

# What goes around comes around

A critical geopolitical analysis of contemporary western  
European terrorism as a process of tit-for-tat

*By*

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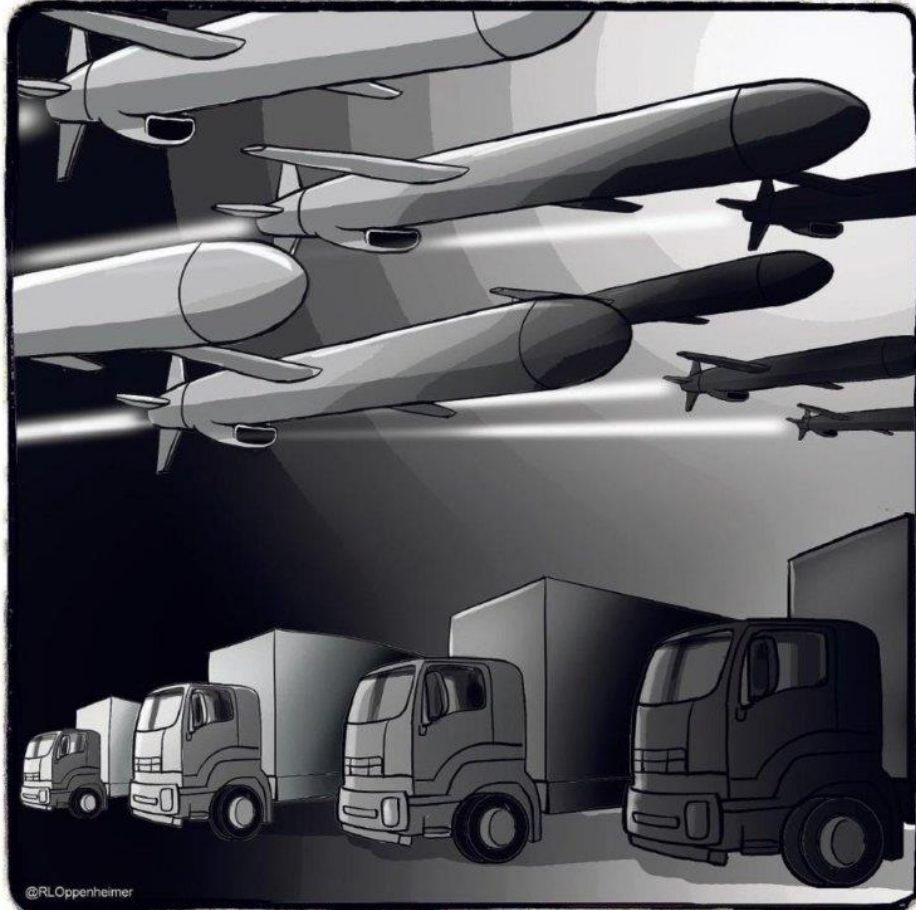




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## A critical geopolitical analysis of contemporary western European terrorism as a process of tit-for-tat

RUBEN L. OPPENHEIMER



*Figure 1 with special thanks to Ruben L. Oppenheimer (2017) NRC Handelsblad*

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## ABSTRACT

*“France is at war”*. These words, accompanied with a fierce military response, by then French president François Hollande heavily impacted western European counter-terrorism efforts. The response by France to the Paris attacks of November 13, 2015 paved the way for a Europe that engages in wars abroad in order to fight terrorism at home. This thesis analyses the extent to which contemporary western European terrorism could be perceived as a process of tit-for-tat. The dominant understanding of terrorism contains pervasive misrepresentations. Terrorist attacks are too often understood as isolated events that are happening only to states. Throughout this thesis, terrorism is understood as a process employed by both state and non-state actors. The ongoing and unsuccessful quest for a universally accepted definition of terrorism is exemplary for the complexity of the phenomenon. This thesis aims to put contemporary terrorism into context. By applying a critical geopolitical approach and process-tracing to the attacks that targeted Paris, Brussels and Berlin this thesis reveals the causality of terrorism. Terror attacks and following state responses are interconnected and mutually reinforce one another. Throughout this thesis I argue that a strategy of retaliation, a process of tit-for-tat, is present in contemporary western European terrorism. However, this causality is absent from the discourses states uphold in the aftermath of terrorist attacks. Attacks are framed as assaults on ‘our’ values and ‘our’ way of living. Yet, terrorist attacks appear to be violent manifestations of structural problems within European societies. In order to better understand the phenomenon we all so desperately try to defeat, self-reflection is needed.

## PREFACE & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While writing this thesis, numerous terrorist attacks took place all across the globe. Istanbul, Baghdad, Gao, Mogadishu, Lahore, London, Saint Petersburg, Stockholm, Alexandria, Aleppo, Manchester, Jakarta, Kabul, again London and Tehran, to name only a few. This list is far from complete, many events probably never came to my attention in Nijmegen. Moreover, there are countless civilians, with unknown names, who died in the name of counter-terrorism. On March 17, 2017 105 civilians were killed in a US-led airstrike near Mosul. The day before, a ‘precision strike’ killed 42 people who took shelter in a school in Mansoura. A week earlier 49 people died after American warplanes fired at a mosque in Al Jinah. These events, in the name of terror and counter-terror, made me even more determined to finish this thesis. It has been a journey driven by the need to better understand the phenomenon we all so desperately try to defeat. Whether I succeeded in this quest is for others to decide. Yet, it has been a valuable and challenging journey.

This thesis forms the closure of my Master’s in Human Geography with a specialization in Conflicts, Territories and Identities. In the past two years, numerous opportunities unfolded to further discover the world around me. As an intern at the Embassy of the Netherlands in New Zealand I had the pleasure to work and live in Wellington, the ‘coolest little capital in the world’. Thereafter, I gained valuable insights while being an intern at the Civil and Military Interaction Command of the Dutch Ministry of Defence. Finally, Bureau Wijland offered me the opportunity to further hone my skills by being a coordinator for Shelter City Nijmegen.

Although I conducted this research independently, it would not have been possible without the support and guidance from others along the way.

First and foremost to Henk van Houtum, whose critical remarks and cups of coffee in the *Cultuurcafé* kept me focused. His questions and remarks in the initial stage arranged my thoughts and ideas. He made sure that this thesis is built on a critical geopolitical way of thinking and triggered me to question the taken-for-granted assumptions of

contemporary terrorism. He taught me that words are not just words and helped me to find the hidden message and morality behind them.

To Rodrigo Bueno Lacy, who is willing to dedicate some of his time to assess this thesis. But foremost for the article *Recycling violence: How maps about terrorism fail to round up the argument* he wrote with Henk van Houtum and Kevin Raaphorst. This article provoked me to think beyond the dominant understanding of terrorism. It placed me on the right track to question the pervasive misrepresentations present in how ‘we’ perceive, present and respond to terrorism. Their final sentence, *what goes around comes around*, so eloquently covers what is written in this research and therefore serves as the title of this thesis.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

CTC	Counter-Terrorism Committee
CTS	Critical Terrorism Studies
DAESH	al-Dawla al-Islamiya fil Iraq wa al-Sham
DOS	Department of State
ETA	<i>Euskadi Ta Azkatasuna</i>
EU	European Union
GA	General Assembly
GTD	Global Terrorism Database
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IS	Islamic State
ISIL	Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria / Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OCAD	<i>Orgaan voor de Coördinatie en de Analyse van de Dreiging</i> / Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis
PCS	Peace and Conflict Studies
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
RAF	<i>Rote Armee Fraktion</i>
SOHR	Syrian Observatory for Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USA	United States of America



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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Terrorism seems to be omnipresent in ‘our’ daily lives (Renard, 2016a, p. 1). Among academics as well as in some policy circles it is assumed that the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 marked the dawning of a new historical period (Baker-Beall, 2014, p. 212). According to them it led to a fundamental change in international security. The Western world now faced a threat more insidious and devastating than any other ‘traditional’ threat to states. According to Fukuyama (2002, p. 28) terrorists have the power to: “*wreak immense damage on the modern world.*” Some even argue that these events created a world before and after 9/11 (Der Derian, 2002). The European continent has been hit by terrorist attacks numerous times in the years thereafter. The topic is nowadays present in the media, political discourse and the academic literature. Terrorism is declared a top priority and a profound security threat for several European states (Den Boer & Wiegand, 2012, p. 1).

However, figures reveal that terrorist attacks and casualties in Europe declined since 1970 (Datagraver, 2017). Furthermore European nations do not feature in the lists of present-day most affected countries. In 2015, only 2.2 percent of the global terror attacks took place in western Europe (The Economist, 2017). Therefore there seems a discrepancy in the responses to terrorism and the actual numbers. According to Croft and Moore (2010, p. 821) the responses to terrorism are deliberate political choices. The decision to take part in the ‘war on terror’, was a political choice while other responses could have been chosen. How states respond to terrorist attacks differs greatly and has an impact that goes beyond its own borders. As Chalk (1996, p. xii) argues:

*“terrorism in its various manifestations poses a fundamental threat to the freedoms and principals enshrined in the liberal democratic political systems of Western Europe. However, it is equally stressed that some of the potential responses to terrorism could pose an equal, if not greater, threat to democratic norms than does terrorism itself.”*

It is therefore important to critically reflect on the mechanisms of terrorism and counter-terrorism. Too often terrorist attacks are seen as isolated events, as just a dot in time. Former presidents of the United States of America (USA) and France, George Bush and François Hollande, labelled terror attacks on their soil as an: “*act of war*” (The Guardian, 2001; Gouvernement.fr, 2015). Bush continued by stating that: “*All of this was brought upon us in a single day*”. As if there is nothing prior to, or may have caused, the disastrous events of 9/11. Such a perspective on terror is problematic because it hinders a profound understanding of the phenomenon itself. Flint (2003, p. 161) therefore argues that terrorism should be perceived as a process of action and reaction. To better understand the causes and consequences of terrorism one should have a closer look at the wider geohistorical context of attacks. Geographies of inclusion and exclusion, disparities of wealth and the differences in (religious) values are manifestations of the geohistorical context. To understand and eventually counter the grievances that erupt into terroristic violence, it is important to know the context in which they originated. As Bueno Lacy, van Houtum and Raaphorst (2016) explain, it is no coincidence that some of the EU’s member states have seen the worst Islamic attacks on their soil in the last 15 years. These have been the same years that these countries participated, within the frame of the war on terror, in the invasion and bombing of states in the Middle-East. Bueno Lacy et al. (2016) eloquently make the case that Western counter-terrorism measures and Islamist terrorism are growing stronger fuelled by their own retaliation logics, or as they state: “*what goes around comes around*”. This thesis attempts to analyse the process of retaliation and thereby questions to what extent contemporary terrorism and states’ responses to terrorism could be perceived as a process of tit-for-tat. This is done by applying a critical geopolitical approach to contemporary western European terrorism and thereby attempting to shed light on terrorism and counter-terrorism as a vicious spiral of retaliation.

## **1.1 Research objective and questions**

This thesis analyses to what extent terrorism in western Europe could be perceived as a process of tit-for-tat, in which terrorist attacks and states’ responses to terrorism affect, and possibly strengthen, each other. It therefore questions whether the interaction between terrorism and states’ responses to terrorism could be seen as a vicious spiral. The central

goal is to gain more understanding on how contemporary terrorism and counter-terrorism in western Europe are interconnected. The analysis will focus on how states' responses to terror are constructed, what they reply to and what consequences they have. This is done by applying a critical geopolitical analysis to the case of western European terrorism. More specifically, the attacks in France, Belgium and Germany serve as starting points. Through process tracing a more profound understanding of terrorist attacks and the following states' responses is aimed to achieve. Therefore the main and sub questions within this thesis are:

**To what extent could terrorism and states' responses to terrorism in western Europe be perceived as a process of tit-for-tat?**

The main research question is supported by a number of sub questions. These serve as an addition and tool to answer the main research question and therefore assess whether contemporary western European terrorism could be perceived as a process of tit-for-tat. Tit-for-tat is a strategy of reciprocity (Keohane, 1986, p. 9). It is a theoretical concept that illustrated the tendency for hostile actions to be reciprocated, possibly resulting in an unending series of retaliation. Actors copy what the other has done in a previous step, thereby moving into a mutually destructive conflict. In terms of terrorism the *tit* is understood as the states' response to terrorism and the *tat* as what states respond to, terrorist attacks. As outlined above, terrorism is perceived as a vicious spiral. The *tat* is likely to be based on other events, for instance state responses to former attacks. Tit-for-tat is therefore understood as a sequence of events that could continue indefinitely.

**I. What do theories of conflict analysis (e.g. tit-for-tat) contribute to our understanding of contemporary terrorism?**

The aim of this sub question is to provide a theoretical understanding of contemporary terrorism. This section will address the added value of theories of conflict analysis, mainly tit-for-tat, to our understanding of terrorism. Thereby this research will be embedded in, and further strengthen, the existing theoretical and academic debate.

**II. How is the *tit* in the case of France, Belgium and Germany constructed and how does it relate to the *tat*?**

This sub question is formulated in order to analyse how states' responses to terrorism (*tit*) are constructed. This will be done by applying process tracing to the case of western European terrorism, namely the attacks in France, Belgium and Germany. The dominant narratives of these states will be deconstructed. An important aspect is to question to what extent these narratives are complete. Furthermore it questions how the *tit* relates to the *tat*.

**III. How is the *tat* in the case of France, Belgium and Germany constructed and how does it relate to the *tit*?**

Sub question III relates strongly to sub question II since it aims to critically reflect on the *tat* in contemporary western European terrorism. Therefore this question aims to analyse what states respond to. It aims to reveal the 'other' side of terrorism. What are the justifications of the 'other'? This sub question is important to better understand the comprehensive and ambiguous character of contemporary terrorism. It reflects on the terror of counter-terrorism and how it is perceived by the 'other'.

**IV. To what extent is a process of tit-for-tat in contemporary western European terrorism problematic and are there alternatives?**

This final sub question analyses to what extent a process of tit-for-tat in contemporary terrorism could be perceived as problematic. It therefore combines the insights gained from the previous sub questions. Furthermore, it explores the possibilities based on the theoretical as well as empirical insights for alternatives responses to terrorism. It explores whether there is an exit strategy, a way to break through the process of tit-for-tat.

## **1.2 Scientific relevance**

Too often terror attacks are seen as isolated events, yet there is a context from which grievances and justifications originate that makes a country, according to perpetrators, a

legitimate target (Flint, 2003, p. 163). Flint (2003, p. 161) therefore argues that terrorism should be perceived more in terms of action and reaction. To better understand the causes and consequences of terrorism, one should have a closer look at the wider geohistorical context of attacks. There has been little research on the interconnectivity between attacks and states' responses to terrorism. This thesis therefore aims to fill this existing knowledge gap. An analysis of contemporary western European terrorism as a process of tit-for-tat can serve as an addition to the existing academic debate. It contributes to a more profound understanding of how terrorism functions. Much of the existing academic literature on terrorism focuses on the policy and strategic frameworks for dealing with, and preventing the phenomenon through legal, military or policy measures. However, root causes and dynamics of terrorism are not fully expanded within the academic debate (Richmond, 2003, p. 305). It is feared that attempts to analyse, and ultimately understand, the roots, processes and dynamics of terrorism may lead to an undermining of the existing policy frameworks and a legitimization of the claims made by those who use terror as a tactic. However, as Richmond (2003, p. 305) outlines:

*“A more balanced approach, dealing with root causes, prevention and punishment would increase the legitimacy of the responses to terrorism, both at home, and in the eyes of the communities from which terrorism springs while avoiding moves that might replicate such acts in the future.”*

Bakker and de Roy van Zuijdewijn (2016, p. 8) claim that responses to terrorism are often driven by political interests. Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall (2011, p. 285) rightfully argue that state responses to terrorism and violence should be based on, and preceded by, a careful analysis of the phenomenon. This thesis aims to fill this existing knowledge gap. An analysis of contemporary western European terrorism as a process of tit-for-tat serves as an attempt to better understand the complexity of the phenomenon.

### **1.3 Societal relevance**

The societal relevance of this thesis is closely related to the scientific relevance. Terrorism, as well as state responses to terrorism, do affect societies. However, the scope of it is subject to debate. Terrorism seems to be omnipresent in our daily lives, media and the political

discourse (Renard, 2016a, p. 1). A survey conducted by the European Commission reveals that 39% of the European citizens see terrorism as their greatest fear (Schuman, 2016). A feeling of anxiety seems to have taken root all across the European continent (Renard, 2016a, p.1). This is no surprise taking the abundance of attention for terrorism into account. However, as Chalk (1996, p. xii) argued, some of the responses to terrorism can pose a greater threat to our societies than does terrorism itself. A critical analysis of terrorism as a process of tit-for-tat could therefore contribute to a more profound understanding of the phenomenon. The fear for terrorism is wrongfully based on the idea that it is an unexplainable and unpredictable threat (Bueno Lacy, et al. 2016). Deconstructing this popular discourse and analysing possible alternatives to deal with terrorism may lead to a more balanced understanding of the phenomenon. According to Jenkins (2017), helping society understand how terrorism works is necessary in order to create a comprehensive and effective counter-terror strategy. This thesis therefore aims to advance our understanding of terrorism.

#### **1.4 Structure of this thesis**

This thesis consists of seven chapters. The following chapter (2) illustrates the theoretical framework. It outlines the complexity of terrorism and addresses the theories used in this research. Chapter 3 introduces the methodology of this thesis. The research philosophy is presented, followed by the methods and forms of data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 serves as the link between the theoretical and methodological foundations and the analysis. It outlines what the added value is to apply theories of conflict studies, mainly tit-for-tat, to contemporary terrorism. Chapter 5 forms the backbone of this thesis and portrays the analysis of contemporary western European terrorism as a process of tit-for-tat. Chapter 6 seeks for alternative responses to terrorism. In the final chapter (7) the concluding remarks, along with a debate and critical reflection, will be presented.



## CHAPTER 2

### FROM THEORIES TO RESEARCH PARADIGM

A number of theories and concepts form the fundamentals of this research. These will be discussed throughout this chapter. Thereby positioning this thesis within a rich, yet not complete, academic debate.

A conceptual framework takes a central stage in any social science research, but the term is ill defined and therefore often vague and imprecise (Jabareen, 2009, p. 51). Because of its importance it is worthwhile to further explore the term and properly demarcate how it is used in this thesis. Jabareen (2009, p. 51) argues that a conceptual framework is a construct of concepts rather than simply a selection of concepts. All concepts play an integral role and support one another. According to Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 440) a conceptual framework “*lays out the key factors, constructs, or variables, and presumes relationships among them*”. Conceptual frameworks provide understanding and play an ontological and epistemological role. They can provide an interpretative approach to better understand the ‘world’ around us. Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 18) argue that a conceptual framework: “*explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied – the key factors, constructs or variables – and the presumed relationships among them*”. According to Meredith (1993, p. 7) a conceptual framework consists of interrelated propositions that explain, provide understanding or suggest testable hypotheses. Jabareen (2009, p. 51) defines a conceptual framework as: “*a network, or ‘a plane’, of interlinked concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon or phenomena*”. This thesis will follow the interpretation of a conceptual framework as provided by Jabareen (2009) since terrorism is an interdisciplinary phenomenon that requires a comprehensive approach. Thereby taking into account that terrorism is a heavily contested concept and that how one perceives it, is dependent on one’s position. The ontological and epistemological foundations of this thesis are therefore decisive in how terrorism is portrayed throughout this thesis. The paradigm, as a set of basic beliefs, that forms the basis for the argument made throughout this thesis is undoubtedly a human construction and is therefore not presented as the inconvertible truth (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.108).

## 2.1 The definitional problem of terrorism

*“It is not enough to declare war on what one deems terrorism without giving a precise and exact definition.”*

– Emile Lahoud, President of Lebanon (Al Jazeera, 2004).

The statement above so eloquently covers the controversy around the debate on terrorism. Nearly all scholars struggle with the ambiguity of terrorism and none of them succeeded to come up with a universally accepted definition of the phenomenon (Sinai, 2008, p. 9; Blakely, 2016, p. 64). The aim of this thesis is not to provide an answer to this pressing question but to contribute to our understanding of the phenomenon itself. As will be outlined throughout this chapter, the definitional problem of terrorism hinders a profound debate. A critical reflection of the attempts to come up with a definition and the problems that occur, reveal how contested the term is. Furthermore it exposes the static understanding of contemporary terrorism. This chapter could therefore be perceived as a first step in moving towards an understanding of terrorism as a process. This section will briefly outline the ongoing pursuit, the challenges and the need for a definition. However, it starts with an overview that aims to put terrorism into context.

### 2.1.1 The figures

Terrorism is omnipresent in our daily lives (Renard, 2016a, p. 1). It is considered a major security threat and fear among European politicians, policymakers and citizens (Schuman, 2016). However, as numerous scholars outline, terrorism is nothing new (Bakker, 2012; Crenshaw, 2007, p. 34). It exists already for more than 200 years (Schmid, 2004, p. 395). In order to better understand the phenomenon, it is relevant to provide an overview that puts terrorism into context. However, as will be argued later on, there are a number of important limitations to these reproductions of terrorism.

A popular and influential perspective to look at terrorism throughout history is the wave model (Sedgwick, 2007, p. 98). David Rapoport (2002) identified four waves of global terror. The first wave started in the 1890's and is labelled as the anarchist wave, the following anti-colonial wave was precipitated by the end of World War I, then a leftist wave started in the 1970's and since the 1980's the world faces a religious wave (Rapoport, 2004,

p. 50-65). Rapoport's model is particularly useful because it draws attention on the generational waves of terrorism (Rasler & Thompson, 2009, p. 30). Furthermore it demonstrated that terrorism is a widespread phenomenon that existed long before the 1970's (Sedgwick, 2007, p. 98).

