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1974. The Year In Which Western Europe Was The Epicenter Of Terrorism

Abstract

In 1974, 54% of all terrorist attacks on the planet took place in Western Europe. The disproportion is even more evident when we look at the geographical distribution of fatalities. Terrorists murdered 517 people worldwide in 1974. The Western part of the Old Continent was the stage of 400 (77.3%) of those crimes. Many of these actions involved the use of explosive devices, often resulting in indiscriminate attacks. This article analyses the phenomenon in the light of one of them: the bomb that ETA detonated in the Rolando cafe (Madrid) on Friday, September 13, 1974

Keywords: terrorism, third wave, bomb, Europe, ETA

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1. Introduction¹

On Friday, September 13, 1974, a young French couple placed a time bomb in the dining area of the Rolando café-restaurant (Madrid), located next to Puerta del Sol and the Directorate General of Security (DGS). The device, composed of dynamite goma 2E-C and 1,000 nuts as shrapnel, was activated at 14:30. The explosion claimed the lives of 11 people and, according to the judicial investigation, injured more than 73. Due to the severe injuries they suffered, two of the wounded later died: Gerardo García Pérez on September 29 and Félix Ayuso Pinel, the only police officer on the list, on January 11, 1977. The first indiscriminate attack by Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque Country and Freedom, ETA) resulted in a final toll of 13 fatalities and around 70 wounded (Fernández and Escauriaza, 2024).

Upon learning the outcome of their plans, the leadership of the terrorist group not only denied their responsibility but also accused the far-right and the Francoist dictatorship of committing the massacre. Radical Basque nationalism, part of the opposition, and even figures of international prestige contributed to spreading conspiracy theories about what happened on Calle del Correo, which have had a long-lasting impact. ETA did not claim responsibility for the attack until its final bulletin, *Zutabe* (April 2018).

That massacre was the culmination of ETA's action-reaction-action strategy, which sought to provoke an increase in the repression of the Francoist regime. However, in 1974, this organization was not an anomaly in the international context, much less in the European one. Nor was the tactic it had employed at the Rolando café: an indiscriminate attack in a public establishment using a bomb with shrapnel, followed by a propaganda campaign to shift blame for the events onto another political sector.

This paper analyzes the phenomenon and its implications in light of what happened in that establishment on Calle del Correo.

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Figure 1. General view of the interior of the Rolando café after the rubble was cleared.



Source: Archivo Judicial Territorial of the Comunidad de Madrid, Sumario 2/1977 del Juzgado de Instrucción nº21 of Madrid

Figure 2. Front page of newspaper mentioning a terrorist attack



Source: Stampa Sera

2. The Third Wave of International Terrorism

ETA has been portrayed as the almost inevitable outcome of Sabino Arana's exalted nationalism, as the result of the repressive policy of the Francoist dictatorship, as the latest episode of the secular "Basque conflict," or even as a singularity of the Basque Country. However, academic historiography has long demonstrated that ETA was nothing more than a local manifestation of a global phenomenon (Fernández, 2016).

Following the classification by political scientist David C. Rapoport (2022), this organization must be placed within the third international wave of terrorism, which struck countries around the world governed by very different political systems, from advanced democracies to authoritarian regimes. The major exception was the communist dictatorships of the Eastern Bloc, where totalitarian control of the population prevented any dissent. According to the Global Terrorism Database (GTB), a comprehensive database led by the University of Maryland (United States), only 0.72% of completed attacks across Europe between 1970 (the earliest date studied) and 1989 took place in its central and eastern half.

As historian Juan Avilés explained (2018), the third generation of terrorists was subject to a dual influence. On one hand, the heterodox Marxism of the New Left and the student revolts of '68. On the other hand, Third Worldism: the July 26 Movement led by Fidel Castro, which from its bases in the Sierra Maestra had overthrown Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista in 1959; the charismatic figure of Ernesto *Che* Guevara, who attempted to export that guerrilla formula through foco theory to countries like the Congo and Bolivia (Marchesi, 2019); the National Liberation Front (FLN) of Algeria, which had achieved independence from the former French colony in 1962; or the successive defeats of France and the United States in the Indochina and Vietnam wars, between 1946 and 1975.

