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INSTITUT DE HAUTES
ÉTUDES INTERNATIONALES
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GRADUATE INSTITUTE
OF INTERNATIONAL AND
DEVELOPMENT STUDIES



Conference

States and Terrorism: An Ambivalent Relationship

The Graduate Institute's International History Department convened a conference entitled "States and Terrorism: An Ambivalent Relationship" from 7-8 May 2015. The conference was supported by the *Fondation Pierre du Bois pour l'histoire du temps présent* and the *Fonds National Suisse*. The event provided an excellent opportunity for international researchers to exchange ideas about the relationship between the state and terrorism, as well as the many different levels of cooperation and confrontation between them. States and terrorists have an ambivalent relationship: states want to beat terrorists or use them as tools; terrorists, on the other hand, attack states but also need them as a source of support. The conference tackled this ambiguous link by addressing a wide range of cases in Europe and the Americas throughout the whole 20th century.

The first panel had "Myth and Reality" as a common theme. The fact that terrorist groups, be they state supported or directed against the state, act in a clandestine matter, nurtures the emergence of myths. This was true for the secret NATO sponsored "Operation Gladio", a "stay behind" operation which was organized during the Cold War in Italy, as well as in Austria, where it was an instrument for unconventional warfare against the Red Army only during the early years of the Cold War. Other examples addressed in the first panel were state involvement in right-wing terrorism in Italy and West Germany and the alleged Soviet backing of Venezuelan terrorist-for-hire Carlos the Jackal.

The second panel was devoted in particular to the United States' role in state sponsored terror. The first paper addressed the impact of non-state actors on US counterterrorism policies and focused on the United States' early anti-hijacking efforts, while the second presentation examined the United States' involvement in 'Operation Condor.'

The geographical focus switched to Europe for the third panel, but with the same transnational approach as in the previous one. Two case studies dealt with the two Germanys: West Germany's policies on South American state terrorism in the 1970s, and East German support for Western

right-wing terrorism. The two remaining papers covered leftist terrorist acts in Italy's so called "years of lead," and the relationship between Polish military intelligence and international terrorism in the 1970s and 1980s.

The last panel scrutinized the link between transnational terrorism and national liberation. An early but prominent example from the 19th century was terrorism occurring during the Polish fight for independence. More contemporary case studies covered the link between the KGB's abduction program and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in the 1960s and the role of state building within Jihadi strategic thought.

A keynote address by Professor Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou of the International History Department and Deputy Director of the GCSP addressed similar issues. His presentation entitled "From Al Qaeda to the Islamic State: The Evolution of Contemporary Transnational Terrorism" emphasized similarities and differences between the Islamic State and Al Qaeda. Both emerged from the context of a military occupation, but they also differ in their territorial focus and ideological dimension. The conference concluded with a roundtable that addressed past and future trends in terrorism and its relationship with the state.

Overall, the conference was a large success that saw many attendees and stimulating presentations as well as discussions.