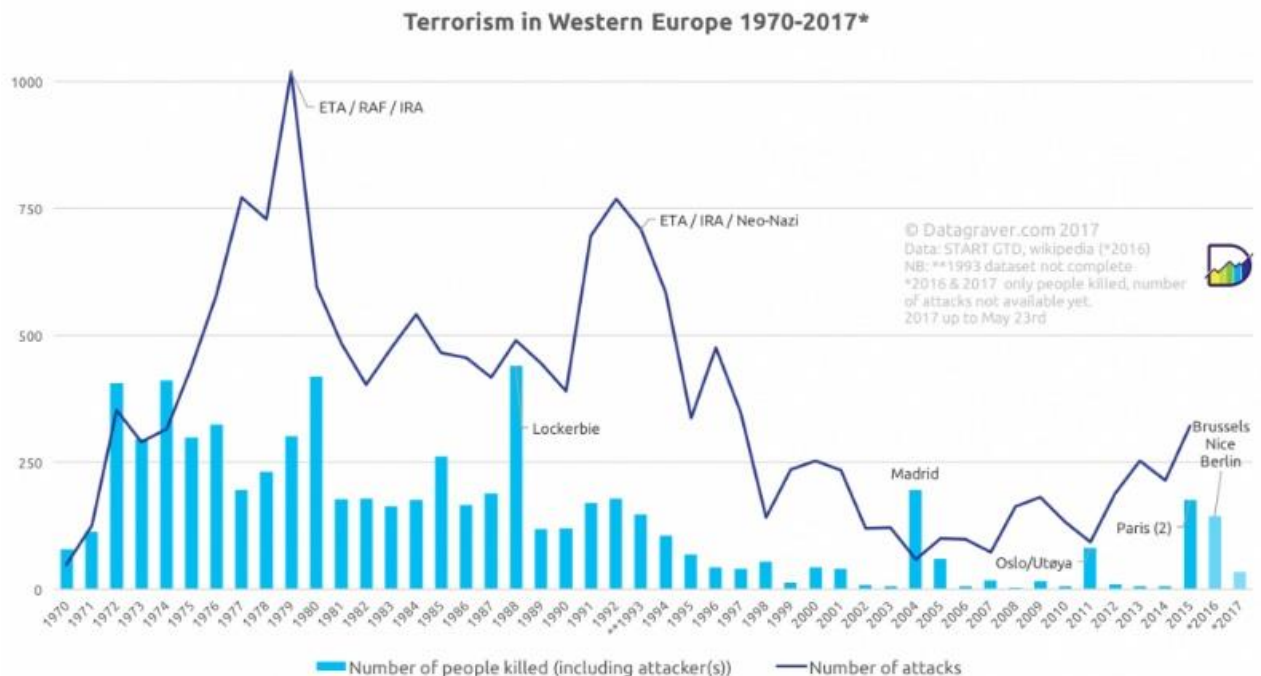


Figure 2 People killed by terrorism per year in western Europe 1970-2015 (Datagraver, 2017)

From the 1970's western Europe witnessed a rise in nationalism-inspired or left-wing terrorist attacks from groups such as the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), the Spanish *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA) and the *Rote Armee Fraktion* (RAF) in Germany (Alcantara, 2016). Influential terrorism databases, such as the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), start tracking the phenomenon from the 1970's. As visible in figure 2, terrorism in western Europe has decreased since then.

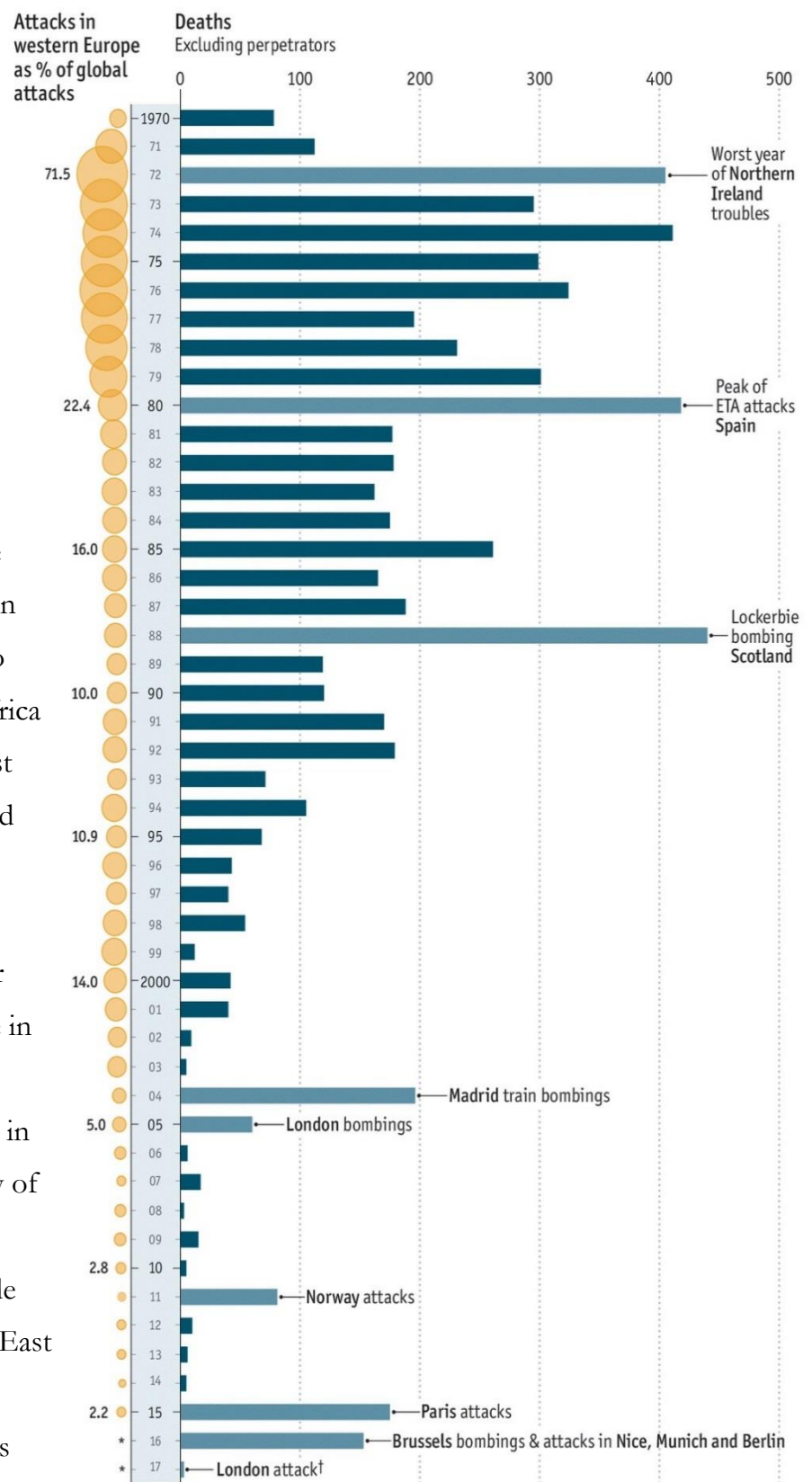
Terrorist attacks in western Europe became less frequent from 2000 onwards, yet remained deadly. Terror attacks in other regions occurred more frequent in recent years. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia has witnessed an increase in terrorism-related attacks and more people died than in any other European country (Alcantara, 2016). Russia experienced one of its deadliest attacks in September 2004. Chechen rebels took 1200 children and adults hostage at a school, and eventually killed more than 300 (CNN, 2016a).

As outlined above, terror attacks in western Europe decreased in recent years. Figure 3 reveals the relative share of terrorist attacks in western Europe compared to attacks on a global level. The terrorist atrocities of 1972 in Europe accounted for 71.5 percent of the global attacks. While in 2015, with the Paris attacks, only 2.2 percent of the global terror attacks occurred in western Europe. From 2015 to mid-2016, the Middle East, Africa and Asia have witnessed almost 50 times more terrorism-related deaths than Europe and the Americas (Gamio & Meko, 2016). The death tolls of terror attacks in western Europe pale in comparison to attacks in other regions of the world. The map in figure 4 outlines the geography of terrorism. The hotbeds of contemporary terror are outside Europe. The so-called Middle East and northern Africa cope with multiple attacks on a daily basis (Gamio & Meko, 2016).

The most affected nations are Iraq,

### Living with terrorism

Terrorism in western Europe and selected events within years



Sources: Global Terrorism Database, University of Maryland; press reports

\*No data †At 11am GMT, March 23rd 2017

Figure 3 Living with terrorism (The Economist, 2017)

Afghanistan, Nigeria, Pakistan and Syria. These five countries account for 72 percent of all terrorism deaths over 2015 (Global Terrorism Index 2016, p. 4). The figures as outlined above put terror attacks into context. It reveals that terrorism is a global phenomenon, yet its impact varies strongly.

## THE GEOGRAPHY OF TERRORISM

Terrorist attacks with at least five non-militant deaths since Jan. 1, 2015

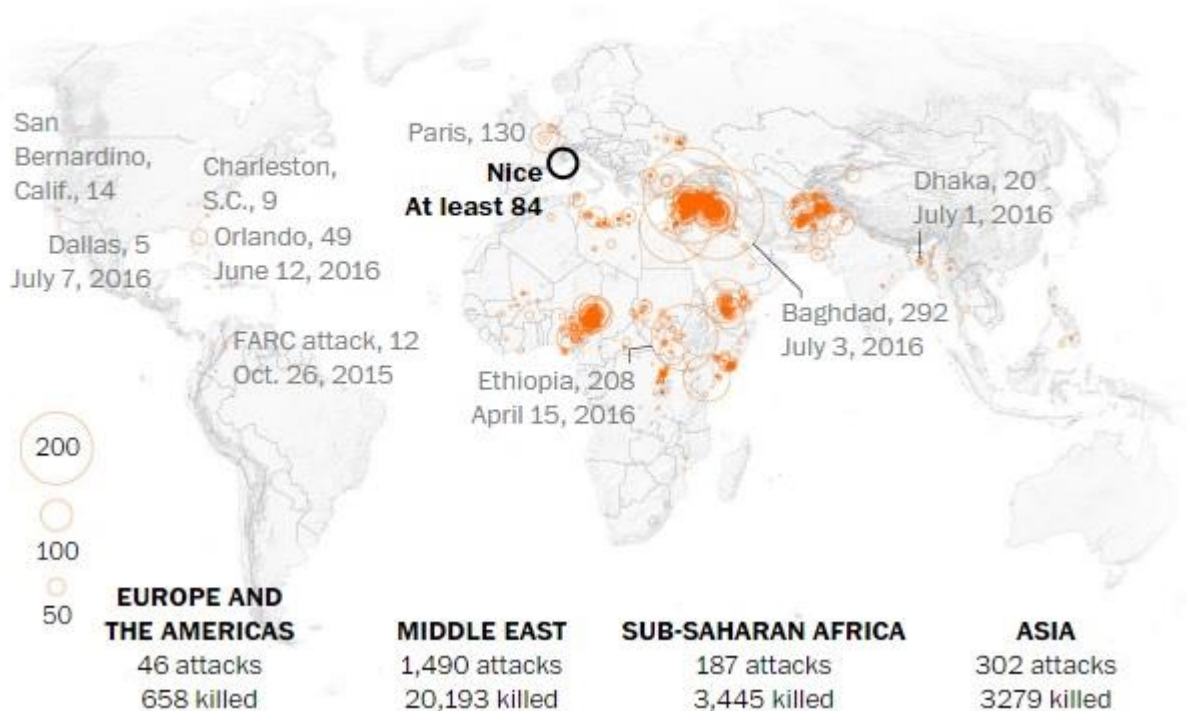


Figure 4 The geography of terrorism (Gamio & Meko, 2016)

However, these figures contain a number of important limitations. Figures about terrorism portray terrorist attacks as merely a dot in time. Most charts and maps on terrorism depict the phenomenon as a self-contained event. They leave no possibility to include the causes or consequences of terrorism. Thereby these figures contain pervasive misrepresentations. As Bueno Lacy et al. (2016) argue, maps about terrorism send the unspoken message that terrorist attacks are inexplicable and unpredictable. Maps about terrorism, and I would argue charts as well, suggest that the targeted states are merely victims and have no possible involvement. Thereby figures about terrorism fail to portray terrorism as a process of action and reaction. As Bueno Lacy et al. (2016) rightfully outline, it fails to depict terrorism as a process of circular violence.

Another important limitation of the figures about terrorism is that it only represents terrorism by non-state actors. Whether acts of states could be labelled as terrorism is subject



to debate within the academic literature. Some scholars argue that acts of terror by governments should be labelled as terrorism (Blakeley, 2007, p.230; Crelinsten, 2002, p. 83). However, these acts are not included in any of the dominant terrorism databases. The GTD excludes state terror from its database despite stating that: “ [...] *we exclude the considerable violence and terrorism that is directly carried out by governments or their militaries*” (LaFree, Dugan & Miller, 2014, p. 13). Thereby they acknowledge that states carry out terrorism, yet refuse to perceive it as such in their statistics. Acts of states, whether it is named as terrorism or not, are excluded from the graphic representations of terror. This strengthens the popular notion that states are merely victims seized by a random and unpredictable threat. Thereby these figures, and the definitions they are based on, are heavily biased. This hinders a profound academic debate on the phenomenon itself because these figures already provide an understanding of nations as victims that solely respond, in self-defence, to terrorism. Therefore these figures are part of and strengthen the popular discourse that terrorism is a random and unpredictable threat.

The next section will outline the ongoing attempt to establish a definition of terrorism. The ongoing pursuit for a definition illustrates the ambiguity and controversy of terrorism.

### **2.1.2 What are we talking about**

As outlined above, terrorism is nothing new. It exists already for a long time, however the meaning, implementation and understanding of it changed throughout history. There have been many attempts to establish a universally accepted definition. In 1983, the Department of State (DOS) of the USA defined terrorism as: “*premeditated, politically, motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience*” (Sinai, 2008, p. 9). This definition is widely used, as well as criticised. Smelser and Mitchell (2002, p. 2) argue that an important intention of terrorists is to induce fear on societies. Therefore the direct victims of terrorism are not the ultimate target, but are a mean to instil fear (Schmid & Jongman, 1988).

Whether terrorism includes attacks against all citizens of a state, including military, or it consists of only non-combatant targets, is subject to debate. If terrorism is defined as attacks merely against non-combatants, then attacks by groups or individuals against armed

military targets should be categorized differently. According to Sinai (2008, p. 9) these should be labelled as guerrilla attacks. Ganor (2002, p. 288) states that there is a clear distinction between terrorism and guerrilla warfare. He argues that the aims of terrorism and guerrilla warfare may be identical but that they differ by the means used, or more precisely by the targets. According to Ganor (2002, p. 288): “*the guerrilla fighter’s targets are military ones, while the terrorist deliberately targets civilians*”. Schmid proposed an answer to this question by arguing that acts of terrorism should be defined as “*peacetime equivalents of war crimes*” (Sinai, 2008, p. 10). However, I would argue that the use of this definition would have major implications for our understanding of terrorism. Placing terrorism in a context of peace is paradoxical, since the rhetoric of terrorism often includes war-like language. The ‘war on terror’, as used by George W. Bush, would become a (even more) self-contradicting concept since Schmid’s definition states that terrorism is used in peacetime, not in times of war (The Guardian, 2001). The declarations of war to Daesh<sup>1</sup> by some European leaders, following the most recent attacks on European soil, would also become highly controversial (Perring & Gutteridge, 2016; NOS, 2015a).

Another contentious component in the definition of terrorism is whether acts of a state could be perceived as terrorism or not. There are several scholars that argue that acts of terror committed by governments against citizens, either their own or abroad, should be labelled as terrorism (Blakeley, 2007, p. 230; Crelinsten, 2002, p. 83). Blakeley (2016, p. 65) argues that despite that motives or effects of terrorism by a state might differ from terrorism by non-state actors, the act of terrorism itself is not any different. He argues that scholars who exclude acts of a state from the definition, use an actor-based perspective rather than action-based. Nevertheless, several scholars refuse the equation of terrorism by states and non-states. Laqueur (1986, p. 89) argues that there are fundamental distinctions in motives, effects and functions between political terrorism and oppression by a state. Furthermore, he argues that: “*the very existence of a state is based on its monopoly of power*” (Laqueur, 2003, p. 237). Hoffman (1998, p. 34) argues that, despite that states have been responsible for far more deaths than non-state actors, there is a fundamental qualitative difference in the types of violence used by them. Throughout history states have developed a set of accepted

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<sup>1</sup> The terms Daesh, Islamic State (IS), Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) are used interchangeably throughout this thesis and refer to the same actor. The notation is dependent on the source it is retrieved from. When a source is quoted, the notation is adopted. However, the author refers to Daesh since it is the most common notation by the actors involved.

norms, rules and behaviour on the use of tactics and weapons, while non-state actors have violated all these rules. According to Blakely (2016, p. 2) this argument would only hold if states would not have violated these rules, as outlined in the Geneva Conventions. Bakker (2012) prefers to label the illegitimate use of violence by states as war crimes and argues that the international community has developed several legal instruments to hold states responsible for their acts. No such legal instruments exist in the field of terrorism. Intertwining terrorism by states and non-states would therefore jeopardize these existing frameworks. However, a critical movement of terrorism scholars appeared that argues that the dominant understanding of terrorism is problematic.

### **2.1.3 A critical turn**

A critical movement of terrorism scholars emerged, because the so-called traditional or orthodox scholars provided an unsatisfactory understanding of the phenomenon. According to academics from critical terrorism studies (CTS) a different way of thinking about the phenomenon is needed. Jackson (2007, p. 245) criticizes terrorism studies for its state-centricity. According to him, research topics are based and tailored to the needs of power holders. The majority of leading scholars is linked to state institutions and the sources of power. This results in a limited and narrow set of narratives and assumptions about terrorism. These narratives form, unrightfully, the dominant discourse on terrorism and counter-terrorism (Jackson, 2007, p. 245). This results in state terrorism often being excluded from the definition.

Furthermore, the ongoing pursuit for a definition lacks the perspective of the ‘other’ (Bakker, 2012). The field of terrorism studies is dominated by Western scholars. The discourse and existing knowledge on terrorism is Eurocentric and therefore too one-sided. The perspective of the ‘other’ is often precluded from being heard. Scholars that focus on the perspective of the ‘terrorist other’, such as their grievances and motives, are often accused of sympathizing with the enemy. A prime example are Jones and Smith (2009, p. 298) who accuse several scholars of CTS of sympathizing with terrorists by arguing that: *“both Islamist and critical theorists share an analogous contempt for Western democracy [...]”*.

The aspects mentioned above are decisive in how one defines terrorism. CTS views terrorism as a strategy or tactic, thereby taking an action-based rather than an actor-based



perspective. According to Jackson (2007, p. 248) CTS therefore perceives terrorism as a: *“strategy or tactic of political violence that can be, and frequently is, employed by both state and non-state actors during times of war and peace”*. Tilly (2004, p. 5) adds that: *“terror is a strategy, not a creed.”* Terrorism should therefore not be perceived as merely an ideology, but rather as a tool, used at specific times, to achieve certain goals. This implies that the label of terrorist is fluid and not fixed. The strategy of terrorism, may be abandoned once it seems no longer useful in achieving the goals set (Jackson, 2007, p. 248). This is illustrated by Nobel Peace Prize winners as well as ‘former terrorists’ Nelson Mandela and Yasser Arafat.

Within the academic literature there is a lot of disagreement on how to define terrorism. The international community made several attempts to establish a universally accepted definition, but does not seem to be any closer than academia.

#### **2.1.4 Attempts by the international community**

Several unsuccessful attempts to develop legal frameworks to effectively combat terrorism were made by the international community. Numerous scholars argue that the lack of a globally accepted definition hinders international and domestic law making efforts to counter terrorism and is a serious threat to the effectiveness of counter terrorism operations (Setty, 2011, p. 7). Due to the absence of a definition the international community has been unable to construct a unified global stance against terrorism. Despite the lack of a definition there are several United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions, international treaties and protocols aimed at addressing international terrorism (Setty, 2011, p. 8).

In 1937 the United Nations’ (UN) predecessor, the League of Nations, already made an attempt to establish a supranational definition. They proposed to define terrorism as: *“criminal acts directed against a state and intended or calculated to create a state of terror in the minds of particular persons, or a group of persons or the general public”* (Setty, 2011, p. 9). However, the proposed definition was not adopted by the League of Nations, nor considered for adoption by the UN. In 1987 the General Assembly (GA) of the UN accepted a resolution stating that the effectiveness of combating terrorism would be enhanced by the establishment of a generally accepted definition. In this resolution the GA emphasized the importance of combating terrorism, yet also highlighting the need to do so in a manner that

recognises the right to self-determination of oppressed people and that protects human rights (UN, 1987).

After the attacks of 9/11 a unified global stance against terrorism seemed closer due to the adoption of resolution 1373 by the UNSC. Due to great pressure by the US, the Security Council took this unprecedented step just weeks after the attacks (Setty, 2011, p. 11-12). According to Scheppele (2010, p. 455) it is no coincidence that resolution 1373 almost exactly copies the strategy to combat terrorism as outlined in the PATRIOT Act, which the US drafted at the same time. Resolution 1373 mandates that all UN member states cooperate, share information and report to the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC)<sup>2</sup> in order to combat terrorism effectively (UN, 2001). However, it does not present a definition of terrorism thereby not providing the parameters for the implementation of counter-terrorism efforts. Furthermore it does not provide a framework to safeguard the protection of human rights and the rule of law by member states. Despite that resolution 1373 did not present a definition, it did trigger individual countries to find a way to comply with obligations of the resolution. Several countries did so by establishing their own definition, others declined to define terrorism but indicated that they would comply with international treaties and obligations (Carlile, 2007, p. 9-15). Through several resolutions, treaties and bodies the UN has established measures to work around the absence of a definition. In 2004 the UNSC passed resolution 1566, reminding the member states of their obligations to counter terrorism. Resolution 1566 offers a partial definition by describing a terrorist act as:

*“Criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act, and all other acts which constitute offences within the scope of and as defined in the international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism.”* (UN, 2004).