The cycle of political violence began in the late 1960s. On May 7, 1966, members of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), a loyalist organization, threw a Molotov cocktail at a bar owned by a Catholic in Belfast (Northern Ireland). They missed their target and set fire to the house of Matilda Gould, a 77-year-old Protestant woman, who would die on June 27, 1966, from her injuries (McKittrick, 1999). On June 7, 1968, ETA ended the life of Traffic Guard José Antonio Pardines (Fernández and Domínguez, 2018). The following month, a Croatian ultra-nationalist planted a bomb in a cinema in Belgrade, resulting in one fatality and 89 injuries. In November of that same year, members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) shot at an Israeli plane taking off from Athens airport: a passenger died.

Italian neo-fascists, the Northern Irish republican movement, and the Uruguayan National Liberation Movement-Tupamaros (MLN-Tupamaros) began killing in 1969 (Ríos, 2022), the same year that the Weathermen (later Weather Underground) were founded in the United States. The first murder by Argentine Montoneros and the Provisional IRA (Irish Republican Army) branch dates from 1970; that by the Japanese United Red Army, the German Red Army Faction (RAF), and Palestinian Black September from 1971; that by the Japanese Red Army from 1972; that by the Anti-fascist and Patriot Revolutionary Front (FRAP) from 1973; and that by the Italian Red Brigades from 1974. The following year, the Greek Revolutionary Organization November 17 (17N), the First of October Antifascist Resistance Groups (GRAPO), and parapolitical terrorism (in Spain) opened their tally of

victims. However, it must be noted that this list of acronyms only represents a small sample of the phenomenon, which has been studied in works such as “After ‘68” (Avilés, Azcona, and Re, 2019).

According to GTB data, from 1970 to 1989, 41,070 attacks and 73,860 murders were committed worldwide. 23% of terrorist actions and 6.4% of fatalities occurred in Western Europe: the bulk of the 4,774 murders took place in the United Kingdom (2,751), Spain (835), and Italy (387).

In its initial phase, which we can date between 1970 and 1975, groups affiliated with the third wave carried out 3,484 attacks that resulted in the deaths of 2,253 individuals across the globe. 68.3% of the total fatalities, 1,540, were concentrated in Western Europe: 1,145 in the UK and another 85 in Italy, two consolidated democracies, and 58 in Spain, a country suffering the last throes of the Franco dictatorship. This region accounted for 46% of terrorist actions worldwide.

In 1974, the percentage of attacks on European soil reached 54%. The disproportion is even more pronounced when we look at the geographical distribution of fatalities. That year, terrorists killed 517 people worldwide. The western part of the Old Continent was the scene of 400 (77.3%) of these crimes. Undoubtedly, in 1974, Western Europe was the epicenter of terror.

3. Family Resemblances

While most groups operating during the seventies and eighties were affiliated with the extreme left and radical/separatist nationalism, there were also those of ultra-right-wing or vigilante/parapolice nature. Despite their doctrinal differences, almost all these bands shared common characteristics. On one hand, they represented a break from their traditional political currents of reference, represented by communist parties, the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI), or, in the case of ETA, the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV). On the other hand, their members shared youthfulness, intransigence, hate speech, a frontal rejection of capitalism and parliamentary democracy, disdain for human life, and a fascination with “armed struggle” and the guerrilla model of the Third World. In the words of Jann-Marc Rouillan (2009: 158), a Frenchman who passed through the ranks of organizations like the Iberian Liberation Movement (MIL), the Internationalist Revolutionary Action Groups (GARI), and Action Directe, “we were so happy to fight. Immensely free and filled with that endless rebellion, we laughed at everything and nothing. Later, with other comrades, the Italians and, above all, the Germans from the RAF, we would savor the good moments like fresh morning bread, we would share joyful rebellion in abundance”.