It is another attempt by the UN to come closer to a workable definition, but was again hindered by the lack of consensus among its member states. Another failed attempt was by

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<sup>2</sup> The CTC was established to oversee the fulfilling of the mandate of resolution 1373.

former Secretary General of the UN Kofi Annan. He tried to reach consensus on a definition that focused on the deliberate killing and targeting of non-combatants for political purposes but also failed to reach consensus (Bakker, 2012). In 2006, the GA adopted the Global-Counter Terrorism Strategy (resolution 60/288). According to the UN, it is a unique global instrument to: “*enhance national, regional and international efforts to counter terrorism*”. But again, it does not provide a definition. In a report to the GA to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the strategy, the Secretary-General outlines the challenges (UN, 2016, p.2). Among them is the lack of an internationally agreed definition of violent extremism. The Council of Europe adopted the Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism in 2005, however thereby not providing a definition of terrorism (Pawlak, 2015). The ongoing struggle to provide answers to the fundamental questions of terrorism made some scholars question whether a universal definition is even possible (Begorre-Bret, 2006, p. 1987).

### **2.1.5 Why we cannot agree upon a definition**

Nowadays, a universally accepted definition has still not been established. According to previous UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, it is among the major contemporary challenges the international community faces (UN, 2016, p. 2). The pursuit to establish a universally accepted definition of terrorism is entangled in questions of law, philosophy, morality, history and religion. Several scholars question whether it is even possible to establish an objective definition, and argue that the definitional question of terrorism is subjective by nature (Setty, 2011, p. 6-7). Laqueur (1987) argues that: “*no definition of terrorism can possibly cover all the varieties of terrorism that have appeared throughout history*”. According to Schmid (2004) it would be difficult to reach consensus on a definition because any definition is built on one’s political preferences or ideological biases. Hoffman (1998, p. 31) argues that: “*the decision to call someone or label some organization ‘terrorist’ becomes almost unavoidably subjective, depending largely on whether one sympathizes with or opposed the person/group/cause concerned*”. Jackson (2007, p. 246) adds from a critical perspective that it is impossible to have objective or neutral knowledge on terrorism. Biases and assumptions are intrinsic parts of the phenomenon and therefore it is impossible to use it in a neutral manner. The efforts to define terrorism made by the UN failed because the perceived subjectivity of any of the proposed definitions and because elements in the proposals did not meet the interests of

various member states (Setty, 2011, p.9). Several member states and political actors have expressed their wish to exclude freedom fighting, anti-colonial uprisings and anti-occupation violence from the definition of terrorism. In 1974, Yasser Arafat as representative of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), spoke to the General Assembly of the UN and stated:

*“The difference between the revolutionary and the terrorist lies in the reason for which each fights. For whoever stands by a just cause and fights for the freedom and liberation of his land from the invaders, the settlers and the colonialists cannot possibly be called terrorists, otherwise the American people in their struggle for liberation from the British colonialists would have been terrorists; the European resistance against the Nazis would be terrorism, the struggle of the Asian, African and Latin American peoples would also be terrorism, and many of you in this Assembly hall were considered terrorists”.*

(General Assembly, November 13 1974, 29<sup>th</sup> Session, 2282<sup>nd</sup> plenary meeting).

As Schmid (2004, p. 395) outlines, terrorism is a contested concept. According to Bakker (2012) this is most adequately explained by the phrase: *“one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter”*. The unsuccessful and ongoing pursuit for a universally accepted definition is exemplary for the limited understanding of the phenomenon. The inability to go beyond the definitional problem of terrorism hinders a profound debate because it does not advance the understanding of the phenomenon itself. The causes and consequences of terrorism are often precluded from the debate.

### **2.1.6 Do we really need a definition?**

According to Setty (2011, p. 7) counter-terrorism laws and policy depends on a definition. It is impossible for the international community to address the problem of terrorism without a definition of its parameters. The question who is considered a terrorist is of utmost importance. Ganor (2002, p. 287) argues that it is not only possible to establish an objective definition of terrorism, it is also essential for any serious attempt to combat the phenomenon. It is thereby not merely a theoretical concern, but even more an operative one. Since terrorism is an international phenomenon, any strategy to combat it should be implemented on an international level. According to Ganor (2002, p. 300) an effective

international strategy that leads to operational results requires a definition. No responsibility can be imposed on states or actors supporting terrorism without an answer to the question of *‘what is terrorism?’*. Schmid (2004, p. 380) elaborates on this argument by stating that terrorism can only be fought by international cooperation. He states that one of the fundamental principles of judicial cooperation is the principle of dual criminality. An act must be seen as terrorism by both, or all, countries involved. Disagreement on what terrorism is makes interstate cooperation nearly impossible.

According to Ganor (2002, p. 287) there is a whole school of thought that argues there is no need for a definition because it depends entirely on the subjective outlook of the one defining terrorism. A striking example is the post 9/11 speech of former British Ambassador to the UN Sir Jeremy Greenstock in which he states that: *“Terrorism is terrorism...What looks, smells and kills like terrorism is terrorism”* (Schmid, 2004, p. 375). However, not defining terrorism carries a risk as explained by Martin Scheinin, the UN Special Rapporteur<sup>3</sup>. He warns for the potential failure of the international community to address terrorism by not having a comprehensive definition. He states that:

*“Calls by the international community to combat terrorism, without defining the term, can be understood as leaving it to individual states to define what is meant by the term. This carries the potential for unintended human rights abuses and even the deliberate misuse of the term. [...] Furthermore, there is a risk that the international community’s use of the notion of ‘terrorism’, without defining the term results in the unintentional international legitimization of conduct undertaken by oppressive regimes, through delivering the message that the international community wants strong action against ‘terrorism’ however defined.”* (UN, 2005, p.9).

This concern is shared among several scholars. Setty (2011, p. 8) argues that the combination of a mandate for strong counter-terrorism policies and the lack of a definition opens the door for abuse by member states. A report published by Human Rights Watch (HRW) suggests potential abuse does not only happen by states with oppressive regimes. In a report HRW (2016c) raises the concern that Belgium’s counter-terror responses in the wake of the Paris and Brussels attacks threaten fundamental rights. HRW argues that the

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism.

measures taken by the Belgian government raise human rights concerns and in some cases have resulted in abuses.

Another reason why there is a need for a universally accepted definition is for scientific reasons. According to Bakker (2012) it is impossible to make accurate analysis of terrorism if scholars are not discussing the same phenomenon. Schuurman and Eijkman (2013, p.1) argue that despite the abundance of books and articles written on the topic, none of the scholars has been able to provide answers to the fundamental questions of terrorism. In 1988, Schmid and Jongman raised concerns about the methodologies used by researchers to gather data. Silke (2001, p.1) builds upon this conclusion and argues that scholars in the field of terrorism failed to arrive at a level of knowledge where they can explain and predict the emergence of terrorism. One of the reasons is the absence of satisfactory answers to the basic questions of what terrorism is (Silke, 2001, p. 3).

### **2.1.7 Terrorism throughout this thesis**

The debate on terrorism as outlined above reveals that these basic questions, the ontological and epistemological foundations, are not sufficiently covered in contemporary terrorism studies. The ongoing, and so far unsuccessful, attempt to establish a universally accepted definition is therefore exemplary. A number of critical scholars outlined these shortcomings and argue for a critical terrorism research agenda (Jackson, 2009; Jarvis, 2009; Gunning, 2007). These scholars critically reflect on how terrorism knowledge is constructed and who it is for (Jackson, Gunning & Breen Smyth, 2007, p. 16). Their perspective on terrorism is based on an understanding that objective or neutral knowledge about the phenomenon is impossible. This thesis builds upon such a way of thinking. As Smith (2004, p. 498) argues: *“there can be no such thing as a value-free, non-normative social science”*. CTS offers a valuable insight in the use of the label ‘terrorism’. The label is ambiguous and hinders a profound debate. The concept ‘terrorism’ is used to apply a political judgement about the legitimacy of someone’s actions and is therefore a pejorative rather than an analytical concept (Jackson, Gunning & Breen Smyth, 2007, p. 17). As outlined above, terrorism should be perceived as a strategy rather than merely an ideology. Thereby, *terrorism* and *terrorists* do not exist. There are actors, state and non-state, who apply methods of terror (Jackson, Gunning & Breen Smyth, 2007, p. 18). Throughout this thesis terror is understood in this manner. As

outlined above, the dominant understanding of terror is to static. Terrorist attacks are manifestations of deeper problems, they originate and erupt somewhere. It is therefore relevant to include the geohistorical contexts in the debate of terrorism. It is more to be perceived as a process over time (Flint, 2003, p. 161). In order to do so, this thesis applies process-tracing to the case of contemporary western European terrorism. The ontological and epistemological foundations of such an approach are different from the traditional understanding of terrorism and require a strategy that enables a researcher to destabilize what is seen as the objective truth. A critical understanding of terrorism should strive to reveal the underlying politics in narratives, discourses and actions. To do so this thesis applies a critical geopolitical approach towards contemporary western European terrorism, as outlined in the following section.

## **2.2 What geographical perspectives add to the debate**

Geography enables us to better understand the rapidly changing world around us (Knox & Marston, 2012, p. 4). Geography is a comprehensive field of study and can be decomposed into many sub-disciplines. It is the study of how societies construct places, how social and political phenomena are distributed spatially and how we bring space into consciousness (Warf, 2006, p. xxv). The overall geographical understanding is of added value to the study of terrorism. According to Flint (2003, p. 161) the analysis of contemporary terrorism lacks such an understanding. Flint (2003, p. 166) argues that there is no other discipline better suited to understand the multiple causes and mechanisms of terrorism. Agheysi (2016, p. 12) argues it is relevant to apply geographical perspectives to terrorism since it can contribute to a broader understanding of the phenomenon, it sheds light on the causes and consequences of it. Geography is a vital field of study that engages in a variety of topics, scales and other disciplines. Cutter, Richardson and Wilbanks (2003, p. 2) argue that geographers are well positioned to address some of the initial questions and impacts of terrorism. Furthermore they state that: “*recent events [attacks of 9/11] provide an opportunity and a context for charting a new path to bring geographical knowledge and skills to the forefront in solving this pressing international problem*”. I would argue that the momentum Cutter et al. (2003, p. 2) speak of is present in contemporary Europe. The most recent terrorist attacks on European soil and the declaration of war by some of the European leaders ask for a profound

understanding of the phenomenon we so desperately try to defeat (Perring & Gutteridge, 2016; NOS, 2015a). Therefore applying a geographical perspective to terrorism could enable us to better understand the complexity of it.

Terrorism is not only entangled in a wide variety of disciplines, it also has a character of multi-layeredness. Terrorism exposes itself on different scales. A terrorist attack manifests itself on a certain place, it has locality in it. It is this smallest geographical scale, the local level, where terrorism is experienced most fiercely. However, this place and the victims are often not the ultimate target. An important aim is to instil fear in a society and to bring about political change (Schmid & Jongman, 1988). This takes place on a higher level. As Brian Jenkins stated in 1975: “*Terrorism is aimed at the people watching, not at the actual victims*” (Bakker, 2011, p. 388). This clearly reveals how terrorism moves on different scales. There is a strong interconnectivity between the global motives for an attack and the local level where it takes place. I therefore argue that terrorism undergoes a process of globalization. The global and the local are completely interwoven and impossible to pull apart (Gregory, Johnston, Pratt, Watts & Whatmore, 2009, p. 424). Flint (2003, p. 163) argues that geography is well suited to analyse the interconnectivity of these different scales. The understanding of place, the core of human geography, is essential in studying terrorism. Flint (2003, p. 163-164) argues that the local level is the setting for everyday life. It is therefore not only the level on which terrorist attacks manifest itself, but also the level on which the motives for terrorism originate. But it goes beyond local, it is a product of linkages between the regional, national and global scales. It is the interdisciplinary and multi-layered character of terrorism that makes it useful to apply a geographical perspective to it.

### **2.2.1 (Critical) Geopolitics**

As outlined above, applying a geographical perspective enables a researcher to better understand the interdisciplinary and multi-layered character of terrorism. This thesis will apply a critical geopolitical approach and thereby question to what extent contemporary western European terrorism could be perceived as a process of tit-for-tat. Critical geopolitics is considered as an appropriate approach for this thesis since it is problem-based and present-oriented (Kuus, n.d., p. 5). It opens up new space for debate and action and thereby goes beyond the dominant understanding. Since this research’s aim is exploratory



by nature, it is useful to apply an approach that destabilizes taken-for-granted assumptions. A brief outline on geopolitics and the evolution towards critical geopolitics will be provided in this section.

Geopolitics refers to the linkage of power, space and political practice (Warf, 2006, p. 184). By Knox and Marston (2012, p. 418) it is defined as: “*state’s power to control space or territory and shape the foreign policy of individual states and international political relations.*” Traditionally, geopolitics studies the relations between a state, its borders and neighbouring states (Heffernan, 1998, p. 61). However, the term has a long history and has often been redefined. It was first used by Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellen in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Tuathail, 1998, p. 1). Kjellen put forth the idea of geopolitics as describing the relation between the physical environment, governance and political objectives. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century the term geopolitics was further elaborated on by military-minded academics such as Mackinder, Haushofer and Spykman. Their imperialistic and expansionist interpretations of the term heavily influenced world politics. Mackinder’s Heartland theory and Haushofer’s *Lebensraum* made the term geopolitics synonymous to European imperialism and fascism (Gregory et al., 2009, p. 301). This caused certain reticence amongst academics and politicians to use the term. Despite its shadowy character it was never totally abandoned. Geopolitics seemed to offer a unique perspective on the rapidly changing world and renegotiation of power (Atkinson & Dodds, 2000, p. 1). Gearóid Ó Tuathail (1998, p. 1) argues that geopolitics became popular again because it addresses ‘the big picture’. It enables one to view the political world map from a holistic perspective.

It was the same Tuathail that, in the mid 1980’s, called for a different way of thinking about and within geopolitics. His attempts to critically deconstruct our understanding of conventional geopolitics emerged into, what we know now as, critical geopolitics (Dalby, 2008, p. 414). According to Tuathail (in Tuathail & Dalby, 2002, p. 16) conventional geopolitics and the way we map and represent the world, does not coincide with the contemporary world. But even more, he questions the assumption that conventional geopolitics is a neutral and objective practice to describe the world. Tuathail argues that geopoliticians hold the power of ‘geo-graphing’. This is the process in which geopoliticians present maps or explanations of the political world as objective and accurate, while in fact they construct or choose these representations from a certain interest or belief. Thereby

they play an essential role in how someone perceives and interprets the world. Tuathail argues that conventional geopolitics is a discourse in itself, a political, social and cultural practice (Tuathail & Dolby, 2002, p. 2). Critical geopolitics therefore seek to reveal the hidden politics of geopolitical knowledge. Dodds and Sidaway (1994) argue that critical geopolitics are not neutral and may not be seen as a descriptive, transparent reality but that it is a discourse that is part of politics itself. Kuus (n.d., p. 5) describes it as a critical way of thinking to destabilize what is seen as the objective truth. It aims to deconstruct the taken-for-granted assumptions and examines how dominant geopolitical narratives came about. A crucial aspect of critical geopolitics is therefore the analysis of discursive practices, the language of geopolitics (Gregory et al., 2009, p. 122; Warf, 2006, p. 65). Simply describing the world is impossible, there is always a choice in what concepts are used. Critical geopolitics acknowledges the connectivity between power, knowledge and language. Critical geopolitics is not an addition to conventional geopolitics but it offers an alternative (Klinke, 2009). It is influenced by post structural theory and builds upon concepts such as post-colonialism, otherness and orientalism (Gregory et al., 2009, p. 121-122). It are these, and many other, concepts that trigger the critical geopolitical way of thinking that is necessary to deconstruct the hidden politics in knowledge.

Another important concept that triggers the critical geopolitical paradigm this research follows is imaginative geography. It is the representation of other places, peoples, cultures and natures (Gregory et al., 2009, p. 369). The concept was proposed by Edward Said in his influential book *Orientalism*, in which he elaborates on the ways in which the 'West' comes to understand 'Others' as unchanging and primitive (Said, 1978; Warf, 2006, p. 245). Said particularly well emphasized the cultural construction of one's perspective and thereby rightfully questioned the objectivity of any representation. He argues that, through imaginative geographies, 'otherness' as well as one's own identity is constructed. The concept of imaginative geographies is particularly interesting with regard to terrorism since it is often used in a way to alienate, or create an image of, enemies. Gregory (2004) elaborated on this by outlining how strategies to reduce the enemy into targets, barbarians or pixels were used during the 'war on terror'. However, in response, there are attempts labelled as imaginative counter-geographies to contest, displace and subvert the dominant and simplistic imaginations.

There is also critique on critical geopolitics. Dodds (2001) argues that critical geopolitics refers disappointing little towards methodology, and thereby questions the methodological underpinnings of critical geopolitical research. Nevertheless, throughout the years critical geopolitics evolved into a vibrant sub-field of human geography. Furthermore, it borrows methodological and theoretical underpinnings from many different fields of study, such as poststructuralist stands, postcolonial theory and other critical approaches (Dodds, Kuus & Sharp, 2013, p. 6). By making use of methodologies used in numerous different fields, critical geopolitics is nowadays built on a comprehensive methodological basis.

Critical geopolitics serves as research paradigm throughout this thesis. The critical geopolitical way of thinking enables this research to critically reflect on the dominant understanding of terrorism. It destabilizes what is seen as the objective truth. As outlined above, the dominant understanding of terrorism is problematic. The contexts of terrorism are often precluded from the debate, the figures on the phenomenon contain pervasive misrepresentations and the role of states in terrorism is neglected. A critical geopolitical approach enables a researcher to critically reflect on how these assumptions came about and what consequences they have. Such an approach is therefore helpful to open up space to perceive terrorism in a different manner. Throughout this thesis, a critical geopolitical approach is complemented by methods and theories of conflict analysis. The extent to which a process of tit-for-tat is present in contemporary western European terrorism is analysed by applying process tracing, which will be clarified in chapter 3. Throughout this thesis critical geopolitics functions as a paradigm, yet it is complemented by qualitative methods that proved their value within the social sciences.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative method of data collection has been used in this thesis. Qualitative methods enable researchers to achieve a thorough understanding of a research topic. Qualitative research methods are suitable to apply if the research objective is to describe, interpret and to explain experiences, behaviours and ‘products’ of a selected research group. As formulated in the research question, this thesis questions to what extent terrorism and state’s responses to terrorism could be perceived as a process of tit-for-tat. So far however, there has been little scientific research on this specific topic. The research to date has tended to focus on the relevancy for policymakers and therefore often has a problem-solving approach (Jarvis, 2009, p. 15). This study intends to narrow the existing knowledge gap by establishing a more profound understanding of terrorism as a process, a vicious spiral. It is therefore exploratory by nature since it seeks to further develop theory on contemporary terrorism as a process of tit-for-tat. This chapter provides insight in the selected methodological approach.

#### **3.1 Research philosophy**

This thesis is built around a critical geopolitical approach. Within the academic literature terrorism is a widely debated phenomenon. However, the dominant understanding of terrorism is biased. Terror conducted by states is often excluded from the figures and the definition. A critical geopolitical approach is helpful in order to deconstruct taken-for-granted assumptions and destabilize what is seen as the objective truth. A critical geopolitical approach is useful to apply to contemporary terrorism since it is problem-based and present-oriented (Kuus, n.d., p. 5). It therefore opens up space for debate and action outside mainstream geopolitics. However, as critical geopolitics reveals, no description of the world can be objective, neither this research. The argument made throughout this thesis is undoubtedly a human construction. It is based on one’s ontological and epistemological foundations and is therefore not presented as the inconvertible truth (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). An academic who faces not only the possible pitfalls of conducting research in the field of geopolitics, but also so eloquently covers the philosophical foundations of

this thesis is Derek Gregory by stating the following: “*But in order to conduct ourselves properly, decently, we need to set ourselves against the unbridled arrogance that assumes that “We” have the monopoly of Truth and that the world is necessarily ordered by – and around – Us.*” (in Dalby, 2008, p. 413).

### **3.2 Process-tracing**

There is a plurality of possible qualitative methods available in the academic literature (Boeije, 2005; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Flick, 2009). Process-tracing was chosen as the main method of research for this thesis, because it enables this research to provide an understanding of terrorism as a process. Process-tracing is particularly useful in combination with the concept of tit-for-tat. As will be further elaborated on in chapter 4, tit-for-tat is a strategy of reciprocity. The theoretical understanding of the concept illustrates the interdependency of decisions. It states that an actor’s behaviour is based on the opposing actor’s decisions. One side will return something equivalent to the actor they received it from (Park & Antonioni, 2007, p. 114). Therefore a sequence of events, a norm of reciprocity occurs. Process-tracing enables a researcher to trace how these decisions mutually influence each other. By applying process-tracing, the sequence of events, terror attacks and state responses to terrorism, can be analysed in a systematic manner. Through process-tracing the geohistorical context can be taken into account, thereby providing a comprehensive perspective on terrorism. By Collier (2011, p. 823) it is defined as: “*the systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analyzed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator*”. Bengtsson and Ruonavaara (2017, p. 46) use a broad understanding of the method by stating that it: “*refers to any research approach that is focused on tracing processes, that is, that looks at how various social and political outcomes are produced by events that result from actors’ actions and interactions and various contextual factors*”. By applying process-tracing a researcher tries to trace the connections between possible causes and perceived outcomes. As Vennesson (2008, p. 232) argues, process-tracing enables one to: “*establish and evaluate the link between factors.*” However, it also allows a researcher to gain insights in the context in which this link occurred. It can therefore function as a method to trace and deconstruct the reasons actors give for their actions (Jervis, 2006). The researcher therefore studies a plurality of sources to see if the causal process a theory presumes or implies in a case is in fact evident in the sequence of the intervening variables in that specific case (George &

Bennett, 2005, p. 6). Collier (2011, p. 823) perceives it as a fundamental analytical tool in qualitative research. Applying this method is helpful to describe and analyse phenomena and evaluate causal claims. It enables a researcher to uncover complex relations and to understand and make sense of collections of evidence. This evidence, the data to be analysed, consists of a sequence of events (Waldner, 2012, p. 58). To explore and analyse causality the method can be applied to a narrative or timeline (Collier, 2011, p. 828).

In recent years process-tracing has increasingly been used in qualitative social science (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 2; Morgan, 2016, p. 489). However, as Collier (2011, p. 823) outlines, too often the method is not well understood nor accurately applied. According to Beach and Pedersen (2013, p. 2) the existing academic literature fails to fulfil its potential due to the lack of a coherent framework that addresses the ontological and epistemological foundations of process-tracing as a qualitative method. Therefore a number of scholars have strived to create a more rigorous understanding of the logic and methods to use process-tracing (Bengtsson & Ruonavaara, 2017; Morgan, 2016; Collier, 2011). According to Beach and Pedersen (2013, p. 3) much of the haziness about process-tracing can be tackled by differentiating the method into three variants: theory-testing, theory-building and explaining-outcome. The three variants differ in their research purpose. As figure 5 illustrates, the objectives are either to test whether a causal mechanism is present, to build a theoretical instrument or to come up with an explanation for a specific outcome (Beach

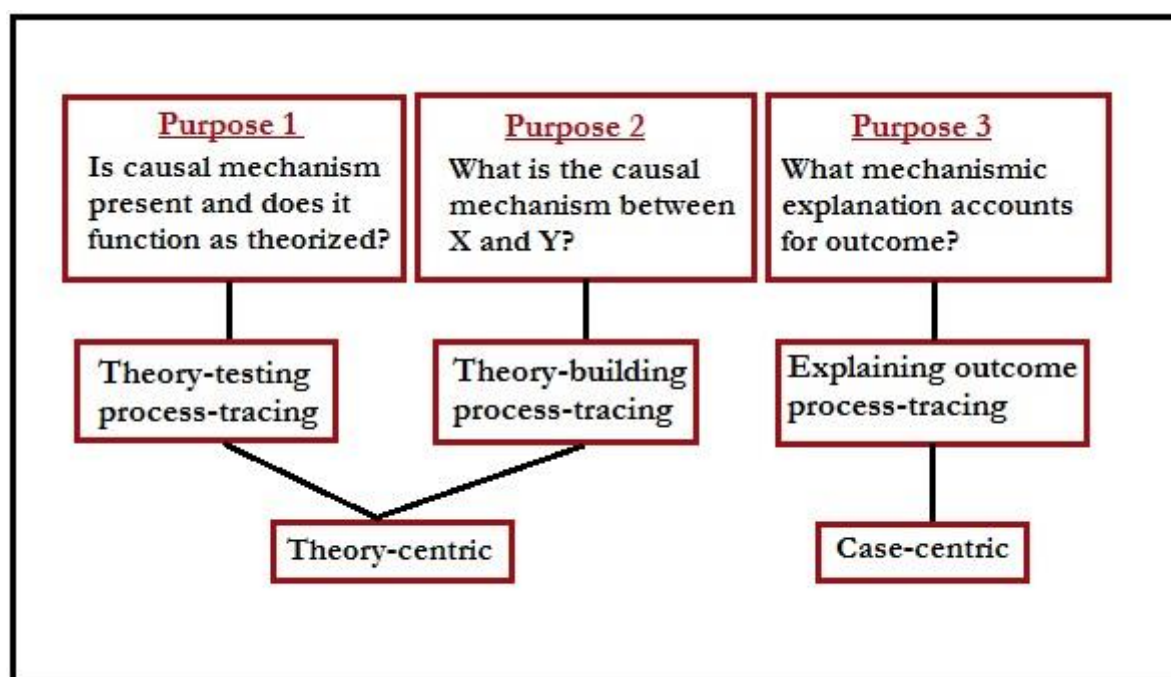


Figure 5 The purposes of process-tracing. Based on Figure 2.1 in Beach & Pedersen (2013, p. 12)

& Pedersen, 2013, p. 11). Following the diagram led to the conclusion that the theory-testing variant of process-tracing applies best to this research. According to Beach and Pedersen (2013, p. 3) this variant: “*deduces a theory from existing literature and then tests whether evidence shows that each part of a hypothesized causal mechanism is present in a given case*”. Furthermore this variant enables a researcher to: “*use logical reasoning to formulate a causal mechanism from existing theorization*” (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 13). Within the terminology of Beach and Pederson (2013, p. 14), process-tracing tests the causal mechanism between X and Y. For the sake of this research X and Y will be correlated to ***tit***(Y) and ***tat***(X). As outlined before, ***tit*** is conceptualized as a state’s response to terrorism and ***tat*** as what such a state responds to, a terrorist attack. However, with a process-based approach terrorism is perceived as a process, a vicious spiral. It is expected that contemporary terrorism does therefore not end with Y. Therefore, tit-for-tat is understood as a sequence of events in itself, that could continue indefinitely. Thereby this thesis follows the paradigm as outlined by Bengtsson and Ruonavaara (2017, p. 61) who oppose the dominant variable-centred approach of scholars as Collier (2011), George and Bennett (2005) and Beach and Pedersen (2013). Instead they plead for a more narrative-centred approach since they are interested in: “*describing and analyzing the sequence of actions and events that constitutes the process leading to a certain end state without transforming it into variables and values*”. The core focus within this thesis is therefore the sequence of events, rather than the individual variables. An important and valid question is where to start. Collier (2011, p. 829) argues that it is productive to start with a narrative or timeline. Any event can thereby function as a starting point as long as the sequence of events is analysed. Throughout this research a timeline of events is used to systematically trace the process. The attacks in the capitals of France, Belgium and Germany function as starting points for the analysis. Applying process-tracing enables me to analyse what happened prior to, and following these events. Process-tracing is part of the case study methods, it is a member of the family of methods that is tracing processes (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 4; Bengtsson & Ruonavaara, 2017, p. 46).

### 3.3 Case study methods

By applying a case study a researcher attempts to get an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of a certain case. George and Bennett (2005, p. 5) define a case study approach as: “*the detailed examination of an aspect of a historical episode to develop or test historical explanations that may be generalizable to other events*”. It is therefore a relevant method to apply in newly developing areas of research since it provides a strong basis for theory development (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 548). According to Riege (2003) it has the main objective to develop and construct theory. Furthermore, it is useful in providing descriptions and testing theories. This method is therefore considered relevant to apply to an explorative research. Case studies provide the possibility to combine a number of methods of data collection, such as observations, archives, interviews or surveys (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 534). This form of source triangulation leads to a more profound and in-depth understanding of a specific case (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2007, p. 184; Cresswell, 2007, p. 73). Several types of case studies exist, Yin (2003, p. 23) makes a distinction between single and multiple case studies.

Process-tracing differs from most other case study methods by the type of inferences that are made. Most case study methods seek to make cross-case inferences while process-tracing attempts to make within-case inferences about causal mechanisms in single case studies (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 4). Process-tracing thereby enables a researcher to achieve a more profound understanding of the nature of causal mechanisms compared to other case study methods in the social sciences. However, according to Beach and Pedersen (2013, p. 28) it is therefore impossible to compare results from process-tracing studies with results from other case studies. Thus, evidence derived from process-tracing studies is therefore to be treated as case-specific according to Beach and Pedersen (2007, p. 28). Yet, Bengtsson and Ruonavaara (2017, p. 45) argue that it is possible to compare multiple cases by applying what they call comparative process tracing.

#### 3.3.1 The case of contemporary western European terrorism

The debate as outlined above is relevant to this thesis since it addresses the question what forms the unit(s) of analysis throughout this research. It is debatable to what extent



contemporary western European terrorism is ought to be considered as a single case or whether terrorism in the chosen countries France, Belgium and Germany are to be considered as separate cases. As previously mentioned, this thesis builds upon a process-based approach that analysed a sequence of events through a timeline and/or narrative. The events, the terrorist attacks that took place across France, Belgium and Germany, are part of this sequence. Terrorist attacks are within this research not to be understood as isolated incidents. In order to question to what extent these can be perceived as a process of tit-for-tat their interconnectivity is ought to be analysed. The attacks that hit France also affected Belgium and Germany, and vice versa. To fully understand the context in which terrorism unfolds it is important to gain an understanding that covers the interconnectivity between these events. Therefore it is chosen to perceive contemporary western European terrorism as a single case study. Among the European continent France, Belgium and Germany were hit most fiercely in recent years. The attacks on their capitals served as starting points in the analysis conducted throughout this thesis.

### **3.4 Data collection & analysis**

Within this case study multiple sources have been used for the collection of relevant data and the subsequent analysis. Source triangulation leads to a more profound understanding of the case. Furthermore, it secures the internal validity of the results as presented in this research. The method of process-tracing is applied throughout this research to a number of sources (academic literature, policy papers, press releases, journals and videos). The analysed sources were selected on the criterion that it represents the identified actors. For analysing the *tit* (state response) this means that it represents the agreement of the governments of France, Belgium or Germany. Material that portrays the vision of individuals, outside the government, was only used in order to better understand the context. The dominant narratives within this material was therefore expected to reflect a common understanding of the selected countries. For analysing the *tat* (terror attacks) statements in which Daesh claims the responsibility were analysed. The statements were released by Amaq, a news agency that is affiliated with the terrorist group. Translations of these texts were provided by major media outlets such as Reuters, Washington Post or New York Times.

As outlined above, the terror attacks in Paris, Brussels and Berlin function as starting points in the analysis. The process, or sequence of events, is analysed from there on. In order to analyse the process in a systematic manner, numerous sources were used. In the wake of terrorist attacks, much is written based on little information. To counter this pitfall a wide variety of sources was used. To trace the process, 93 articles from *Le Monde*, France24, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, *De Tijd*, *De Morgen*, *Zeit Online*, *Spiegel Online*, *Deutsche Welle*, BBC, The Guardian, Independent, The Economist, CNN, New York Times, CBS News, Washington Post, Reuters, Time, NRC, *de Volkskrant* and Al Jazeera were examined. These articles are all available on the world wide web and published online. Several articles were accessed via the online newspaper database *LexisNexis*. Process-tracing was applied to these articles by systematically analysing key events. Throughout this thesis attacks and following state responses (through public statements, press releases, speeches) are understood as such. Thereby a timeline was constructed, which forms the backbone of the analysis as written in chapter 5.

In order to deconstruct the state responses to the terror attacks, official statements by the heads of states and their governments were analysed. Documents, and translations, were retrieved from *gouvernement.fr*, *France Diplomatie*, (France), *dekamer.be* (Belgium) *bundesregierung.de* and *bundeskanzlerin.de* (Germany). As outlined above, the statements of Daesh were released by Amaq. Despite that the extent to which Daesh is directly involved in the analysed terrorist attacks is not always known, the statements do refer to the justifications. However, these were only taken into account if the state responses presume that the attacks were either ordered, carried out or inspired by Daesh. This was the case in all attacks analysed in this research.

These statements were analysed and coded with the help of Atlas Ti<sup>4</sup>. This is powerful software to analyse large bodies of textual, graphical, audio and video data. The application of such software is no guarantee of quality, however it does make the analysis of large amount of sources more efficient and effective (Paulus, Woods, Atkins & Macklin, 2017, p. 42). Throughout my academic career I have used this software and do therefore have the knowledge and experience needed to use it in a systematic manner.

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<sup>4</sup> Version 7.5.16

The textual analysis was aimed to critically deconstruct the state responses in the wake of the terrorist attacks. To do so the texts were coded. The progress of this analysis was iterative, yet two steps were taken to serve as frame of reference. These steps are based on the principle of ‘constant comparison’ and aim to discover patterns (Boeije, 2002, p. 393). The first step is to explore the texts and thereby gain a general insight. The second step is to code the texts more specifically. The texts were coded with the aim to deconstruct the responses. Therefore codes were used that focus on; the attack, the reasons for the attack, the attacker(s), the target(s), what the attack means and what actions will be taken next. Thereby the texts were systematically analysed, compared and put into context. The statements of François Hollande on November 13, 14 and 16 of 2015 were analysed (3). Following the attacks in Brussels on March 22, 2016 the statements of prime minister Michel and King Filip (2) were examined. Furthermore the resolution stating the deployment of the Belgian military in Iraq and Syria was analysed (1). After the Berlin attack statements by Merkel were analysed (2). These documents served as an attempt to grasp the immediate and official responses following the attacks and were complemented with over 90 articles published by numerous media outlets. Thereby a comprehensive analysis was made of the sequence of events.

Furthermore numerous academic articles were used in order to better understand the complexities of contemporary terrorism. The combination of news articles, government statements, policy papers and academic articles provided a thorough understanding from multiple perspectives. This form of source triangulation served as a valuable tool to achieve the research goals since it does justice to the complexity of terrorism. The analysis of this research was conducted through process-tracing. As outlined above, this has implications for the external validity of this research. The results of this thesis are case-specific. Further theory development based on the results is therefore ought to be done thoughtfully without grand generalizations. This exploratory character of this research aims to better understand this specific context and to challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions. It therefore serves as an attempt for further theory development and a ‘force of example’ for future studies.

## CHAPTER 4

### TERRORISM FROM A CONFLICT STUDIES PERSPECTIVE

This chapter builds on the previous chapters by providing a theoretical understanding of contemporary terrorism from a conflict studies perspective. As outlined in chapter 2, the definitional problem of terrorism hinders a profound academic debate. The aim of this chapter is therefore to analyse what the added value of theories and concepts from conflict studies is for our understanding of contemporary terrorism. Thereby this research will be embedded in, but moreover strengthen, the existing theoretical and academic debate. The following sub question was therefore formulated:

**What do theories of conflict studies (e.g. tit-for-tat) contribute to our understanding of contemporary terrorism?**

Firstly, a short outline of the knowledge gaps in the field of terrorism studies is provided. Consequently, a discussion on the relation between conflict and terrorism studies will be given. Then, the added value of applying tit-for-tat to contemporary western European terrorism will be outlined.

To what extent the study of terrorism could be perceived as an autonomous discipline is subject to debate. Tinnes (2013, p. 81) argues that an independent academic discipline has not been established. A large research periphery with scholars from a wide variety of disciplines exists, yet there is only a limited core of researchers truly committed to this field of study. Tellidis (2015, p. 2) argues that the multi- and interdisciplinary research of terrorism is a strength and contributed to the establishment of an autonomous discipline. However, the rapid increase in terrorism research after the events of 9/11 have only had a limited contribution to a rigorous academic debate (Tellidis, 2015, p. 2). As Sageman (2014) outlines, terrorism research was conducted in sensationalist manners and often had political motivations. Jackson (2015, p. 23) adds that the leading scholars in the field of terrorism studies have close ties to states. This creates a relationship in which research topics are prioritized and tailored to the demands of the power holders. Burnett and White (2005)

described them as ‘embedded experts’. According to Jackson (2007, p. 244) this restricted focus led to the failure to cover important topics such as state terrorism. Academics who sought to understand terrorism research topics perceived as less relevant to the power holders such as the motives, grievances or ideologies of terrorism were often accused of sympathizing with terrorists (Tellidis, 2015, p. 3). A (political) discourse constructed terrorism and terrorists as evil and irrational. Thereby making any attempt to understand the underlying causes irrelevant, because it is impossible to understand something ‘irrational’ in a rational manner (Stampniztky, 2013, p. 189).

From a critical terrorism studies perspective the problem-solving approach in traditional terrorism studies is problematic (Jarvis, 2009, p. 15). The focus is on the definition of the phenomenon, but also on the prevention of the issue. According to Cox (1996, p. 88) this is problematic because it reduces the academic responsibility to merely a form of risk management. It takes the world as it finds it, thereby the current division of power prevails. While it is the academic responsibility of scholars to question to what extent the status quo is part of the problem itself and of the survival of terrorism (Jackson, 2007, p. 245). This thesis aims to counter this shortcoming by applying a critical geopolitical approach to contemporary terrorism. It therefore questions the status quo and destabilizes what is seen as the objective truth. This opens up space for a more rigorous debate on the phenomenon of terrorism itself. Jarvis (2009, p. 15) argues that traditional terrorism studies suffer from the limitations as outlined above. The narrow framework that terrorism scholars operate in, prevents them from questioning the processes in which terrorism originates and from discussing the (il)legitimate use of violence by states. This research builds upon the work of critical terrorism studies and could be understood as an attempt to trigger a rigorous academic debate on the root causes of terror.

Another problematic aspect of the study of terrorism is, that it is dominated by Western or Western-educated scholars (Bakker, 2012). The voice of the ‘other’ is often precluded from being heard, while much is said about the ‘other’. Burke (2005, p. 98) argues that states secure their sovereignty by using violence against and alienation from the ‘other’. According to Jackson (2007, p. 249) terrorism studies, in its attempts to identify the ‘terrorist other’, decides and asserts who can rightfully be labelled as a terrorist. Jackson (2007, p. 249) points out that terrorism studies thereby: “*provides an authoritative judgement*

*about who may legitimately be killed, tortured, rendered or incarcerated by the state in the name of counter-terrorism”.*

Jones (2015, p. 46) opposes CTS and argues that their discourse, approach and ideological underpinnings are nearly identical to those of Islamist and jihadist groups. He claims that scholars in the field of CTS are not interested in Islamic terrorism, but merely in exposing the dubious Western democratic responses to it. Thereby he accuses critical scholars not to provide an understanding of the world as it is, but to apply an ethical agenda of transformation. Their academic purpose is not to achieve methodological pluralism but to accomplish an ideological hegemony (Jones, 2015, p. 52). Therefore Jones argues that they share the quest for revolutionary transformation with the ‘terrorist other’. To intertwine CTS scholars with terrorists puts Jones on a slippery slope and does not contribute to a rigorous academic debate. It is an academic’s responsibility to critically reflect on the status quo and the current division of power. Blaming an academic for posing the question what role Western states play in contemporary terrorism is exemplary for the narrowly demarcated framework scholars of traditional terrorism studies, such as Jones, operate in.

The ongoing debate as outlined above reveals in my opinion the shortcomings of terrorism studies as an autonomous discipline. The inability to move away from the definitional problem hinders a profound debate that truly adds to our understanding of the phenomenon itself. The continuous finger-pointing resulted in a stalemate and does therefore not stimulate an informed debate that meets the needs for appropriate and balanced responses (Chalk, 1996, p. xii). Laqueur (1977, p. 79) predicted already four decades ago that: *“the disputes about a comprehensive, detailed definition of terrorism will continue for a long time, they will not result in consensus and they will make no notable contribution towards the understanding of terrorism”*. Richmond (2003, p. 291) argues that the definitional quest does not focus on root causes, but merely on the demonization of actors, methods and objectives. In order to move towards a better understanding of terrorism there should no longer be an obsessive focus on the quest for a definition.

The step, as Blakely (2016, p. 65) calls for, to an action-based rather than an actor-based approach is a move in the right direction. However, I would argue to adopt a process-based approach that views terrorism as a process, or spiral, rather than isolated incidents. Applying a process-based approach on terrorism is valuable for a number of reasons

(Horgan, 2005, p. 50). It is helpful to gain more understanding on the root causes of terrorism and how it evolves. A process-based approach enables a researcher to reveal the interconnectivity of the processes and mechanisms of terrorism. It sheds light on terrorism as a vicious spiral.

Within contemporary terrorism studies, there is a lack of analytic tools to apply such an approach. However, the interdisciplinary and multi-layered character of terrorism opens up space for the use of analytical frameworks of other disciplines. Throughout this thesis theories of conflict analysis are used. Richmond (2003, p. 289) argues that the differences between conflict studies and terrorism studies are diminished. However, one important difference remains. Conflict analysis addresses the root causes of conflict while terrorism studies focuses mainly on the perpetrators of terror and the ways to prevent attacks. Conflict analysis engages with explaining and understanding conflicts whilst terrorism studies seems to dodge these issues, partly due to the fear of granting any legitimacy to terrorists by trying to explain their motivations (Richmond, 2003, p. 298). Terrorism studies, mainly the traditional approaches, lost the explanatory and practical traction it used to have (Richmond & Tellidis, 2012, p. 120). To achieve a broader understanding of the multiple causes of terrorism the possibility to provide a critical reflection on the role of the existing international order should at least be explored. Conflict studies provides the parameters and theoretical underpinnings to critically discuss and question the mechanisms that cause and fuel conflicts. It is therefore useful to apply conflict analysis, through the interdisciplinary theoretical and analytical frameworks it offers, to contemporary terrorism (Richmond, 2013, p. 299).

Conflict studies, also described as peace and conflict studies (PCS), is defined by Barash and Webel (2013, p. 20) as the study that: *“identifies and analyzes individual and collective violent and nonviolent behaviors as well as the structural mechanisms underlying social conflicts in order to understand and transform those processes that might lead to a more peaceful planet”*. Contemporary conflict analysis builds upon the assumption of founding theorists as Johan Galtung, John Burton and Anatol Rapoport that the sum of conflicts is greater than the parts (Ramsbotham et al., 2011, p. 118). Merely focusing on the separate parts, or the outcomes, would therefore not provide a comprehensive understanding. An analysis is ought to explain the interconnectivity of these elements.