Of course, the term “joyful rebellion” was a euphemism. What Jann-Marc Rouillan and many other radical European youths of his generation decided to practice was a substitute for guerrilla warfare: terrorism, that is, a type of violence that seeks a psychological, political, and symbolic effect superior to the material and human damages directly produced by their actions².

Regardless of the context in which they operated and their ideological orientation, the technology and methods used by terrorists in the third wave were also similar. On occasion, they themselves acknowledged this. On February 10, 1976, gunmen from ETA militar (ETAm) killed mechanic Julián

2 For further information, please consult the audiovisual glossary available at the following link: <https://glosariovt.com/glosario-vt/terrorismo/>.

Galarza Ayasturi in Cizúrquil (Guipúzcoa). A few days later, the group acknowledged that it was a *mistake*: the command had mistaken him for the mayor of the town. The following month, issue 10 of the Hautsi bulletin from ETA político-militar (ETAp), the other branch of the organization, criticized ETAm's *mistake*, warning that "eighty kilograms of explosive can be used to execute a dictator like Carrero Blanco or to kill hundreds of people by causing a railway disaster, as fascist groups in Italy attempted to do. From a strictly technical-military point of view, armed revolutionary practice does not differ at all from fascist terrorism".

Indeed, left-wing extremism, radical nationalism, and far-right terrorism did not differ at all, except for the end they sought to justify their bloody means. Nor was the reference by ETAp to two specific attacks insignificant: the assassination of President Luis Carrero Blanco, his driver, José Luis Pérez Moga, and his bodyguard, Juan Antonio Bueno Fernández, using explosives in December 1973 (Fernández and De Pablo, 2024: 253-279); and the bomb that the neo-fascists detonated on the Italicus express train, from the Florence-Bologna line, which left 12 dead, in August 1974 (Avilés, 2021: 185-196). The ideological divergences of the perpetrators and the different circumstances (dictatorship in Spain, parliamentary democracy in Italy) did not prevent the method and results from being very similar. The analogy is even more evident if we substitute Carrero's assassination for the attack on the Rolando café: both massacres, as planned by the terrorists, were "reprisals" to avenge successful police operations.

4. The Bombs

One of the most common methods among the groups active during this period was the use of explosive devices, which often led to indiscriminate attacks such as those on the Italicus train or the Rolando café. Although mass tragedies like 11-M have led us to automatically associate such attacks with the fourth international wave, the religious one, it is a tactic with a long tradition in contemporary history. In fact, it dates back to the first generation, that of nihilists and anarchists. Examples of terrorist actions committed in Spain include: in November 1893, a libertarian threw two bombs at the Liceo de Barcelona, resulting in 20 deaths and 27 injuries; in June 1896, an attack during the Corpus Christi Procession in the same city killed 12 people and left over 60 injured; and in May 1906, Mateo Morral attempted to assassinate King Alfonso XIII and Victoria Eugenia with an explosive device on their wedding day, as the royal procession passed through Calle Mayor in Madrid. He killed 15 spectators and injured another 117 (Avilés, 2013).

Much later, on July 29, 1963, the anarchist group Defensa Interior detonated a bomb in the Passport Department of the DGS, very close to the building where the Rolando café would later be located. Among officials and citizens waiting their turn, there were over 100 people in the room: 31 of them suffered injuries of varying degrees (Fernández, 2021: 50-51).

Like their predecessors, the terrorists of the third international wave used explosive devices. According to GTB estimates, 18,455 of the 41,070 attacks committed worldwide between 1970 and 1989 consisted of bombs: 45%. Their use was predominant in Western Europe, reaching 50% of the 9,458 terrorist actions recorded in that period. In Spain, the percentage reached 54.5% of the total. GTB does not specify in which cases these were indiscriminate attacks, but it is undeniable that

many of them were planned as such from the beginning, and others, regardless of the intentions of their authors, had the same outcome. And it should not surprise anyone that this happened with some frequency: terrorists were aware that bombs were a non-selective weapon.