However, to what extent theories of conflict analysis are applicable to terrorism is debatable. According to Tellidis (2015, p. 2) terrorism should be separated from conflict because it evolved into an autonomous field of study. As outlined above, in my opinion contemporary terrorism studies do not provide the necessary tools to analyse terrorism as a process. It is therefore useful, or even necessary, to apply theories and methods from different fields of study. Nonetheless it is important to question the extent to which theories of conflict analysis are applicable to terrorism. According to Ramsbotham et al. (2011, p. 80) typologies of terrorism do accord closely to typologies of conflict. They correlated typologies of conflicts to typologies of terrorism. As figure 6 (Ramsbotham et al., 2011, p. 83) shows, they correlate 'social revolutionary terrorism', 'right-wing terrorism' and 'religious fundamentalist terrorism' as manifestations of revolution/ideology conflict. Furthermore, they correlate 'national/separatist terrorism' with identity/secession conflicts. Lastly, they correlate a category of criminal terrorism, also referred to as economic terrorism, with factional conflict. However, there are two types of terrorism that do not fit in their conflict typology. The first is 'state terrorism', including acts of terror, internal oppression and state sponsored terrorism, and caused according to Ramsbotham et al. (2011, p. 82) the greatest number of terrorist atrocities. Second, there is 'international terrorism' which refers to the relatively small groups of terrorists who are international in their manpower as well as their purpose. Terrorism by groups such as IS and Al Qaida is perceived as international terrorism. This form of terrorism has come to dominate the popular perception of what terrorism is. Although this type is hard to fit in the conventional typologies of conflict, it is by no means completely 'new' and is similar to previous forms of terrorism. Despite that it is impossible to correlate the typologies of conflict completely to terrorism and that it does not cover all types, Ramsbotham et al. (2011, p. 85) argue that it is relevant to make use of methods of conflict analysis to study terrorism. Tit-for-tat, a theoretical concept that derived from conflict studies, will throughout this thesis be applied to contemporary terrorism since it provides the possibility to perceive the phenomenon as a process. The following section will further outline how tit-for-tat is understood and used in this research.



A conflict resolution terrorism typology

Terrorism type	Conflict type
State terrorism	
Insurgent terrorism	
<i>Ideological</i>	Revolution/ideology
Social revolutionary (SL, FARC)	
Right wing/survivalist	
Radical religious (GIA)	
Nationalist-separatist (LTTE, ETA, KLA)	Identity/secession
Economic/factional (RUF, LRA)	Factional
International terrorism (Al-Qaida)	

Figure 6 A conflict resolution terrorism typology (Ramsbotham et al., 2011, p. 83)

## 4.1 Towards tit-for-tat

Tit-for-tat is often used interchangeably with a number of other concepts, such as retaliation, reciprocity and an eye for an eye. The idea that any decision echoes back and forth, and thereby creates a chain of punishments, dates centuries back. In Exodus (21:22) there is a saying: “*Do unto others as they have done unto you*” (Dixit & Nalebuff, 1993, p. 106). Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century the concept has been further developed. During the Cold War conflict analysis was used to better understand the bipolarity of the East-West divide. Tools such as system analysis and game theory were applied (Wallensteen, 2002, p. 33). Rapoport (2012, p. 1) defines game theory as a theory of rational decision in conflict situations. The models used lay out the set of choices a player has, as well as how the outcomes depend on the choices the players make (Starkey, Boyer & Wilkenfield, 2010, p. 114). Game theory is an effective tool to illustrate the interdependency of decisions. The Prisoner’s Dilemma is the classical representation in game theory that highlights the tendency for clashing strategies to result in lose-lose outcomes. Robert Axelrod conducted a series of experiments in which he invited experts to present strategies for a Prisoner’s Dilemma competition. The simple strategy, submitted by Anatol Rapoport, called ‘tit-for-tat’ was the winner (Ramsbotham et al., 2011, p. 19). Within this strategy the first move is to cooperate and thereafter copy what the other does. This strategy could lead to an unending series of mutual cooperation (Axelrod, 1980, p. 4). As Ramsbotham et al. (2011, p. 20) argue, this

strategy is predictable and reliable. In the case of the Prisoner's Dilemma, it hits back when the other defects. Therefore tit-for-tat can also result in a mutually destructive conflict. Tit-for-tat in the context of game theory, gives useful insights in the predictability and continuity of decisions. However, when applied to the complexities of the 'real' world, outside the artificial setting of game theory, it loses some of its power (Tanter & Ullman, 2015, p. 14). However, the theoretical concept is helpful in understanding terrorism as a process of action and reaction. Dixit and Nalebuff (1993, p. 108) eloquently describe tit-for-tat behaviour as: *"feudists on either side are not willing to end the feud until they consider themselves even"*. But in a continuing attempt the retaliation becomes self-perpetuating. This often happens with intractable conflicts. A lack of trust on both sides, an ideological commitment and a security-dilemma perpetuate mutual retaliation, also referred to as the eye-for-an-eye principal (Rapoport, 2012, p. 29). Any hostile action will be reciprocated. Tit-for-tat could therefore also result in an unending series of retaliation.

## 4.2 Tit-for-tat in 'reality'

Tit-for-tat is often used interchangeably with reciprocity. Keohane (1986, p. 3-8) outlines that it is an ambiguous term, used in multiple ways. According to him, reciprocity refers to: *"exchanges of roughly equivalent values in which the actions of each party are contingent on the prior actions of the others in such a way that good is returned for good, and bad for bad"*. Park and Antonioni (2007, p. 114) argue that the tactics parties in conflict use are often based on the opposing party's conflict behaviour. Conflicts do not take place in a vacuum, but are interactive processes. Therefore a norm of reciprocity occurs, which states that one party returns something equivalent to the party they received it from (Park & Antonioni, 2007, p. 114). According to Keohane (1986, p. 9) tit-for-tat is a strategy of reciprocity.

However, the empirical understanding of the theoretical concept is rather weak. As outlined above, tit-for-tat is often used in the context of game theory and was developed throughout the Cold War. Most of our understanding of tit-for-tat strategies is therefore based on a limited number of cases from the Cold War divided world (Goldstein & Pevehouse, 1997, p. 515). The collapse of the bipolar world order of the Cold War and the 'new wars' that originated in the era of globalization call for a renewed interest in our empirical understanding of this theoretical concept (Melander, Öberg & Hall, 2009, p. 510;

Kaldor, 2013, p. 2). At the onset of the post-Cold War era Goldstein and Pevehouse (1997, p. 515) called for more focus on the triangular, rather than merely bilateral, aspects of reciprocity. Due to the demise of a world with two relatively equal parties there is a need to understand reciprocity beyond the binary character of the Cold War. However, a triangular perspective would not adequately cover the complexity of contemporary terrorism. It is therefore relevant to apply the process-based approach as argued for above. It is an analytical tool to analyse terrorism as a process, or vicious spiral. As outlined above, a tit-for-tat strategy could result in a mutually destructive conflict with indefinite forms of reciprocity. A tit-for-tat strategy therefore encourages conflict spirals (Brett, Shapiro & Lytle, 1998, p. 412). To analyse the extent to which contemporary terrorism could be perceived in terms of tit-for-tat is therefore relevant to better understand the phenomenon.

As outlined above there is a need to perceive terrorism more as a process, in terms of action and reaction (Flint, 2003, p. 161). However, terrorism studies does not provide the analytical tools to do so. Therefore this chapter assessed whether concepts of conflict studies are useful to apply to terrorism. As stated above, conflict studies addresses the root causes and consequences of conflicts. It therefore takes the wider context into account. Conflict analysis aims to explain and better understand conflicts. The study of terrorism lacks such an understanding and is focused on problem-solving and on the relevancy for policy. It does thus not provide the possibility to go beyond the narrow understanding of terrorist attacks as isolated incidents. Applying concepts of conflict studies to terrorism, such as tit-for-tat, is therefore helpful to further advance our understanding of the phenomenon itself.

The following empirical chapter analyses the extent to which contemporary terrorism could be perceived as a process of tit-for-tat. Process-tracing has been applied to the terrorist attacks in Paris, Brussels and Berlin. The analysis aims to shed light on the wider context of these attacks. Therefore the analysis will focus on the causes and consequences of the events. Thereby it questions the interconnectivity between attacks and state responses to terrorism.

## CHAPTER 5

### ANALYSIS

This chapter builds on a critical geopolitical approach and analyses the extent to which contemporary terrorism could be perceived as a process of tit-for-tat. It aims to answer two of the sub questions that supported the main research question.

**How is the *tit* in the case of France, Belgium and Germany constructed and how does it relate to the *tat*?**

This sub question aims to analyse how states' responses to terrorism, the *tit*, are constructed. It closely relates to the following sub question that sheds light on what states respond to, the *tat*.

**How is the *tat* in the case of France, Belgium and Germany constructed and how does it relate to the *tit*?**

In order to answer these sub questions, process-tracing was applied to the case of contemporary western European terrorism. The terror attacks that hit the capitals of France, Belgium and Germany served as starting points in the analysis of the process. However, thereby not implying that these events form the starting point of the process itself. The analysis sheds light on events that occurred prior to these attacks. However, this chapter starts with the events that took place on Friday November 13<sup>th</sup> of 2015. From there on the analysis continues.

## 5.1 The Paris attacks

On the evening of Friday 13 November 2015 a series of coordinated attacks struck Paris. From 21:20 onwards three bombs went off near the *Stade de France* where France was playing Germany in a football friendly (BBC, 2015b). The first of three explosions took place when a man detonated a suicide belt after being refused to enter the stadium. The second and third explosion followed soon. The suicide bombers wore identical explosive vests. Besides the three perpetrators, one person is killed (CNN, 2016b). The game was attended by then French President François Hollande and German minister of Foreign Affairs Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who were safely evacuated. In the meantime, other attacks were unfolding in the streets of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement* of Paris (France24, 2015a).

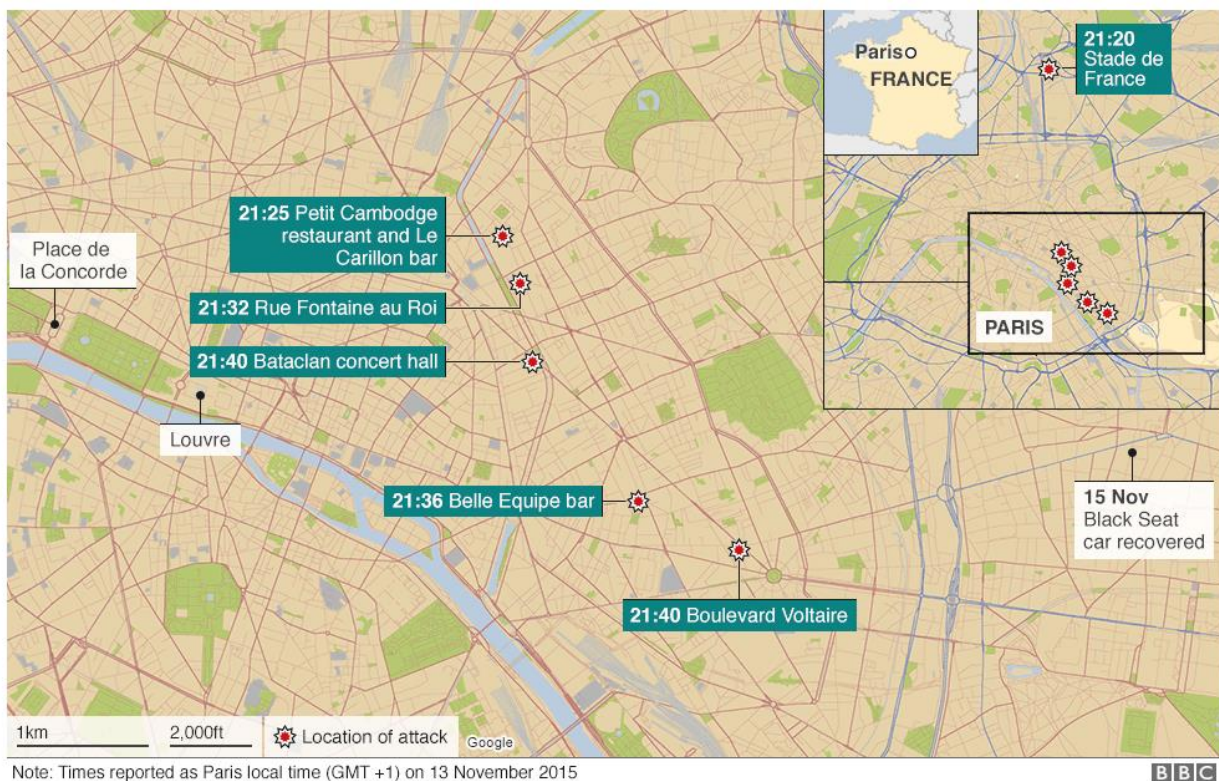


Figure 7 Map of the Paris attacks (BBC, 2015b)

Near the iconic *Place de la République* gunmen opened fire from a car on customers of several restaurants and bars. A suicide bomber detonated his explosive vest. The deadliest attack of the night took place during a performance at the Bataclan concert hall. Three gunmen opened fire and held the concert audience hostage. At about 00:20 French authorities entered the concert hall to end the siege. One of the attackers was shot, the two others blew themselves up (Ponsaers & Devroe, 2016, p. 215). 89 people died in the attack.



The series of coordinated attacks left 130 people dead and 350 wounded (Ponsaers & Devroe, 2016, p. 213). Thereby this multi-site attack is the first of this magnitude taking place in France and the deadliest in western Europe since the 2004 train bombings in Madrid (Philippe, Brahic, Carli, Tourtier, Riou & Vallet, 2016, p. 2; Nossiter, Breeden & Bennhold, 2015).

### 5.1.1 Towards a response

In the night of Friday 13<sup>th</sup> to Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> November, before the hostage taking in the Bataclan ended, President Hollande addresses his fellow compatriots from *l'Élysée*. Throughout the address he announces two decisions. Hollande declares a state of emergency throughout France and closes the borders. He argues that: *"We must ensure that no one enters to commit any crimes and that those who have committed the crimes that we have unfortunately seen can also be arrested if they should leave the territory."* (Sharma, 2015a). Despite the decision to close the nation's borders Salah Abdeslam, one of the suspects, was able to cross the border into Belgium on Saturday morning. Furthermore Hollande states that: *"This is a terrible ordeal which once again assails us. We know where it comes from, who these criminals are, who these terrorists are."* (Farrell, 2015). However, the identity of the perpetrators was not yet known, neither were their motives. Therefore Hollande does not explicitly outline who these criminals and terrorists are. He urges that France must be strong and firm, and ensures that France will be. Furthermore he: *"calls on everyone to be responsible"*.

The following day, November 14, Hollande gives a statement after the Defence Council meeting and his discourse changed (France Diplomatie, 2015). In this statement he refers to the terrorist attacks as: *"an act of war"*, whilst the night before he phrased it as crimes. Furthermore Hollande calls the perpetrators by name. According to him it was committed by: *"a terrorist army, Daesh, a jihadist army"*. He frames it as an external threat with internal complicity. Hollande argues that France has been targeted because of the values it upholds. By stating that: *"France will show no mercy to the Daesh barbarians"* he builds on his promise to react strong and firm. Thereby Hollande engages in a verbal attack on the perpetrators.

On November 16, François Hollande opens a joint session of both houses of parliament with the words: *"France is at war"* (France Diplomatie, 2015). His discourse

drastically changed since his first statement, moving from crimes and acts of war towards full-fledged war. In his address Hollande sets the tone for the measures he has in mind to counter terrorism, domestically and abroad. Hollande outlines that France has been attacked by the jihadist army of Daesh because it is a country of freedom and because it is the place where human rights originated from. They targeted France as a whole, the country: “*which makes no distinction as to color, origin, background, religion*”. However, in the amendments to the constitution Hollande proposes in the same address he seems to aspire a different France. A revision of the constitution should make it possible to deprive the French nationality of someone who is found guilty of a terrorist act, even: “*if he was born a French person, if he has another nationality*”. Apparently, the ‘other’ nationality counterweights the French nationality. According to Hollande, the France that makes no distinction as to origin and background seems to belong to the past. A categorization of French people is constructed, comprising of a category of those who can lose their citizenship and a category of those who cannot.

Nevertheless, throughout his address he does acknowledge that the perpetrators are French citizens. Hollande states that: “*we know that these were French people who killed other French people*”. In his address he calls the perpetrators also differently, namely as *cowardly murderers, despicable killers, the enemy, armed killers, the barbarians and the assassins*. Gregory’s (2004) analysis of how strategies to alienate enemies during the war on terror were used, seems very applicable to the discourse of Hollande in the aftermath of the Paris attacks. He continues by arguing that: “*living here in our land are individuals who start out by committing crimes, become radicalized, and go on to become terrorists*”. To what extent these individuals are part of ‘our land’ remains unclear. Throughout his statement Hollande does not address the question how these born French persons turned into *cowardly murderers* and *barbarians*. At what point their ‘Frenchness’ turned into ‘otherness’ is a grey area.

Another controversy is Hollande’s call for international solidarity. According to him the need to destroy Daesh is a concern for the entire international community. He states that “*all of us – the neighboring countries, the major powers, but also Europe – must live up to our responsibilities*”. However, how far the responsibility and solidarity reaches remains unanswered. Hollande’s proposals to deprive the French nationality of individuals found guilty of terrorist acts, the prohibition of dual nationals to return to France and the possibility to expel foreigners are not in line with his call for international solidarity. These

can be understood as attempts to dodge the responsibility since it transfers the burden to other states rather than providing a solution. Hollande's discourse in the aftermath of the Paris attacks paves the way for a fierce response, domestically as well as abroad.

### 5.1.2 The tit

Throughout his address to parliament on November 16, Hollande outlines his foreign policy response. His declaration of war to the "*jihadist army*" is followed by immediate actions. He states that: "*France will step up its operations in Syria. Yesterday I ordered 10 French fighters to launch air strikes on the Daesh stronghold of Raqqa*". According to the French Ministry of Defence 20 bombs were dropped on Raqqa, the self-proclaimed capital of Daesh (Ministère de la Défense, 2015). The targets included a command centre and a training camp and were, according to a statement by the Ministry, completely destroyed. Furthermore Hollande declared that the aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* would set sail to the eastern Mediterranean and thereby tripled France's capacity to act.

The airstrikes are perceived to be a retaliation for the Paris attacks (Rubin & Barnard, 2015; Nakamura & DeYoung, 2015). This also becomes clear by Hollande's statement that: "*Those who ordered the Paris attacks must know that far from undermining France's resolve, they further strengthened our determination to destroy them*". However, these airstrikes are part of a larger campaign. In September 2014 France joined the US-led global coalition, comprising of over 60 nations, that aims to degrade and ultimately defeat Daesh (McInnis, 2016, p.3). France is a key military player in the global coalition and carries out Operation Chammal, as the operation to counter Daesh has been named, in Iraq since September 2014 and in Syria since September 2015 (Irish & Vidalon, 2015). The airstrikes Hollande ordered are thereby part of a sequence of events, that increased since deployment. France makes numerous financial and military contributions to the coalition, including the aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* that serves on a rotational basis (McInnis, 2016, p. 9). Since the Paris attacks France stepped up its air operations.

As Hollande announced, France is at war. He states that: "*in this war, which began some years ago, we are all aware that we need time [...]*". Hollande does not outline when this war started. The language of war became increasingly accepted in the public debate and political discourse since the attack on the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in January 2015.



According to Lequesne (2016, p. 307) it is striking how easily a country with such a strong tradition of social contest accepted this discourse. On Saturday November 14, the morning following the attacks a number of French newspapers adapted the war-like discourse. The front page of *Le Parisien* said: “*This time, it is war*”. Furthermore *Le Figaro* stated: “*War in all of Paris*” (Walt, 2014). This leads more and more to an equation of terrorism, war and Muslim radicalism by the French public. Thereby it became a popular notion that military action, outside Europe, is the way for France to defeat terrorism (Lequesne, 2016, p. 313). This is in line with the traditional French approach to counter-terrorism with barely any attention for ‘soft’ approaches (Hellmuth, 2015, p. 979). It is therefore no surprise that Hollande immediately called on the international community, and specifically Europe, to live up to its (military) responsibilities.

In his address on November 16, President Hollande invoked Article 42 (7) of the Treaty on the European Union. This provision has never been used by any other member state and declares that:

*“If a member state is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power, in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.”* (In: Lequesne, 2016, p. 310).

Hollande justified this measure by stating that: “*the enemy is not just France’s enemy, it is Europe’s enemy*”. In Brussels questions were raised why France did not invoke Article 222 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU since it specifically refers to terrorist attacks (Lequesne, 2016, p. 310). According to the European Parliament France preferred to invoke Article 42 (7) over Article 222 because the latter would involve European institutions in the process. Whilst Article 42 (7) enabled France to request support from other EU member states bilaterally (European Parliament, 2015). According to Lequesne (2016, p. 310) this article also had the preference of France because it refers to armed aggression. It is therefore considered as a convenient article to push other EU member states towards more activity in external military operations. Since Article 42 (7) involves a ‘commitment’, and Article 222 refers to ‘assistance’, it is perceived as more binding (Chauzal, Colijn, van Ginkel, Paulussen & Zavagli, 2015, p. 6). According to the government in Paris the majority of the

EU member states are not committed enough to defeat the sources of terrorism where it is most needed, in the Middle-East and Africa (Lequesne, 2016, p. 310).

France's foreign and security policy is thereby more in line with the American strategy than Europe's. The country's firm commitment to the American-led coalition that fights Daesh in Syria and Iraq is based on the assumption that fighting terrorism at home requires military operations abroad (Lequesne, 2016, p. 316). Hollande's decision following the 2015 terrorist attacks to increase the military expenditures by 3.7 percent, after 25 years of decrease, is therefore no surprise. In his address to parliament on November 16, Hollande announced to cancel the planned cutbacks on military personnel. A widespread consensus, within politics as well as society, that military activities abroad are a legitimate measure to fight terrorist attacks at home seems to have taken root in France (Lequesne, 2016, p. 314).