However, from the perspective of the perpetrators of the third wave, it was also one of the cheapest, most useful, and most destructive methods (especially when shrapnel was added). Furthermore, it was a less risky way for their commandos to cause numerous victims and, therefore, to alarm the press, terrorize society, and pressure political authorities. The effect was multiplied when terrorist attacks occurred in a large city. In the words of Shane Paul O'Doherty (2008: 135), who participated in the Provisional IRA campaign in the capital of the United Kingdom between 1973 and 1974, "when Northern Ireland suffered from chronic pneumonia, nobody worried, but when London sneezed, everyone had to pay attention...". It should be added that the limited experience in counter-terrorism of the police forces deployed in cities like Madrid and London in 1973/1974, unlike those working in the Basque Country or Northern Ireland, was an initial advantage for the terrorists.

5. Indiscriminate Attacks

Among the organizations operating during the years of lead, which consciously opted for indiscriminate attacks? One of the most well-known was the current of Italian neo-fascism, which split from the MSI and reorganized around acronyms such as Ordine Nuovo, Ordine Nero, Avanguardia Nazionale, and Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari. By placing bombs in highly crowded public places, these groups caused a considerable number of fatalities: 17 in Piazza Fontana in Milan (December 12, 1969); three carabinieri in Peteano (May 31, 1972); eight demonstrators in Piazza della Lloggia in Brescia (May 28, 1974); 12 passengers on the Italicus train (August 4, 1974); and another 85 people killed at the Bologna train station (August 2, 1980), among them the Spaniard Francisco Gómez Martínez.

Instead of claiming responsibility for these *stragi* (massacres), the far-rightists sought to shift the blame onto the extreme left, thus escalating tensions in the country, fueling conditions for an eventual coup d'état to impose a dictatorship. However, as Juan Avilés (2021) explained, their lies were short-lived: today we have the certainty that the major *stragi* bore the mark of neo-fascism, which between 1969 and 1984 killed 178 people in Italy. Another 144 fatalities corresponded to extreme left-wing groups like the Red Brigades, which tended to use more selective methods such as firearms (Re, 2013).

However, in other countries, radical left-wing groups did resort to indiscriminate attacks. On May 30, 1972, three members of the Japanese Red Army shot dead 26 passengers at Lod Airport (Israel). They acted in "solidarity" with the Palestinian nationalist movement. On August 30, 1974, two weeks before the Rolando café massacre, another Japanese far-left group, the East Asia Anti-Japanese Armed Front, detonated a powerful bomb at Mitsubishi's main office building in Tokyo: eight people died and almost 380 were injured.

That same year 1974, the Palestinian nationalist organization Fatah experienced a radical split accusing its leader, Yasser Arafat, of betraying the anti-Israeli cause. The new group, which took the name Fatah-Revolutionary Council, was led by Sabri Khalil al-Banna (*Abu Nidal*) until his death in 2002. They carried out indiscriminate attacks. For example, on September 8, 1974, just five days before the Rolando café bomb, an *Abu Nidal* cell blew up a Trans World Airlines Boeing 707 in flight on the Tel Aviv-Athens-Rome-New York route. There were 88 fatalities (Pérez, 2014).

Perhaps more well-known than *Abu Nidal* was the name Black September, which presented itself as an autonomous organization, although it was probably just a convenient flag of Palestinian nationalism to claim certain attacks, some of them indiscriminate. Their most famous operation was the kidnapping and killing of 11 Israeli athletes and coaches, as well as a German policeman, during the Munich Olympics in August/September 1972 (Igualada, 2021: 55-65). Just a few months later, in January 1973, the Black September brand was used to claim responsibility for the death of Baruch Cohen, an agent of the Israeli secret service, Mossad, in Madrid. The term “Black September” became so popular that it was used both by the press and by ETA themselves to describe those who ordered and placed the bomb in the Rolando café (Fernández and Escauriaza, 2024).