On 20 November 2015, the UN Security Councils adopts resolution 2249 (UN, 2015a). Officially it condemns the 2015 terror attacks in Sousse, Ankara, Sinai, Beirut and Paris. However, it is no coincidence that the resolution is adopted 7 days after the Paris attacks and is drafted mainly by France. The resolution has served as the justification for several of the military actions taken following the Paris attacks. Nevertheless, the resolution has been received with criticism due to its vagueness (Hilpold, 2015, p. 535). According to Flasch (2016) an appropriate legal justification for the air strikes is absent. O'Connor (2016) therefore concludes that the use of force in Syria is illegal. Despite that the document does not explicitly refer to self-defence, some argue it can be used so. Paragraph 5 of the resolution: *"calls upon Member States that have the capacity to do so to take all necessary measures [...] to redouble and coordinate their efforts to prevent and suppress terrorist acts committed specifically by ISIL [...]"* (UN, 2015a). According to Hilpold (2016, p.17) this comes close to an authorization for the use of force in light of self-defence. However, as Bannelier (2016, p.8) outlines the absence of any reference to the right to self-defence is deliberate. There was no agreement among the UNSC members and in order to obtain a compromise the term was avoided. However, the process prior to the adoption of the resolution clearly reveals France's position with regard to right to self-defence. During a meeting of the Security Council François Delattre, Ambassador of France to the UN, stated that: *"Our military action [...] which was justified as legitimate collective self-defence, can now also be characterized as individual self-defence [...]"* (UN, 2015b). During the meeting France announced the intensification of airstrikes

against Daesh and its will to: “*further mobilize the entire international community to defeat our common enemy*” (UN, 2015b). Yet, they do not mention the disagreement within the international community on who this common enemy actually is. Hilpold (2016, p. 31) argues that resolution 2249 puts military measures in the forefront of the fight against terrorism. This resolution could therefore be perceived as supporting France’s assumption that the fight against terrorism requires merely military operations abroad.

A critical debate on the legitimacy or consequences of France’s military actions seems to be absent. However, the effectiveness of the international coalition to fight Daesh has been questioned. Among other military experts, former General Vincent Desportes criticized the coalition for its half way efforts. The paradox in such missions is that participating states become a priority target for terrorist attacks as long as Daesh is not fully defeated. It is assumed that merely bombing is insufficient to win the war against Daesh, but does reinforce the threat of retaliation attacks at home (Lequesne, 2016, p. 315-316). This does not serve as a call for further increases in French military activities but functions as an attempt to question the effectiveness and consequences of it.

### **5.1.3 A domestic response**

Hollande’s declaration of war was accompanied by immediate actions, abroad as well as domestically. The state of emergency, he declared in the night following the Paris attacks, may be used: “*in cases of imminent danger resulting from serious breaches of public order, or in case of events threatening, by their nature and gravity, public disaster*” and has far reaching consequences (France24, 2015b). The French *état d’urgence* is among the most severe and has major infringements for civil and political rights (Loof, 2016, p. 160). It allows French authorities to exercise a number of powers that normally requires judicial authorization on forehand (Amnesty International, 2016, p. 6). Several exceptional powers are transferred to the central authorities, the movement of people is limited and more powers are granted to the security services. It also enabled the authorities to carry out police searches throughout continental France, without interference of a judge (Loof, 2016, p. 158). During the night of the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> of November raids had been launched at 168 addresses throughout the country (Lichfield, 2015). According to Hollande 104 people were placed under house arrest. Former minister of the Interior, Bernard Cazeneuve, states that: “*these operations are*

*going to continue, the response of the Republic will be huge, will be total*” (New York Times, 2015). A statement given on December 3<sup>rd</sup> confirms these promises. According to Cazeneuve, the police carried out 2,235 raids, arrested 232 people and shut down three mosques since the November 13 attacks (France24, 2015c).

The state of emergency is based on a law that dates from 1955 and states that it can only last 12 days. However, during the joint session of parliament on November 16 an amendment to the law was approved which enables the state of emergency to last for three months (Loof, 2016, p. 156). Since then several amendments passed and the state of emergency has been renewed 5 times, currently it lasts until July 2017 (The Guardian, 2016a). It is an exceptional measure, however due to the continuous prolonging it becomes the new status quo. The state of emergency gives the French authorities the power to carry out raids without the approval of a judge (Loof, 2016, p. 158). Both Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International published reports in which they express their concerns that the state of emergency undermines human rights and the rule of law (HRW, 2016b; AI, 2016). According to Loof (2016, p. 159) it is not only applied to combat jihadist terrorism. During COP 21, the climate change conference held in Paris 12 days after the attacks, several raids were carried out that targeted climate activists, house arrests were warranted and demonstrations were prohibited. This triggered a public debate and increased resistance against the state of emergency (Loof, 2016, p. 159).

In January 2016, five UN special rapporteurs called on the French government not to extend the state of emergency (OHCHR, 2016). Nils Muižnieks, Human Rights Commissioner at the Council of Europe, argued that the state of emergency in France only had limited effects in combating terrorism. Yet, it greatly restricted numerous liberties and rights (Breedon, 2016). According to Loof (2016, p. 162) this carries the risk of an increasing polarization between a number of groups within French society and impairs respect for the rule of law. According to HRW, France has: *“carried out abusive and discriminatory raids and house arrests against Muslims under its sweeping new state of emergency law”* (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Amnesty International (2016, p. 6) questions to what extent the measures taken under the state of emergency were necessary and proportionate. Amnesty spoke to a number of people that were confronted with the emergency measures and subsequently lost their jobs or were stigmatized (Loof, 2016, p. 162). A further stigmatization of French Muslims is thereby just around the corner and carries the risk of further increased

polarization. This has been the case following the Paris attacks (Bakker & de Roy van Zuijdewijn, 2016, p. 8). In 2015, there were 25 attacks on Muslim sites that required protection of the national armed forces (Lequesne, 2016, p. 309). HRW (2016a) argues that: “*practices that discriminate against Muslims are counterproductive*”. The UN General Assembly has repeatedly outlined that counter-terrorism measures that violate human rights are counterproductive and can even be drivers of terrorism (UN, 2006). As numerous human rights organizations outline, France is on the verge of a situation in which the cure is worse than the cause.

As HRW (2016a) argues, France has the responsibility to protect the country from being targeted by further attacks. But it should also critically reflect on the productivity and proportionality of the measures taken. As Lequesne (2016, p. 308) argues, due to the warrior discourse and the absence of a profound public debate the French government did not try to deescalate the terrorist threat. The counter-terrorism actions France took under the state of emergency in the aftermath of the Paris attacks seem conflicting with Hollande’s words in his address to parliament on November 16. According to Hollande: “*The Republic must equip itself with the means to eradicate terrorism, while upholding our values and without compromising the rule of law*”. Furthermore the French government hinders a rigorous debate that aims to gain a better understanding of the Paris attacks. A few months after the attacks Manuel Valls stated: “*Car expliquer, c’est déjà vouloir un peu excuser*”. Thereby Valls insists that trying to find explanations is almost trying to excuse (Coolsaet, 2016, p. 10). As Ramsbotham et al. (2011, p. 285) argued, any state response to terrorism should be based on, and preceded by, a careful analysis of the phenomenon. The measures and discourse taken in France in the wake of the Paris attacks lack exactly such an understanding.

#### **5.1.4 The tat**

On Saturday November 14, the day after, Daesh claims responsibility for the Paris attacks. A statement was released in multiple languages on a social media account that was also used to claim the responsibility for the crash of the Russian plane above the Sinai Peninsula, that killed 224 people. Furthermore the manner in which the attacks unfolded, were in line with the tactics of indiscriminate killings the terror group used before (Callimachi, 2015). SITE Intelligence Group, a nongovernmental organization that tracks jihadist propaganda,

therefore considered the claim authentic. A transcript of the statement was provided by the Washington Post (Sharma, 2015b). Paris is mocked as: “*the capital of prostitution and obscenity*” and the victims are labelled as *pagans*, *disbelievers* and *crusaders*. The perpetrators are named as *brothers*, *martyrs* and *soldiers*. François Hollande is ridiculed as: “*the imbecile of France*”. The statement is full of threats and the Paris attacks are framed as: “*the first of the storm*” and: “*this is just the beginning*”. France, as well as Germany, are considered crusader nations. Throughout the statement the motivations for the attacks are framed as being twofold. On the one hand for religious reasons, for: “*Allah’s sake*”. But on the other hand as an act of retaliation, as a consequence of France’s foreign policy. A threat is expressed by stating that:

*“let France and all nations following its path know that they will continue to be at the top of the target list for the Islamic State and that the scent of death will not leave their nostrils as long as they partake in the crusader campaign [...]”*

Furthermore a direct reference to the airstrikes France, and its allies in the coalition, conducts in Iraq and Syria is made by stating: “*[...] their strikes against Muslims in the lands of the Caliphate with their jets*”. The statement as released by Daesh seems to confirm the earlier outlined argument made by Brian Jenkins in which he states that: “*terrorism is aimed at the people watching, not at the actual victims*” (Bakker, 2011, p. 388). The statement only briefly refers to the direct victims of the attacks. The aim of the attacks seems to be to reciprocate, and ultimately stop, the airstrikes in the: “*lands of the Caliphate*”. In Dabiq, a monthly published digital magazine, Daesh justified the attacks as retaliation for the French air strikes by stating:

*“France haughtily began executing airstrikes against the Caliphate. It was blinded by hubris, thinking that its geographical distance from the Caliphate’s lands would protect it from the justice of jihadists. [...] Thus, the Islamic State dispatched its brave knights to wage war in the homelands of the wicked crusaders, leaving Paris and its residents shocked and awed. The eight knights brought Paris down to its knees, after years of French conceit in the face of Islam.”* (Rapoport, 2016).

### 5.1.5 Tit-for-tat

The Paris attacks triggered France to take extraordinary measures, abroad as well as domestically. The Paris attacks are by Daesh framed as a justified response to the coalition airstrikes. The tat could therefore also be perceived as tit, depending on one's perspective. The terrorist attacks that took place in the streets of the French capital are a form of reciprocity. Yet, so is Hollande's decision to immediately step up the air operations in Iraq and Syria. France thereby engages in a process of retaliation. However, this causality is absent in the discourse of the French president. The attacks are framed as an assault on French *values*, *way of live* and its *liberty* rather than as a violent response to France's foreign policy in the Middle East. It is constructed as an external threat. Thereby France increasingly moves towards the assumption that the fight against terrorism at home requires military operations abroad. Despite being labelled as *barbarians* and *despicable murderers*, the perpetrators were mainly EU-citizens (van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2017, p. 89). The decision to declare, and repeatedly prolong, the state of emergency has far reaching consequences (Loof, 2016, p. 160). The proportionality of the decision is widely questioned and it carries the risk to cause further polarization. Hollande's discourse therefore contains pervasive misrepresentations and opened the door for extraordinary measures.

As will be outlined throughout the following sections, France's response to the Paris attacks heavily impacts the responses to terror by other European states. Following the attacks in the French capital, Belgium took numerous measures in the fight against terrorism due to the involvement of a number of its inhabitants. Molenbeek, a Brussels district, was home to two of the Paris gunmen and labelled as the 'jihadi capital of Europe' by numerous media outlets (Leman, 2015; Traynor, 2015; Elbagir, Naik & Ben Allal, 2016). On March 22, 2016 the Belgium capital was hit by terrorist attacks.

## 5.2 The Brussels bombings

Tuesday, 22 March 2016, started as any other day in the Belgian capital (Renard, 2016b, p. 3). However, during rush hour bombings occurred at Brussels Zaventem Airport and Maalbeek metro station (BBC, 2016b). At 07:58 in the morning two bombs exploded in the departure hall of the international airport, killing 16 people (McDonald-Gibson, 2017). Another bomb at the airport did not explode and was later detonated by the Belgian authorities. Just over an hour later at 09.11 a third explosion struck Brussels. Maalbeek metro station, connecting central Brussels to the main EU institutions, was targeted (The Guardian, 2016b). Another 16 people were killed, raising the total death toll to 32. Another 340 people were wounded, thereby the attacks of 22 March 2016 are the worst terrorist attacks in the history of Belgium (McDonald-Gibson, 2017). During the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March, Brussels went into a day-long lockdown (The Guardian, 2016b). The unexploded bomb in the departure hall and a suspect, referred as the ‘man in the hat’, on the run resulted in a continuing threat.

### 5.2.1 Towards a response

Around midday, prime minister Charles Michel appeared at a press conference in which he stated: “*We feared a terrorist attack and it happened*” (NOS, 2016). However, he does not outline where this fear for an attack comes from. Michel continued: “*I appeal on everyone to remain calm but also to show solidarity*” (Cook & Dahlburg, 2016). At 19.00 Belgian king Filip addressed the country in a widely broadcasted statement. He stated that: “*for all of us, March 22, will never be a day like any other*” (Taylor, 2016). Furthermore the attacks were by king Filip and prime minister Michel labelled as *barbaric*, *cowardly* and *odious*.

While the Belgian response was characterized by calmness, neighbouring France continued its war-dominated discourse. Then prime minister Manuel Valls stated: “*We are at war, we have been experiencing acts of war in Europe for some months now and we must act relentlessly in the face of this war*”. Then President of the French Republic François Hollande declared that: “*This war on terrorism must be fought with composure, with a clear head and with determination, because it will be a long one*” (Gouvernement.fr, 2016). Furthermore Hollande called to maintain unity, on national, European and global levels. The difference in the discourse



chosen between both France and Belgium is striking. According to McDonald-Gibson (2017) Belgian prime minister Michel wanted to prevent sending messages of exclusion in the days following the Brussels attack, this would trigger a form of double radicalization. Furthermore he stated: *“I did not say that we are at war. It is not a war in Belgium. I chose the words to avoid this dramatization.”* (McDonald-Gibson, 2017). Instead Michel speaks of: *“a battle we will certainly win. Our fundamental values are resilient enough to resist all weapons used against them”* (De Morgen, 2016). However, several of the actions Belgium took after, as well as prior to, the attacks seem conflicting with the non-war discourse of Belgium’s prime minister.

### 5.2.2 Tit

Several measures were taken in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in Brussels. During the press conference on March 22 Michel announced that OCAD<sup>5</sup> decided to reactivate the highest threat level (4) in Brussels, while the rest of the country remained at level 3. Therefore a number of additional security measures were installed, including an increased deployment of soldiers in order to defend strategic locations. This level was only installed two times before. For the first time in 2014 after the attack on a Jewish museum in the Belgian capital and secondly following the Paris attacks of November 2015 (Sadri, 2016). Levels 3 and 4 enable the government to deploy soldiers and increase security in strategic



Figure 8 Contemporary street life in Brussels (NOS, 2015b)

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<sup>5</sup> OCAD (Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis) is the Belgian crisis center.

places. However, for security and efficacy reasons the exact actions that can be taken under each level are not outlined (HRW, 2016c). Since the November attacks in Paris the Belgian army has been deployed throughout the streets of several Belgian cities. During the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March the deployment was immediately increased. Prime minister Michel's choice to avoid a discourse of war seems conflicting with the actions taken in response to the threat of terrorism. Since the beginning of 2015, Belgium deployed hundreds of troops to defend possible terrorist targets, including transport hubs, diplomatic missions and Jewish sites (Frizell, 2015). The military presence is increasingly visible across the European continent (Zunes, 2017, p. 1). Since the Paris attacks Belgium stepped up its military presence (HRW, 2016c, p.22). Over 1800 soldiers were deployed to support the police (De Voogt, 2017). The deployment of the military domestically, may be a proportionate and justified action in extraordinary times. However as HRW (2016c, p. 2) outlines, it is questionable whether an extended military deployment in a civilian policing context is desirable. The goals, and means, of military armed forces and the police differ greatly (Walzer, 2016). During armed conflict soldiers aim to defeat an enemy through means that include lethal force. Yet, the goal of the police is to restrict the use of force to a minimal amount and to keep order (HRW, 2016, p. 2). In the case of Belgium, the deployed military forces operate under the supervision of the police and are assigned to provide security to the police. The soldiers are authorized to only act to defend themselves or others from an immediate threat. According the Belgian government it is a temporary measure and is reviewed every two months (HRW, 2016c, p. 22).

It is questionable what the added value of such a deployment is. The presence of soldiers in the streets was aimed at providing support to the police and to create additional capacity for police forces to conduct other operations. According to a police report, the military deployment did not lead to this increased capacity (Vanhecke, 2017). Furthermore it is questionable to what extent the presence of the army contributes to (the feeling of) safety. In France, a commission of inquiry publicly questions whether the deployment of up to 7000 soldiers is of added value to securing the nation's territory (BBC, 2016c). Terrorism scholar Jelle van Buuren argues that the deployment of soldiers in the streets is counterproductive since it increases the feelings of unsafety. People associate the army with war (Dekker, 2016). This seems conflicting with prime minister Michel's preference to avoid a discourse of war. According to him it is not a war in Belgium, however the military

presence suggests otherwise. During a second press conference on March 22 Michel declared that Belgium aimed to return to normal life as soon as possible, it is highly debatable whether the deployed troops are beneficiary to achieve this goal (Het Laatste Nieuws, 2016).

Following the attacks of March 22, a number of raids took place throughout Brussels. Soon after the attack on the airport Belgian authorities conducted raids in Schaerbeek, from where the perpetrators departed. In the following months several hundred raids and detentions were carried out. These actions resulted in the conviction of dozens of terrorism-related suspects. However, according to HRW (2016c, p. 34) the measures Belgium took in the aftermath of the terror attacks also raise serious human rights concerns. Prime minister Michel released 30 measures, including a number of new counter-terrorism laws and regulations, following the terrorist attacks of January and November 2015 in France (Seron & Andre, 2016, p. 10). HRW (2016c, p. 2) expressed its concerns that at least six of these laws threaten fundamental rights. In the summer of 2015 a law was approved that allows the Belgian authorities to strip the citizenship of dual nationals who have been sentenced to five or more years in prison for terrorism-related crimes (HRW, 2016c, p. 24). As outlined above, a similar attempt was made by Hollande. Michel thereby follows the example as set by France and attempts to install a categorization of Belgians, those who can lose their citizenship and those who cannot. According to HRW (2016c, p. 25) these measures create: “*second-class citizens based on their ethnicity and religion*”. This carries the risk of further stigmatizing already marginalized Muslim communities (van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2017, p. 89).

In contrast to France, Belgium did not immediately step up its military operations in Syria and Iraq. Prime minister Michel preferred to avoid a discourse of war, because: “*it is not a war in Belgium*”. However, several of the actions Belgium took seem conflicting with Michel’s discourse. Two months after the terror attacks the Belgium government decided to expand its military operations from Iraq into Syria (Rubin, 2016). Thereby Belgium follows the path of states that recently made the same decision such as the UK, Germany and the Netherlands. As a justification the Belgium government used UN Security Council Resolution 2249 that was adopted after the Paris attacks (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2016, p.4). As outlined above it is highly debatable whether this resolution serves as a sufficient legal justification for such measures. Furthermore the

Belgian government justifies its decision to expand its activities to Syrian territory on the decision of France to invoke Article 42 (7) of the Treaty on the European Union. This request for aid and assistance received unanimous support and finds its legitimacy in the right to self-defence. Therefore Belgium decided on 18 November 2015 to provide its frigate Leopold I to support the French aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle. Already on 12 September 2015, before the Paris and Brussels attacks, the Belgian minister of Defence outlined that: *“in case there will be a similar coalition in Syria [as in Iraq], we will not be on the sidelines”* (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2016, p. 6). In the process prior to the adoption of Resolution 2249 Belgium’s stance came close to the position of France. Belgium, likewise Germany, confirmed the statement that they had a justified claim to act against Daesh on the basis of the right of collective self-defence. According to the Belgian government air strikes in Syria are justified because the Syrian government does no longer exercise effective control over parts of the country (Bannelier, 2016, p.11). A number of scholars question the legality of the use of force in Syria (Flasch, 2016; O’Connor, 2016). Furthermore Crikemans (2016) argues that the Belgian airstrikes in Syria are counterproductive. It provides the opposing side with more ‘ammunition’, thereby leading to increased unsafety. Minister of Defence, Steven Vandeput, dismissed concerns that the decision to conduct airstrikes in Syria might provoke more terror attacks in Belgium by stating that: *“The Islamic State in any case is planning to continue committing attacks in the Western world”* (Rubin, 2016). Belgium’s discourse seems to differ from the actions the country took, prior to as well as following the Brussels attacks. The measures taken by the Belgian government in response to the attacks that hit Brussels follow the path chosen by France.

### 5.2.3 Tat

At 16.17 in the late afternoon on March 22, the responsibility for the Brussels bombings is claimed by Daesh. A statement was released by Amaq, a news agency that is affiliated with the terrorist group (Rubin & Breeden, 2016). The responsibility was claimed through a short statement only a few hours after the attacks. According to Daesh Belgium was targeted because it is: *“a country participating in the international coalition against the Islamic State”*. Belgium was labelled as a *crusader country*. The terrorist group unrightfully claimed that the assault left 230 people dead (Dearden, 2016). A more extensive statement was later released by Amaq

(Prince, 2016). It stated that Belgium was targeted because it: *“has not ceased to wage war against Islam and its people”*. This statement was more in line with the statement released following the Paris attacks. It is full of threats by stating that: *“We promise black days for all crusader nations allied in their war against the Islamic State, in response to their aggressions against it, and what is to come will be more devastating and bitter by Allah’s permission.”*

According to the statement Belgium is targeted for its role in the international coalition. A number of documents that were found near the apartment of the perpetrators and the interrogation of several suspects revealed that the intended target was France, not Brussels (Rapoport, 2016; Eeckhout, 2017). A week prior to the attacks, a raid took place in a safe house in Brussels. Mohamed Belkaïd, a suspect in the Paris attacks, is killed in a firefight and Salah Abdeslam, the ‘tenth terrorist’ of Paris, is able to escape. On March 18 Abdeslam, along with another suspect, is captured during a raid in Sint-Jans-Molenbeek. By Belgian authorities he was described as the most wanted man in Europe (BBC, 2016a). Abdeslam fled Paris for Belgium by car following the attacks of November 13 and returned to the city he grew up in (Chrisafis, 2016a). The months after the attack he found shelter in Schaerbeek and Molenbeek. The deputy prime minister and minister of the Interior Jan Jambon warned that the arrest of Abdeslam could wake up new terrorist networks. Furthermore he stated that the discovery of weapons and terrorist in one place means that they were preparing a terrorist attack. With the arrest of Abdeslam nearly the entire terrorist cell that prepared the Paris attacks is dismantled. The five terrorists that carried out the attacks in Brussels were afraid they were next (Rapoport, 2016). Numerous articles in the press suggested that Abdeslam was cooperating in the investigations, thereby causing concern among the perpetrators (Eeckhout, 2017). A number of audio messages reveals that Brussels was not the initial target. The plan was to target the European Championship of 2016 that was held in France. Najim Laachraoui, one of the airport suicide bombers, stated in a conversation with contacts in Raqqa that such an attack on Euro 2016 would be humiliating, a major financial loss and a lesson for those attacking Daesh (Eeckhout, 2016). Furthermore, it was stated that Brussels was not a preferred target because it was perceived as a safe haven to return to. With an arrest by the Belgian authorities just around the corner, the group decided to take immediate action.

#### **5.2.4 Tit-for-tat**

In the wake of the Brussels attacks, Belgian prime minister Charles Michel tried to avoid a discourse of war. Whilst its southern neighbour France continued its war dominated discourse, the Belgian response was calmer. However, the measures taken in the aftermath of the attacks are conflicting with this narrative. The tit, Belgium's response, follows the example as set by France. As HRW outlines, some of the domestic measures raise serious human rights concerns. A striking example is the counter-terrorism law that enables the authorities to strip the Belgian citizenship of dual nationals. Such measures do not address the root causes of terrorism and do merely shift the burden to other states. By its decision to respond to France's request for aid and assistance under Article 42 (7), Belgium moves towards the assumption that fighting terrorism at home requires military operations abroad and engages in the process of tit-for-tat.

As outlined above, the attacks in Brussels had direct links to the Paris attacks and were therefore interconnected. Belgium took numerous counter-terrorism measures in the wake of the Paris attacks and strengthened these following the attacks in Brussels. Germany stood shoulder to shoulder with its European neighbours following the attacks. Berlin was targeted late 2016.

### **5.3 The Berlin truck crash**

On Monday 19 December 2016, at 20:14 a truck crashed into a crowded Christmas market at the Breitscheidplatz in the centre of Berlin (BBC, 2016d). 12 people died in the attack, including the Polish truck driver. He was found dead in the passenger seat (Leijendekker, 2016). Furthermore 48 people were wounded. Thereby it became the worst terrorist attack in Germany in decades.

On Monday night a Pakistani asylum seeker was arrested as the main suspect for the truck crash (Connolly, 2016a). A witness saw the perpetrator get out of the truck, followed him briefly, but eventually lost sight of him. Based on the description the witness provided, the Pakistani man was arrested. Yet, soon doubts arose that he was the actual perpetrator. Because there was no evidence that linked the man to the crime, he was released (Eddy & Smale, 2016). By then, German authorities were looking for the Tunisian Anis Amri. His

documents were found in the truck (Connolly, 2016b). After the attack Amri travelled from Berlin to Nijmegen, Brussels, Lyon and Milan (Bouma, 2016). On Friday the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December Amri was stopped by the Italian police in a routine check in the outskirts of Milan. After being asked for his documents, he opened fire and died when the police returned fire (Kirchgaessner, Oltermann, Salfiti & Chrisafis, 2016).

### 5.3.1 Towards a response

On the evening of the attack, German authorities refrained from describing the incident as a terror attack. However, minister of the Interior Thomas de Mazière stated: *“I don’t want to use the word ‘attack’ yet at the moment, although a lot speaks for it”* (Paterson, 2016). Despite the absence of the necessary information to draw any valid conclusions, many assumed that the event was a horrible echo of the attack that took place in Nice, France in July 2016 (de Roy van Zuijdewijn, 2016). On Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> of December, the morning after the attack, German Chancellor Angela Merkel gave a speech on national television. By stating: *“Wir müssen von einem Terroranschlag ausgehen”* Merkel presumed that it was a terror attack (de Roy van Zuijdewijn, 2016). Merkel memorized the victims by stating: *“A barbaric and inconceivable act of violence has robbed them of their lives”* (The Federal Chancellor, 2016). Thereby her response is more in line with that of Michel and differs from Hollande’s *act of war*. Despite that a lot was still unclear about the event, Merkel responded to the suspicions that the attacker was an asylum seeker. She stated that:

*“It would be difficult to bear if it emerged that somebody who had come to Germany asking for protection and asylum was behind this tragedy. That would be particularly repugnant, given the huge numbers of Germans who work with dedication day in day out to care for refugees.”* (The Federal Chancellor, 2016).

Political opponents of Merkel seized the opportunity to verbally attack the government’s migration policy which made the country, according to them, vulnerable to terrorism (Eddy & Smale, 2016). Merkel’s direct response to the suspicions that the perpetrator was an asylum seeker could therefore be perceived as a form of political self-defence (de Roy van Zuijdewijn, 2016).



However, such a statement strengthens the perception that terror attacks are committed by migrants or refugees rather than by fellow citizens (Lucassen & van Houtum, 2016, p. 81). While most of the recent attacks on European soil were committed by persons that were either born or raised in Europe. And in the US, no person accepted as a refugee has been involved in a major fatal terrorist attack since implementation of the Refugee Act of 1980. The majority of the perpetrators of major terror attacks have been US-born citizens or legal residents from countries that were not included in the controversial Muslim travel ban as proposed by President Trump (Levenson, 2017). Due to premature statements like Merkel's address, the paradoxical perception arises that those fleeing war and suppression are increasingly perceived as a security threat themselves (Lucassen & van Houtum, 2016, p. 82). The abuse of the so-called refugee flow by affiliates of Daesh poses a serious threat and is not to be underestimated. However as outlined above, failed integration and radicalization might pose an even bigger threat. The harsh conditions and poor treatment of refugees by host countries may trigger the escalation of grievances (Milton, Spencer & Findley, 2013, p. 626). In addition to the assessment of security risks of those entering Europe, the guarantee of a refugee's safety and well-being should be a priority in migration policy (Lucassen & van Houtum, 2016, p. 82).

Angela Merkel continued her address to the German people by stating that: *"We do not want the fear of evil to paralyse us. Even if it is difficult at this time, we will find the strength to live as we want to live in Germany: freely, openly and together"*. It is questionable how Merkel's plea for solidarity and openness is received by the German population (de Roy van Zuijdewijn, 2016). In her New Year's eve speech to the nation, Merkel upholds this discourse. She states: *"We are free, caring and open people"* (Kinkartz, 2016). Merkel calls on the German citizens to remain calm and unified.

In her address Merkel names Islamic terrorism as the most difficult test Germany faces. She mentions the attacks in Würzburg, Ansbach and the recent assault in Berlin. Merkel says to 'the' terrorists: *"You are murderers full of hate"* (Kinkartz, 2016). However, she does not outline who 'the terrorists' are. Merkel makes an implicit reference to those responsible, or at least those who claimed responsibility, for the attacks. In the case of the Berlin attack this is remarkable since it is uncertain whether the perpetrator acted as 'lone wolf' or was given orders from abroad (NOS, 2017; Musharbash, 2017; Tagesschau, 2017). By referring to the attacks in Würzburg, Ansbach and Berlin in one sentence Merkel grants



legitimacy to Daesh. The attacks in Würzburg and Ansbach were committed by perpetrators that were in direct contact with Daesh (Ulrich, 2016). Anis Amri pledged allegiance to Daesh before he hijacked the truck and drove it into the Christmas market (Withnall, 2016). However, it remains unclear whether he acted in command of the organization or as a 'lone wolf', by Bakker and de Graaf (2010, p. 2) defined as: "*a person who acts on his or her own without orders from – or even connections to – an organization.*"

Throughout her address Merkel widens the gap between 'us' and 'them'. From her address on New Year's eve there appears to be a category in between 'us', the German people, and 'them' the terrorists. Anis Amri, as a Tunisian asylum seeker, made: "*a mockery of those who truly need and deserve our protection*". She also states: "*It's a bitter reckoning – and a despicable one- when terror attacks are committed by people who came here ostensibly to seek safe haven [...] only to perpetrate such horrific acts*". She repeatedly refers to *our nation, our country, our citizens* and *us Germans*. She outlines the need to welcome *those* who truly need *our* protection and help *them* integrate here (Kinkartz, 2016).

Germany's discourse in the aftermath of the Berlin attack is dominated by solidarity, openness and unity. Therefore a striking difference between the discourses of Germany, Belgium and France is visible. Merkel, like Belgian prime minister Michel, refrains from a discourse of war. However Germany engages in the international coalition against Daesh, framed as a war by former French president Hollande.

### 5.3.2 The restrained 'tit'

Germany's 'tit', its response to terror attacks, originates from the Paris attacks in November 2015. Like Belgium, Germany responded to France's decision to invoke Article 42 (7) of the Treaty on the European Union. On the day following the Paris attacks, Merkel reassured Hollande that Germany would help France in the fight against terrorism. The following week, Merkel announced that Germany was willing: "*to give France every support*" (Peifer, 2016, p. 2). She further stated: "*We are stronger than any terrorism. Nevertheless, terrorism must be fought with all possible force. IS can't be convinced with words, it must be fought with military means*". Furthermore German minister of Defense Ursula von der Leyen outlined that: "*this inhumane rage can hit us or other societies at any time too*" (BBC, 2015a). Three weeks after the Paris attacks, the German parliament approved Merkel's plan to join the military campaign

against Daesh in Syria. Germany decided to deploy up to 1.200 soldiers, six reconnaissance warplanes, the frigate 'Augsburg' and a refuelling aircraft. It is Germany's largest deployment since German troops were sent to Afghanistan after the attacks of 9/11 (Connolly, 2015). The mandate, as drafted by parliament, states that it seeks to prevent acts of terror (Deutsche Welle, 2015). Furthermore, Merkel announced that Germany will deploy 650 troops to Mali to relieve the French troops already stationed in the African nation (BBC, 2015a). In the beginning of 2017, the German Bundestag approved an extension and enlargement of the mission (The Federal Government, 2017). Despite their passive role, Germany's deployment fuels the assumption that fighting terrorism at home requires military operations abroad.

Germany abstains from using a war discourse like France. Minister of Defence von der Leyen outlined that Germany was not at war because: "*it is not fighting a sovereign country but a murderous gang*" (Barkin & Siebold, 2015). As Geis and Hildebrandt (2015) outline, Angela Merkel has always sought to bypass the word 'war'. However, then German Federal President Joachim Gauck addressed the Bundestag and stated that: "*We live in times in which we honor the victims of a new kind of war*" (Deutsche Welle, 2015a). The deployment of troops to Iraq and Syria is merely used for non-combat roles, such as reconnaissance flights. However the decision to take part in the international coalition seems to be a shift in Germany's foreign and security policy (Barkin & Siebold, 2015; Chambers, 2015). The German stance on military involvement abroad was characterized by caution, reserve and restraint (Hyde-Price, 2015, p. 601). The primary example is Germany's abstention on UNSC resolution 1973 in 2011. The resolution aimed to authorize an intervention in Libya and the German abstention caused surprise and irritation among its allies (Brockmeier, 2013, p. 63). The country's foreign and security policy was dominated by a culture of restraint (Geis & Hildebrandt, 2015). According to Peifer (2015, p. 6) this culture of restraint stems from the collective German memories of World War II. Throughout her chancellorship, Merkel has governed in accordance with the pacifist stance of the German people (Geis & Hildebrandt, 2015). However, similar to the decision to engage in Afghanistan, Merkel's promise to give France every support requires a break with the reluctant past. The paradoxical situation arises in which the French call for solidarity, through military support abroad, carries the risk to increase the threat of terrorist attacks at

home. Germany engages in something it refuses to label as a 'war'. Yet, according to their enemy as well as their ally, it is war.

### 5.3.3 Tat

On Tuesday December 20<sup>th</sup> Daesh claimed responsibility for the Berlin attack. A statement published via Amaq, a news agency affiliated to the group, stated that the perpetrator was "*a soldier of the Islamic State*" (Osborne, 2016). Furthermore it stated that the perpetrator: "*carried out the attack in response to calls to target nationals of the Crusader coalition*" (Deutsche Welle, 2016). The statements matches claims that were released after previous attacks that were committed by individuals. In a video published by the group, Amri pledges allegiance to Daesh (Zeit Online, 2016). It remains unclear what the actual role of Daesh was in this attack. However, similar to the attacks in Paris and Brussels, the statement refers to the military campaign of the international coalition. Daesh constantly refers to the campaign of the international coalition and frames the attacks as a justified response. Yet, this causality is absent in the state responses to these same attacks. Instead, they call for an extended campaign. The paradox arises in which terror attacks, framed as response to the bombing campaign in the Middle east, are reciprocated with even more airstrikes.

## 5.4 A common 'tit': the formation of an international coalition

The terror attacks analysed throughout this thesis, the 'tat', have one thing in common. Namely that they are justified by Daesh as a legitimate response to the military campaign of the international coalition that aims to defeat them. Daesh repeatedly referred to the *crusader nations* and warned that a continuation of the airstrikes will lead to further attacks. As Lucassen and van Houtum (2016, p. 113) outlined, a Russian plane was shot down by Daesh after Russia started airstrikes in Syria, Paris was hit following France's decision to join the coalition and Istanbul has been repeatedly targeted since it opened an air base to coalition bombing. Terror attacks by Daesh therefore became a predictable response to decisions of its enemies (Bueno Lacy et al., 2016).

On September 10, 2014 the US announced the formation of the Global Coalition on the Defeat of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (US DOS, 2017). The Global Coalition is

committed to: “*degrading and ultimately defeating Daesh*” (Global Coalition, 2017). The US-led coalition launched an extensive military campaign. According to Airwars, a non-profit group that tracks the military campaign in Iraq and Syria, the coalition conducted over 22.000 airstrikes since the start of the operation (Airwars, 2017). However, there are numerous scholars who argue that the airstrikes in Iraq and mainly Syria are counterproductive and illegal (Verkoren, 2015; Lucassen & van Houtum, p. 113; van Houtum, 2016; Todenhöfer, 2015; Flasch, 2016; O’Connor, 2016). In response to the terror attack that struck Paris, Hollande and Merkel stated that terror attacks should be countered by military operations. However as Verkoren (2015) and van Houtum (2016) outline, bombings do not lessen the threat of terror. As Todenhöfer (2015) stated: “*war is a boomerang, and it will hit us back in the form of terrorism*”. Kinnunen and Reed (2016) describe this as the boomerang effect and argue that the battle against Daesh is an unintended consequence of previous interventions. Even if Daesh would be defeated on the battlefield, it would still be capable of launching terror attacks (Clarke, 2017). Furthermore historic research by RAND reveals that only seven percent of the terrorist organizations end as a result of a military campaign. To effectively counter terrorism it is therefore not enough to provide only, or mainly, a military response (Chauzal et al., 2015, p. 7). As former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon stated: “*Missiles may kill terrorists, but I am convinced that good governance will kill terrorism*” (UN, 2015c). The airstrikes may have long-term negative consequences and thereby feed anti-Western sentiments (Chauzal et al., 2015, p. 7). Furthermore, as Verkoren (2015) rightfully outlines, bombs lead to victims.

The US takes a leading role in the fight against terrorism in the Middle East. The Pentagon announced that US-led strikes have killed at least 484 civilians since the operation started in September 2014 (Sanders, 2017; Dearden, 2017). However, Airwars (2017) estimates that up to 3.800 civilians were killed due to bombings by the coalition. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) on March 16 2017 a ‘precision strike’, as described by the American military, killed 42 people (Gordon & Saad, 2017). The pentagon confirmed that the following day, 105 civilians were killed in a US air strike (Shugerman, 2017). Thereby it was one of the heaviest incidents since the Global Coalition started its campaign. A few days later, on March 20<sup>th</sup>, a US-led airstrike on a school used as a refugee centre in the province of Raqqa killed at least 33 people (Chulov, 2017). According to the UN as of March 22 2017, the day Belgium commemorated the 32 people that died

in the Brussels attack the previous year, at least 307 civilians have been killed in little more than a month (Cumming-Bruce, 2017). The actual number of civilians that were killed as a consequence of airstrikes by the international coalition remains unclear, it is surrounded by vagueness. Estimates from research initiatives, such as Airwars, Bellingcat and SOHR, are much higher than those of the participating states. The vagueness reveals the pain and controversy around this issue. According to the American Secretary of Defense James Mattis civilian casualties are: *“a fact of life”*. However he states that the US is: *“doing everything humanly possible [...] to avoid civilian casualties at all costs”* (CBS News, 2017). Being confronted with the 105 civilians that were killed in an American airstrike on March 17 Mattis responds: *“We are the good guys. We’re not the perfect guys, but we are the good guys.”* According to Mattis the US accelerated its campaign against ISIS to: *“throw them on their back foot”*. According to Airwars (Gibbons-Neff, 2017) this is reflected in the increased number of civilian casualties since Donald Trump became Commander in Chief. In 2015 Trump already outlined his strategy to win the fight against ISIS by stating: *“The other thing with the terrorists is you have to take out their families, when you get these terrorists, you have to take out their families”* (LoBianco, 2015). Figure 9 illustrates the number of civilian casualties, based on data from Airwars, as a consequence of the international coalition’s campaign.

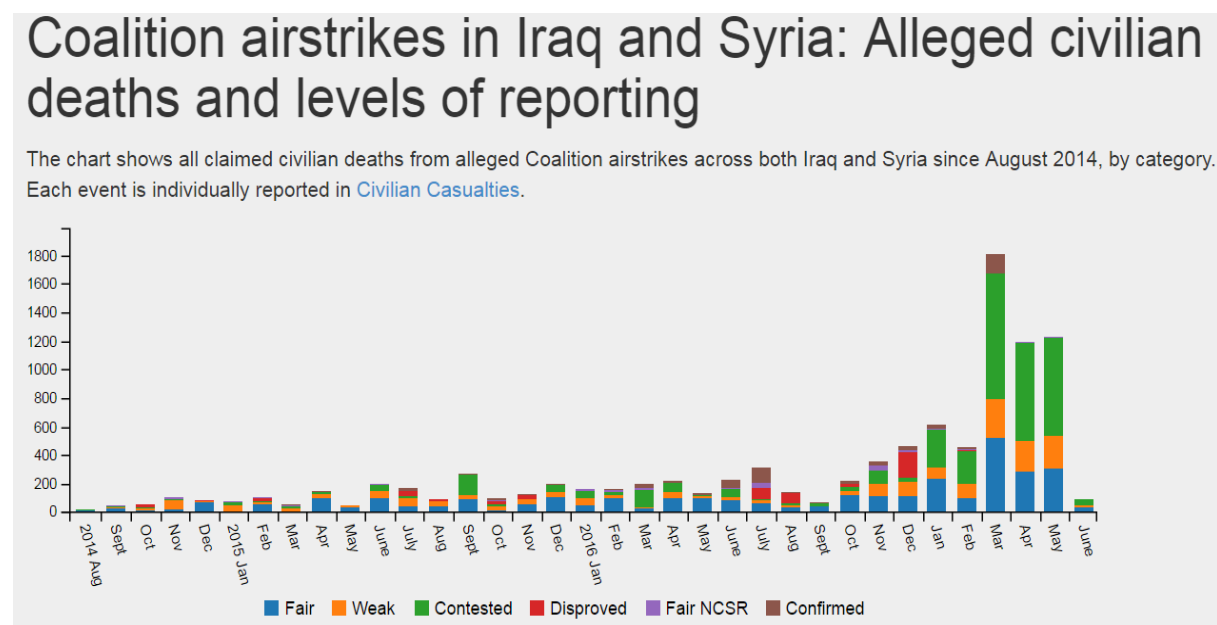


Figure 9 Coalition airstrikes in Iraq and Syria (Airwars, 2017)

These striking figures are often precluded from the debate about terrorism. As outlined in the theoretical framework, the figures only portray terrorism as a threat that happens to

states and not by states. Thereby these figures, and the common understanding of the phenomenon, contain pervasive misrepresentations. By not taking into account the civilians that died in the name of counter-terrorism, one attempts to provide an authoritative judgement about legitimate (counter-terrorism) and illegitimate (terror attacks) forms of terror (Jackson, 2007, p. 249).

Yet, countries such as the UK, France, Canada, the Netherlands and Belgium claim that their air strikes did not result in any casualties (van Straaten, 2017). It is highly questionable that a country like France, as the third most active member of the coalition, has not caused any civilian casualties. Numerous countries in the coalition do provide barely any information on their military activities in Iraq and Syria and can therefore not be held accountable for their actions. Belgium, along with the Netherlands, is among the countries that provides the least information on its military actions (Airwars, 2016, p. 48). It is therefore nearly impossible to verify the claims they made, and to hold them accountable for civilian casualties. Germany, despite not conducting air strikes itself, contributes by providing reconnaissance. German tornado jets provided intelligence for an airstrike that may have led to dozens of civilian deaths (Winter, 2017). The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights calls on the international coalition to reconsider its tactics since so many civilians are killed as a consequence of the airstrikes (Cumming-Bruce, 2017). Besides that each civilian casualty is a humanitarian drama, it also increases the recruitment pool for anti-western radical groups (Verkoren, 2015). Thereby the air strikes aimed to defeat Daesh are counterproductive since they may increase the risk of future terror attacks (Lucassen & van Houtum, 2016, p. 113).