Ilich Ramírez Sánchez (*Carlos El Chacal*), a figure who initially acted in the service of the Palestinian PFLP but later worked as a mercenary of terror, also organized indiscriminate attacks. The first took place on September 15, 1974, just two days after the Rolando café bombing, when he threw a grenade at the Publicis drugstore on Boulevard Saint-Germain (Paris). There were two fatalities and 34 wounded, including two Spanish girls: Elvira and María del Pilar Seguí. According to historian Jenny Raflik (2023: 69), it was the first terrorist attack with victims committed on French soil since the Algerian War. It was so significant that the Musée-mémorial du terrorisme starts telling the history of terrorism in France from that date³. Likewise, it is one of the first examples of the long criminal career of *El Chacal*: he himself claimed in court to have on his resume as a professional terrorist “1,500 deaths, 80 of them with his own hands” (EFE, 2018).

The bands active in Northern Ireland perpetrated indiscriminate attacks in crowded places such as hospitality establishments (CAIN and McKittrick, 1999). For example, the Europa Hotel in Belfast has the dubious honor of being the most attacked in Europe: 36 IRA bombs since its opening in 1971. Of course, it was not solely the Republicans. On December 4, 1971, an explosive device from the loyalist UVF detonated at McGurk’s bar (Belfast), claiming the lives of 15 people and injuring another 17. On May 2, 1974, another bomb, this time at the Rose & Crown pub in the same city, left six dead and 18 injured.

In the early seventies, terrorists from all political affiliations in Northern Ireland also carried out indiscriminate attacks outside Ulster. The explosion of devices in Dublin, the capital of the Republic of Ireland, on November 26, 1972 (Burgh Quay), December 1, 1972 (Eden Quay and Sackville Place), and January 20, 1973 (Sackville Place), resulted in a total of three fatalities and 185 people with physical injuries. No organization claimed responsibility for those actions, although everything indicates that they were carried out by loyalist terrorists. On May 17, 1974, the UVF placed three car bombs in different points of Dublin and another in the Irish town of Monaghan: 33 were killed and 258 were injured. The band did not claim responsibility for those massacres until July 1993.

3 <https://musee-memorial-terrorisme.fr/>

A year earlier, the Provisional IRA had begun its campaign in England. In March 1973, car bombs parked at a courthouse and the Ministry of Agriculture caused one death and injuries to 265 others. According to historian Gary McGladdery (2006: 63), London had not experienced anything like it in peacetime. The attack had demonstrated the vulnerability of the capital of the United Kingdom to terrorism, the limited preparation of English police forces in the fight against this type of violence, and the level of publicity that the IRA could achieve with such actions, much greater than what they achieved with those carried out in Northern Ireland. In September, London metro stations were attacked, leaving 15 wounded. During Christmas, the republicans sent letter bombs and placed explosives in public offices, shops, and bars, causing physical injuries to various people.

In the early months of 1974, the Provisional IRA focused on “military” targets, ignoring the frequent presence of civilians. For example, in February, a 50-pound device detonated a bus carrying soldiers and their families: there were 12 fatalities, including two children, and 14 wounded. In June of the same year, an attack on the British Parliament left eleven wounded. The next month, the target was the Tower of London: one woman died and another 42 individuals, many of them tourists, were injured. On October 5, two bombs exploded in separate pubs in the second most populous English city, Birmingham, killing 21 patrons and injuring another 183 (CAIN).

The reputation of the Provisional IRA was at risk, even within its own political environment, which at that time found it difficult to accept such extremes, so the band decided not to acknowledge authorship of massacres such as those in Guildford and Birmingham. Exactly as ETA did after the Rolando café bombing. According to Gary McGladdery’s calculations (2006), from 1973 to 1975, republican terrorists carried out 244 attacks in England, killing 57 people and injuring another 1,054. The bloodiest year, not only within that interval but of the entire campaign (1973-1997), was precisely 1974: 130 actions, 44 fatalities, and 459 wounded.

Figure 3. Provisional IRA attack at the Mulberry Bush pub (Birmingham) on November 21, 1974



Source: Library of Birmingham

Among the attacks carried out by other terrorist groups and the bomb that ETA placed on Calle del Correo, notable similarities can be detected: the choice of crowded venues as targets, the use of explosive devices, sometimes with shrapnel, the indiscriminate nature of the attacks, and the lack of claims of responsibility when the perpetrators feared damaging their image. Such behavior was not the monopoly of a specific political color or geographical area but rather a generational and global phenomenon.