#### **5.4.1 Tit-for-tat or tat-for-tit?**

As set out throughout the theoretical framework, the popular understanding of terrorism does not include actions of a state. Throughout this thesis terrorism is understood as a strategy rather than an ideology carried out by state and non-state actors. Terrorist attacks are not to be understood as singular dots in time, but originate in a certain (geopolitical) context. The statements as published by Daesh following the attacks in Paris, Brussels and Berlin were justified as a legitimate response to the military campaign by the international coalition. The *crusader nations* were ought to be brought to their knees. The ‘war’ as declared

by France following the Paris attacks, and the subsequent decisions from Belgium and Germany to engage, was framed as an attempt to prevent terror attacks. The causality between terror attacks and counter terrorism policies is absent from the discourses of the heads of state. The assumption that fighting terrorism at home requires military operations abroad seems to have taken root across the Western world. Thereby a process of retaliation emerged. A situation arises in which the Western military campaign and Islamic terrorism mutually reinforce each other (Lucassen & van Houtum, 2016, p. 114). Thereby the events are growing stronger fuelled by their own strategy of retaliation (Bueno Lacy et al., 2016). Contemporary western European terrorism and the following state responses could thus be perceived as a strategy of retaliation, a process of tit-for-tat.

## CHAPTER 6

### SYNTHESIS ~ TOWARDS NEW RESPONSES TO TERRORISM

Throughout the previous chapter the analysis of contemporary western European terrorism as a process of tit-for-tat was examined. This chapter combines the theoretical foundations of this research with the empirical findings. The following sub question takes a central role in this chapter:

**To what extent is a process of tit-for-tat in contemporary western European terrorism problematic and are there alternatives?**

This chapter analyses to what extent a process of tit-for-tat in contemporary terrorism is problematic. Furthermore, it explores the possibilities, based on the theoretical as well as empirical insights, for alternative responses to terrorism. It explores whether there is an exit strategy, a way to break through the process of tit-for-tat.

#### 6.1 Shooting at a mosquito with a canon

The problematic aspect of contemporary state responses and policies to counter western European terrorism is eloquently described by De Graaf (2011, p. 8) as: “*Shooting at a mosquito with a canon*”. These responses create: “*considerable collateral damage, while the real target may still be pestering us*” (De Graaf, 2011, p. 8). As outlined throughout the empirical chapter, the collateral damage can either be the civilian casualties as a consequence of the bombs dropped in the Middle East, the increased influx of refugees following these same bombs, or the further stigmatisation of communities due to domestic responses such as the seemingly everlasting state of emergency in France.

France’s response to the Paris attacks, the tit, was to immediately step up its air operations in Iraq and Syria. However the tat, the Paris attacks, was justified by Daesh as a legitimate response to exactly these airstrikes. Thereby a vicious spiral emerges in which decisions on both sides are reciprocated. An unending sequence of violent events arises.



However, it is this causality that is left out of the state's discourses (Schinkel, 2015). Thereby the state responses, as analysed throughout this thesis, fuel the perception that a terror attack is just a dot in time, an isolated event. Applying process-tracing, in combination with a critical geopolitical approach, revealed that terrorism is more to be perceived as a vicious spiral. The process of tit-for-tat that contemporary terrorism turned into has far reaching consequences. The response of France, and to a lesser extent this is also the case for Belgium and Germany, is characterized by extraordinary measures that evolved into a seemingly new normality (van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2017, p. 91). Hollande's war dominated discourse contains the geographical fallacy that terrorism grows *there* and only happens to *us*. The terror attacks as analysed throughout this research were framed as an attack on the values *we* uphold. Following the Paris attacks Hollande stated that France was attacked because it is the birthplace of human rights. Furthermore he stated that: "*the French people are staunch, tough, courageous people*" (France Diplomatie, 2015). In the same address he calls the perpetrators *despicable killers, barbarians, cowardly murderers, the enemy and the assassins*. Yet, most of the terrorists were EU or even French citizens (van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2017, p. 89). At what point, and how, these staunch, tough and courageous people turned into barbarians and despicable killers remains unanswered. In order to effectively address the root causes of terrorism these questions are to be answered.

However, with such a discourse Hollande unrightfully fuels the perception that terrorism is imported from abroad. Thereby, France leads the way of a Europe that moves towards the assumption that fighting terrorism at home requires military operations abroad. Belgium and Germany abstained from a war discourse in the aftermath of the terror attacks that hit their capitals, yet did obey to France's request for: "*aid and assistance by all the means in their power*" as stated in the invoked Article 42 (7). Thereby they engaged in a military campaign, by France and Daesh framed as a war, with the false promise that it would decrease the threat of terror. As numerous scholars argue; the international coalition's bombing campaign is not only illegal, but also counterproductive (Verkoren, 2015; Lucassen & van Houtum, p. 113; van Houtum, 2016; Todenhöfer, 2015; Flasch, 2016; O'Connor, 2016). As outlined in the empirical chapter, the domestic measures taken in France, Belgium and Germany are problematic. Measures such as the deployment of soldiers in the streets, raids without warrants and laws to deprive someone from its nationality are ambiguous. According to terrorism scholar Bibi van Ginkel (Riemens, 2017),

such measures lack a profound understanding of the possible consequences and put Europe on a slippery slope.

## 6.2 Towards new responses

As stated before, terrorism is a complex phenomenon. There are no easy solutions to the threat of terror. As outlined throughout this thesis, there is a need to search for alternative ways to respond to terrorism. Contemporary state responses in western Europe are based on an inadequate and incomplete understanding of terrorism. Throughout this section a number of assumptions is presented, based on the empirical findings of this research, which should be at the forefront in any response to terrorism. These assumptions are founded on the conviction that any state response to terrorism should be based on, and preceded by, a careful analysis of the phenomenon itself (Ramsbotham et al., 2011, p. 285).

### **Terrorism is neither inexplicable nor unpredictable**

As outlined in the previous chapter, the terrorist attacks that took place across the European continent were justified by Daesh as a response to the airstrikes in the Middle East. The Paris attacks were *the first of the storm* and *just the beginning*. Following the Brussels bombings, Daesh promised *black days for all crusader nations*. And the Berlin truck crash was carried out *in response to calls to target nationals of the Crusader coalition*. The claims made by Daesh following any attack are a repetition of constantly the same message. Regardless of how despicable these acts are, it becomes sadly predictable. As van Houtum and Bueno Lacy (2017, p. 90) outlined, Europe witnessed the worst Islamic attacks on its soil in the last 16 years. These are also the years during which the same countries participated in the bombing of several Middle Eastern countries. Terrorist attacks have repeatedly proven to be an echo of Western aggression abroad (Bueno Lacy et al., 2016).

## **States are not merely victims**

This assumption relates closely to the previous one. In their responses to the terror that targeted their capitals France, Belgium and Germany framed the attacks as assaults on their *values, way of life and freedom*. The narratives of the European leaders in the wake of terror attacks send the message that they are merely victims, attacked by a random evil for *who we are*. Such a message spreads fear and grievances among the targeted populations thereby increasing the support for governments to take an even firmer stance in the fight against terrorism. France was therefore able to immediately step up its air operations in the Middle East. This is paradoxical because Daesh framed these operations as the direct cause of the Paris attacks. It also enabled France to install an unprecedented measure as the state of emergency, and to renew it 5 times. The measures taken in the wake of terror attacks have major consequences. Kinnunen and Reed's (2016) statement that, in the case of the war on terror, the cure was worse than the cause seems also applicable to contemporary terrorism. The boomerang of terror will hit back.

## **Western European terrorism is a home-grown problem rather than a foreign flow**

In the aftermath of the attacks the perpetrators are alienated by labelling them as *barbarians, cowardly murders and despicable killers*. Thereby the terrorist 'other' is constructed. Imaginative geographies are applied to terrorists in order to reduce them to barbarous enemies (Gregory, 2004). This strengthens the perception that terrorism is something that originates *there* and is committed by outsiders. Thereby it is ignored that the majority of the perpetrators were fellow EU-citizens (Lucassen & van Houtum, 2016, p. 81). People who were born and raised on the same continent they later targeted. To effectively combat terrorism, state responses should focus more on the structural causes that turned these EU-citizens in *barbarians*. In the wake of the Paris attacks Hollande justified the retaliation airstrikes by stating: "*Friday's acts of war were decided upon, planned and prepared in Syria*". Merkel's pledged solidarity to France following the Paris attacks by stating: "*IS can't be convinced with words, it must be fought with military means*." And following the attack on July 14 2016 in Nice,

Hollande immediately stated: *“We will further strengthen our actions in Iraq and Syria. We will continue striking those who attack us on our own soil”* (Chrisafis, 2016b). The discourse they uphold fuels the idea that terrorism originates somewhere far away, comes our way and sneaks through the gates of Europe. Thereby further strengthening the perception that fighting terrorism at home requires military efforts abroad.

Western European terrorism should be more perceived as the manifestation of structural problems within our own societies, therefore self-reflection is needed. The perpetrators of the attacks may find their inspiration, canalized through internet, from outside but are radicalized within the societies they grew up. According to van Houtum and Bueno Lacy (2017, p. 90) terrorism is a product of the West itself. Numerous EU citizens feel alienated and distanced to such an extent that using violence against their fellow residents becomes a, in their eyes, legitimate response. A number of the policy measures taken in the aftermath of attacks such as the deportation of terrorism suspects, stricter immigration policies and laws to strip dual nationals of their citizenship do not address the root causes and will only increase further alienation. According to van Ginkel (2015, p. 15) in order to effectively combat terrorism a European or international counter-narrative should be created. A narrative that is more tempting than the story of violence. However as Reed (2017) argues, counter-narratives alone will never win the campaign. These should be embedded in an integrated, comprehensive and multi-dimensional campaign that counters the root causes. Furthermore a counter-narrative does not coincide with policies and laws that lead to further stigmatization of already marginalized communities. As long as Western air strikes continue to cause civilian casualties a counter-narrative will be a hollow promise.

In chapter 4 it was argued that contemporary terrorism studies reduces the academic responsibility to merely a form of risk management as long as it does not question to what extent the status quo is part of the problem itself. So are the current efforts to combat terrorism by the European states as analysed throughout this thesis. Exemplary is the recent response of British prime minister Theresa May following the assault in London on June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017. By stating: *“It [terrorism] will only be defeated when we turn people’s minds away from this violence and make them understand that our values – pluralistic British values – are superior to anything offered by the preachers and supporters of hate”* May engages in a war of words (Berger, 2017). A response that is constructed by declaring ‘our’ values superior and the need to make them

understand, lacks even the slightest form of self-reflection. To effectively combat terrorism, one should critically reflect on the societies it originates from.

### **Terrorism is nothing new**

According to Angela Merkel, Islamic terrorism is *the most difficult test we faced*. However, terrorism is nothing new, it exists already for more than 200 years (Bakker, 2012; Crenshaw, 2007; Schmid, 2004). As the outlined figures in chapter 2 demonstrated, European history has witnessed far more terror than it faces nowadays. Yet, it is omnipresent in our daily lives (Renard, 2016a, p.1). As LaFree et al. (2014, p. 2) argue, it is important to place terrorism into context. This could contribute to lessen the fear for terrorism that has taken root all across Europe. Nowadays, 39% of the European citizens see terrorism as their greatest fear (Schuman, 2016). However, as discussed in the theoretical framework, to instil fear in a society is one of the aims of terrorism (Schmid & Jongman, 1988). As Brian Jenkins argued: “*Terrorism is aimed at the people watching, not at the actual victims*” (Bakker, 2011, p. 388). Placing terrorism into context could therefore contribute to a more balanced understanding of the phenomenon. As Gurski (2017) outlines, terrorism is perceived differently than other tragedies in life. A certain level of lethality is accepted in car transport, the (ab)use of alcohol or flying with airlines. Through policies, regulations or technological innovations the number of casualties is attempted to be minimised. Yet, it is unlikely that the chance of lethality will ever be downgraded to zero. According to Gurski (2017) the unfortunate reality is that some terrorist acts are unstoppable. An understanding of terrorism as a phenomenon that has been present in Europe for a long time, and probably will be, does not undermine the need to counter it but opens up space for more balanced and appropriate responses to it. Furthermore, it would lessen the support for the extraordinary measures that were taken in the aftermath of the attacks as outlined throughout this thesis.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION, DEBATE AND REFLECTION

This concluding chapter is dedicated to provide a short wrap up and thereafter to answer the main research question. Furthermore it will outline what this research adds to the academic debate and literature. Finally, the implications and limitations of this research will be elaborated upon.

#### 7.1 Wrap up

This thesis aimed to achieve a more profound understanding of terrorism as a process of action and reaction, a process of tit-for-tat. By applying a critical geopolitical approach and process-tracing, the mutual relation between terrorist attacks and state's responses to terrorism was analysed. Contemporary western European terrorism, and more specifically the capitals of France, Belgium and Germany, served as case study. The central question throughout this thesis was:

**To what extent could terrorism and states' responses to terrorism in western Europe be perceived as a process of tit-for-tat?**

In order to provide an adequate answer, this thesis builds on an extensive theoretical framework. Contemporary terrorism was aimed to put into context by providing a factual overview. The pervasive misrepresentations present in the figures on terrorism were outlined. These fail to include the causes and consequences of terror and therefore promote the limited understanding of terrorism as merely a dot in time. Furthermore, state terrorism is excluded from the figures and the definition. Thereby the seemingly neutral representations of terror are heavily biased and promote the popular understanding that states are merely victims of the 'unpredictable and random threat' of terror. As outlined throughout chapter 2, the ongoing and unsuccessful attempt to establish a universally accepted definition is exemplary for the ambiguity and complexity of the phenomenon. This research builds on critical terrorism studies by providing an understanding of terrorism as a strategy employed by both states and non-states rather than merely an ideology.

Dominant studies on terrorism tend to focus on the actors and have a problem-solving approach. Thereby it reduces the academic responsibility to a form of risk management. By providing an analysis of terrorism as process of tit-for-tat, this thesis aims to go beyond this. Through applying a critical geopolitical approach this research questioned those assumptions taken for granted by traditional terrorism studies. It problematized the static conception of terrorism. Chapter 4 stressed the added value of applying the theoretical concept of tit-for-tat to the reality of contemporary terrorism.

On November 16 2015, then French president Hollande opened his address to parliament with the words: “*France is at war*”. This declaration of war was provoked by the Paris attacks on November 13, and appeared to be a key event with far reaching consequences for Europe’s attempt to combat terrorism. Hollande framed the events that struck Paris as an act of war against the French Republic, the French people and the French values. The night following the attacks France stepped up its air operations in Syria and dropped multiple bombs on the Daesh stronghold of Raqqa. This retaliation action was accompanied by a fierce domestic response. Hollande declared the state of emergency, a seemingly everlasting decision with major consequences. France’s call for solidarity spread around the European continent and numerous countries followed its example. Although Belgium and Germany abstained from a discourse of war and did thereby not echo the French rhetoric, they engaged in what is by France and Daesh perceived as such. Daesh justified the attacks as a retaliation for the *crusader campaign*. The Paris attacks proved to be a key event, and triggered France to lead Europe towards a new normality that is based on the assumption that terrorism at home is to be fought with military means abroad. France’s answer to terrorism, followed by Belgium and Germany, is based on the geographical fallacy that the phenomenon grows *there*.

The analysis as set out in the empirical chapter reveals that a process of tit-for-tat is present in contemporary western European terrorism. The Paris attacks are a key event with major implications for this process. The attacks, the tat, served according to Daesh as a retaliation strike for France’s foreign policy in the Middle East. The attacks in Brussels and Berlin are horrific echo’s. The claims made by Daesh are a repetition of constantly the same message and become sadly predictable. France’s response, the tit, to the Paris attacks was a fierce form of retaliation. It was framed as a direct response to the attacks in the French capital. The responses of Belgium and Germany are influenced by the French

rhetoric. Their discourse was more restrained, yet their actions supports France stance against Daesh.

The causality of terrorism is absent in the construction of the state's responses. The attacks are framed as assaults on the values they uphold, their way of living and their freedoms. This strengthens the popular notion that they are attacked for who they are. Furthermore, it opens the door for extraordinary measures such as declaring the state of emergency, military deployment in European cities and an intensified military campaign in the Middle East. However as outlined throughout this thesis, these measures are counterproductive and do not address the root causes of terror. Instead it fuels a strategy of retaliation, a process of tit-for-tat. What goes around comes around.

Throughout this thesis the theoretical concept of tit-for-tat was applied to the 'real' world of terrorism. The theoretical understanding states that one party copies what the other does, it returns something equivalent. In the case of contemporary western European terrorism it is questionable to what extent these are equivalent. It does not take place in a vacuum and is not a linear process. Tit-for-tat in the case of terrorism is therefore more to be perceived as an iterative process. The *tat* can be followed by another *tat* and so on before it is reciprocated. It is therefore not to be understood in the artificial setting of game theory. Analysing terrorism as a process of tit-for-tat gives valuable insights in the predictability and continuity of the phenomenon. It sheds light on terrorism as a process, a vicious spiral.

By conducting this research the theoretical concept of tit-for-tat gained more empirical understanding in the context of terrorism. This thesis reveals that the dominant understanding of terrorism in the academic literature is too narrow to fully grasp the complexity of it. The focus on the definitional problem of the phenomenon hinders a profound debate. Furthermore, this thesis builds on critical terrorism studies by outlining the need to include state terror in the debate. It contributes to a more advanced understanding since it counters the widespread notion that trying to understand terrorism equates with granting legitimacy to terrorists. This thesis, by applying a critical geopolitical approach, questioned taken-for-granted assumptions. It opens up space for a research agenda that focuses more on terrorism as a process.

Process-tracing proved to be a valuable method to analyse the causality of terrorism. The theory-testing variant of process-tracing, as outlined by Beach and Pedersen (2013, p. 11), was used to examine whether a process of tit-for-tat is present in contemporary



terrorism. The narrative-centred approach of Bengtsson and Ruonavaara (2017, p. 61) was applied throughout this thesis. Chapter 5 described and analysed the sequence of actions and events that constitutes the process of terrorism. Applying process-tracing to the theoretical concept of tit-for-tat proved valuable since it revealed the interdependency of events. Tracing the process of the attacks in Paris, Brussels and Berlin revealed the causality and interconnectivity of contemporary terrorism.

## 7.2 Critical reflection

This research has attempted to provide a better understanding of terrorism as a process of retaliation; in that respect this thesis has indeed gained valuable insights on how contemporary western European terrorism functions as a process of tit-for-tat. This thesis stressed the importance to move beyond the narrow understanding of terrorism that is dominant in the academic literature and public debate. It illustrated that terrorist attacks are not isolated incidents, they are part of a process and terrorism is the violent manifestation of structural problems. This thesis also attempted to provide a different perspective on responses to terrorism, a way to break through the process of tit-for-tat.

The critical geopolitical approach as applied in this thesis, enabled me to question the assumptions taken for granted. It served as a tool to destabilize what is seen as the objective truth. However, as stated in chapter 3, the argument made throughout this thesis is undoubtedly a human construction and can therefore not be presented as the inconvertible truth. In order to fend off the ever-present pitfalls of conducting research this thesis was built on the words of Derek Gregory (in Dalby, 2008, p. 413) by saying that: *“we need to set ourselves against the unbridled arrogance that assumes that “We” have the monopoly of Truth and that the world is necessarily ordered by – and around – Us”*. With these words in mind, there a number of critical remarks with regard to this thesis.

Every study has limitations, this thesis is not an exception. First of all, this thesis relies on secondary sources. As Schuurman (2014) outlines the overreliance on secondary sources is one of the longest-standing issues in terrorism studies. This is partly due to the lack of access to detailed and reliable data. The use of primary sources would certainly be of added value to this study, as well as many others in the academic literature. Yet, it is not within the possibilities of this research to make use of primary sources. However, there are

multiple ways in which desktop research on terrorism can contribute to further advance our understanding of the phenomenon (Schmid, 2014, p. 593). In order to gather reliable data this research made use of source triangulation. Over 90 newspaper articles were used to trace the process. As Schuurman (2014) rightfully outlines, these are less reliable than academic sources. However, by using multiple articles from different media outlets this shortcoming was attempted to overcome. Academic articles were used to provide a more thorough, comprehensive and theoretical understanding of the events analysed throughout this thesis. Thereby a strong connection between the theoretical understanding and empirical analysis of terrorism was aimed to achieve.

Secondly, and this relates closely to the previous remark, this thesis carries the risk of becoming to Eurocentric. As outlined in the theoretical framework, the voice of the 'other' is often precluded from being heard, while much is said about the other. There is an abundance of European-centred information on terrorism. The terrorist attacks that hit Paris, Brussels and Berlin are widely covered in a variety of media outlets and political discourses. Yet, there is a lack of reliable data that portrays the perspectives of the 'other'. The lack of reliable data on the number of civilian casualties as a consequence of the Global Coalition's airstrikes, is therefore exemplary. This study is exploratory by nature and seeks to develop theory on contemporary terrorism as a process of tit-for-tat. However, in order to deepen and advance our understanding of terrorism follow-up research should search for possibilities to further include the perspectives of the 'other'. This thesis aimed to reveal the causality of terrorism, the process of action and reaction. Therefore it briefly described how terrorism is a violent manifestation of structural problems within the European societies. However, this does not do justice to the complexity of the issue. It is therefore necessary that future research focuses on this process. How fellow European citizens living in 'terrorism hotbeds' such as Molenbeek turn into, as framed by Hollande, *barbarians* and *cowardly murderers* is of utmost important to better understand and eventually counter the phenomenon.

Lastly, the external validity of this research is limited. As a suitable method, process-tracing was chosen. However, this has implications for the external validity. The results of this thesis are mainly case-specific. It aimed to contribute to further theory development. Therefore there are no grand generalizations to be made from the results. This thesis thus serves as a 'force of example' for future studies.

Despite these limitations, I am confident that this thesis serves as an addition to the existing academic literature by further advancing our understanding of terrorism. Much of the existing academic literature is too policy-oriented. Yet, this thesis has important implications for policies. By questioning the status quo and putting terrorism into context, this research attempted to bring back the academic responsibility in terrorism studies. As outlined before any response to terrorism should be based on, and preceded by, a careful analysis. It is recommended that future research on terrorism continues to perceive the phenomenon as a process. Throughout this study it was argued why the dominant understanding of terrorism as isolated events is problematic. However, further research should be done to strengthen the empirical understanding of contemporary terrorism as a process of tit-for-tat.

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