6. Imitation Effect?

Without ruling out the possibility of convergent evolution, the coincidence in the dates of terrorist actions such as those at the Rose & Crown bar in Northern Ireland, the Italicus train in Italy, the Mitsubishi building in Tokyo, the Trans World Airlines Boeing 707 over the Ionian Sea, the Publicis drugstore in France, the Rolando café in Spain, and the pubs in Guildford and Birmingham in the United Kingdom suggests that perhaps a kind of imitation effect had come into play, facilitated by mass media such as newspapers, radio, and television. Although they may not have known the details, terrorists in one country knew what those in other parts of the world were doing. As an example, in ETA publications, numerous references and statements of support for the violent activities of the Uruguayan Tupamaros, the Provisional IRA, the Viet Cong, or “the armed struggle of the heroic Palestinian people” can be found (Equipo Hordago, vol. XVI: 401).

Moreover, there were direct transfers of technology, weaponry, material, tactics, and practical knowledge. There were conducive scenarios, such as training camps built by both revolutionary governments and certain Palestinian groups. It is a phenomenon that, according to David C. Rapoport (2022: 152), accentuated the global nature of the third wave. Following Andy R. Oppenheimer (2016: 97), Israeli intelligence services discovered that, taking advantage of their militants coinciding in two camps in Lebanon, the Provisional IRA and Palestinian forces had exchanged technical information on bomb construction. Among other things, the Republicans had learned to make devices with homemade napalm and shrapnel. In the same vein, journalist Florencio Domínguez (1998: 117-122) indicates that ETA members received training in training camps located in countries like Algeria, Lebanon, and South Yemen, although we only have certainty that they did so starting in 1976.

However, the band had already cultivated relationships with their counterparts abroad before that. According to Domínguez (1998: 115), the need to “establish links with other similar organizations to learn from their experiences, exchange knowledge, and even weapons, led ETA to play an intense role between 1971 and 1974”. For example, in a joint statement signed by Fatah, ETA, and the Democratic Party of Kurdistan in February 1972, after the Congress of the Association of Kurdish Students in Europe held in Bucharest (Romania), the creation of the “World Front of Oppressed Peoples anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist” was proposed for “exchange of information on respective revolutionary experiences, military cooperation, etc.” (Equipo Hordago, vol. XII: 351). The following year, after their delegates attended a meeting of the Italian far-left, ETA celebrated that more groups had come forward to be part of the mentioned Front (Equipo Hordago, vol. XVI: 401).

ETA carried out its first three violent actions in the fall of 1959: all using explosives. According to the US Consul in Bilbao, the Civil Governor of Vizcaya had told him that in the second attack, which occurred on November 7 at the Civil Government of Vitoria, shrapnel had been used. It was “a homemade bomb, made with an old gasoline drum filled with nails and pieces of iron” (Mota and Fernández, 2021: 293). This is data that must be taken with caution. In fact, we have no record of radical Basque nationalism adding shrapnel to its bombs again until it did so twice during the summer of 1974: on July 23 at the Ministry of the Army, where it did not cause any victims, and on September 13 at the Rolando café, where it killed 13 people (Fernández and Escauriaza. 2024).

Figure 4. ETA violence during the Franco dictatorship

Source: Own elaboration

7. The Masters of Radical Basque Nationalism

Where did ETA obtain the knowledge to make bombs like those in 1974? There are at least two possible sources. The first one is the Rio de la Plata. The band had a presence in countries like Venezuela, Mexico, and Argentina since the early sixties (Domínguez, 2010, and Fernández, 2016). Shared language and culture, as well as ideological convergences, facilitated radical Basque nationalism linking with terrorist groups and “national liberation” guerrillas operating in Hispanic America. ETA and the MLN-Tupamaros signed their first joint statement in 1972 (Equipo Hordago, vol. XII: 446).

In early January 1974, ETA’s military front sent José María Arruabarrena Esnaola (*Tanque*), who had a master’s degree in industrial engineering and had worked at the CAF company, to Buenos Aires to be trained by the Montoneros, the armed wing of the ultra-leftist branch of Peronism. In his police statements, the ETA member admitted that he had learned “the construction of covers to disguise the so-called ‘Prisons or People’s Prisons’ and the operation of weapons, explosives placement, security measures, etc”. Three months later, *Tanque* returned to France “carrying plans, photographs, as well as clandestine procedures, weapons, explosives, etc”. (Fernández and Escauriaza, 2024). The Montoneros were extremely skilled in the use of bombs. On July 2, 1976, they placed a shrapnel device in the dining room of the Argentine Federal Police: there were 22 fatalities and 110 wounded.

In turn, the Montoneros had learned from the Uruguayan Tupamaros, many of whom, like radicals from Bolivia and Chile, were refugees in Buenos Aires when *Tanque* arrived (Marchesi,

2019: 151-187). According to one of the leaders of this organization, who was responsible for the services sector and coordinator of the development of turning and milling workshops, in 1968 their group had acquired knowledge of the manufacture of grenades and explosive devices in Castro's Cuba. The following year, they put it into practice through mechanical turners with well-equipped workshops. The MLN-Tupamaros was "the instructor, at least in the beginning, of the Argentine groups, and therefore, indirectly, of ETA"⁴.

In addition to the montonero/tupamaro route, the Basque band received explosives training from its counterpart in Northern Ireland. According to historian Niall Cullen (2024 and in preparation), ETA maintained a fluid relationship with the Provisional IRA. It was an alliance that had been publicly ratified by the signing of agreements such as those of April 1972 and September 1973. There is documentary evidence of arms deliveries and exchanges of material, training, and technical knowledge on explosives and weaponry. In May 1974, ETA's international apparatus chief, Pedro Ignacio Pérez Beotegui (*Wilson*), told a journalist from The Guardian that not only did representatives of both bands meet regularly in cities like Algiers, Paris, and Brussels, but the Republicans had also passed on to members of the Basque band the experience gained in bomb construction. Likewise, in his police statements, *Wilson's* successor, Juan Miguel Goiburu (*Goiherri* or *Pelotas*), admitted that he had contacts with the IRA in Brussels to obtain "technical support" (Fernández and Escauriaza, 2024).

According to Andy R. Oppenheimer (2016), the Provisional IRA was the most dangerous and lethal terrorist group in Europe, thanks to being also the most innovative in bomb making. Its "Engineering Department" was considered an elite unit with special status: its members ("explosives officers") had to be protected at all costs. However, in the early years, experiments and errors led to a high mortality rate: 31 casualties in 1973 and another 17 in 1974. The learning acquired at such a high price was transmitted to other organizations like ETA.

Since the early seventies, the Provisional IRA had been using bombs reinforced with small metal pieces (screws, nails, bearings, etc.) as shrapnel in order to cause the greatest possible damage. One of the most common devices was nail bombs: a kind of homemade hand grenade, with about 10 grams of dynamite, to which nails were attached. The Republicans used to throw them at the police and Protestants after a demonstration or street confrontation. Its effects were called "Belfast Confetti". From the end of 1974, the weight of the bombs increased, and the use of shrapnel became habitual, multiplying their terrible results. For example, on November 7 of that year, a waiter and a patron were killed, and 31 others were injured by the detonation of gelignite and screws in the Kings Arms pub in Woolwich. And on the 30th of the same month, a nail bomb injured eight people in the Talbot Arms bar in London. In this latter case, the Provisional IRA used nuts as shrapnel, exactly as ETA had done in the Rolando café two months earlier.

4 Conversation with a former leader of the Tupamaros, March 7, 2024.

8. Institutional Response

In 1974, the third international wave of terrorism hit various countries in Western Europe hard. The reaction of some of these governments would be similar. According to McGladdery (2006: 93-95), the indiscriminate attacks perpetrated by the Provisional IRA in various pubs in London and Birmingham between October and November 1974 produced such a level of popular anger that there were episodes of violence against Irish and Northern Irish citizens in Great Britain, and the reintroduction of the death penalty was proposed. According to a 1975 survey, 88% of the British public supported sentencing convicted terrorists to death. The UK government did not go that far, but it did urgently push through new anti-terrorism legislation: the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act, passed on November 29, 1974. Among other things, it allowed the police to detain suspects for up to seven days.

A few months later, on May 22, 1975, the Italian Parliament passed the Disposizioni a tutela dell'ordine pubblico, also known as the Reale Law, to combat terrorism and organized crime. It expanded the circumstances in which law enforcement officers could use their firearms, increased the period of preventive detention to four days, and toughened penalties.

The police and legislative response that the Franco regime gave to terrorism followed in the footsteps of those European governments, although the traces left by the Rolando café attack were also evident. On the one hand, on January 31, 1975, the Ministry of Governance created the Specialized Technicians in Explosive Device Deactivation (TEDAX) of the Police and constituted their explosive device deactivation teams, a role that had until then been carried out by the Army's sappers.

On the other hand, on August 26, the Government approved Decree Law 10/1975, on Terrorism Prevention. In its preamble, it was presented as a way to prevent "the terrorist plague afflicting the world", which had led other states to adopt "emergency legal norms". However, in addition to the example of the United Kingdom and Italy, it was evident that the new legislation responded, at least in part, to the Rolando café massacre.

The law toughened penalties for terrorism offenses. If until then military courts had a range of sentences from which they chose the most appropriate one, now they were obliged to always apply them "to their maximum degree". For example, the death penalty had to be imposed on those guilty of the murder of political authorities, police officers, military personnel, and "other public officials", as well as those responsible for kidnappings resulting in the death or mutilation of the hostage. However, "their prompt and unconditional release without harm will be considered as a mitigating circumstance".

However, the law did not only affect collaborators and members of terrorist organizations but also restricted the rights of the entire citizenry: certain articles of the Fuero de los Españoles were suspended for two years, and, whenever authorized by a judge, preventive detention of a suspect could be extended for up to 10 days.

The new legislation was soon applied retroactively. On September 27, 1975, three members of the FRAP were executed in Hoyo de Manzanares: José Humberto Baena (sentenced to death for the murder of policeman Lucio Rodríguez Martín), José Luis Sánchez Bravo, and Ramón García

Sanz (convicted for the murder of Civil Guard lieutenant Antonio Pose Rodríguez). At the same time, members of ETAp^m Ángel Otaegi (sentenced for the murder of Civil Guard corporal Gregorio Posada Zurrón) and Juan Paredes Manot/as (*Txiki*) (sentenced for the murder of Armed Police corporal Ovidio Díaz López) were also executed.

However, neither legislative changes nor increased repression succeeded in stopping the terrorist escalation. On the contrary, they contributed to fueling the spiral of action-reaction-action, which was the strategy that ETA had been applying for a decade, with the aim of unleashing “revolutionary war”. That was the preliminary step to their ultimate goal: a Greater Basque Country independent, annexing French Basque Country and Navarre, and establishing itself as a single-party socialist dictatorship. Although such an outcome did not materialize, the terrorist group did manage to build around itself a large and loyal community that called itself “abertzale left” and has survived to this day.

9. Conclusions

What happened in 1974 confirms that, despite the contradictions and errors that can be attributed to it, David C. Rapoport’s scheme of international waves remains useful for understanding the phenomenon of terrorism. The relationships between the different groups of the third generation and the common characteristics of most of their components, more pronounced in the case of Europeans, led to a similar outcome. The example of indiscriminate bombings is paradigmatic. The family resemblance is evident.

When analyzing the history of ETA and its most lethal milestones, such as the Rolando café massacre, it is essential to broaden the focus to understand what other terrorist groups were doing, especially those with which the “abertzale left” had a closer relationship, such as those in Hispanic America and the Provisional IRA. By looking beyond our borders, researchers not only avoid falling into a self-centered reductionism but can also find keys that allow us to better understand the trajectory of violent ultranationalism.

Figure 5. Newspaper front page with the terrorist attack in Paris

Source: SUD-OUEST

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