

Italy: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

On November 28, 2018, Italian police arrested Amin Alhaj Ahmad, a 38-year-old Lebanese man who was allegedly planning to poison the water supply of the Italian island of Sardinia. Italian authorities had been monitoring Ahmad since September 2018, when his cousin—who was detained in Lebanon after attempting to poison a water tank used by the Lebanese army—revealed information about Ahmad’s plans during an interrogation. A warrant for Ahmad’s arrest was issued after investigators discovered that Ahmad had researched and attempted to purchase ricin and anthrax on his smartphone. Investigators also found evidence to suggest that Ahmed had looked up ISIS material online, leading authorities to believe that the attack was linked to or inspired by the extremist group. Federico Cafiero De Raho, Italy’s chief anti-terrorism prosecutor, stated “he must have been close to doing something,” after noting that Ahmad had withdrawn all the money from his bank accounts. (Sources: [Jerusalem Post](#) [1], [Independent](#) [2])

Following a series of counterterrorism raids across Italy in March 2018, Italian Interior Minister Marco Minniti told newspapers that “the security threat to Italy from supporters of [the] Islamic State was higher than ever.” Minniti attributed the higher threat level to the increased number of foreign fighters attempting to reenter Europe through Italy. (Source: [Reuters](#) [3])

Overview

Between the 1960s and 1980s, far-left and far-right extremists mounted acts of terrorism in a period known as the Years of Lead (“Anni di piombo”). During that time, Italy also suffered attacks perpetrated by nationalist Palestinian groups such as the Abu Nidal Organization and Black September. Jihadist networks began to develop in Italy in the 1980s, and in the 1990s, Islamic extremists began using Italy as a transit point en route to conflicts in the Balkans and North Africa. In recent years, Italy has become increasingly vulnerable to acts of Islamic extremism waged by both domestic Islamists and international terrorist operatives. At the same time, far-right extremism has reemerged in Italy amid the influx of refugees and a struggling economy. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [4], [ADST](#) [5], [U.S. Department of State](#) [6], [BBC News](#) [7], [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [8], [Jamestown Foundation](#) [9])

Italian authorities believe that the threat from an [ISIS](#) [10]-inspired or -directed attack is high. In January 2017, police chief Franco Gabrielli told reporters that “we only hope [an ISIS attack] is going to be as restrained as possible, but we are under threat.” Indeed, ISIS regularly threatens Italy in its propaganda and attempts to radicalize Italian Muslims to carry out domestic attacks on its behalf. In August 2016, Italian authorities tightened security in Rome after ISIS released a 35-minute video repeatedly threatening to “conquer” the Italian capital. In addition, Italian citizens in Libya and Syria have been kidnapped and held hostage by ISIS and the [Nusra Front](#) [11], respectively. (Sources: [MB Watch](#) [12], [Middle East Forum](#) [13], [Deutsche Welle](#) [14], [Al Arabiya](#) [15], [Telegraph](#) [16], [BBC News](#) [17], [Guardian](#) [18])

The Italian government has implemented legislation dedicated to preventing acts of terrorism, deporting terrorist suspects, and punishing terrorist actors. In February 2015, the government passed new legislation—known as Decree Law 7—as per its obligation under United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178. The decree makes it illegal to partake in a conflict in a foreign territory in support of a terrorist organization. In addition, Italy’s government finances counter-extremism programs in prisons and throughout the country. In January 2017, the Ministry of the Interior announced it would be providing lessons to Italian imams on the Italian constitution and the importance of freedom of religion and speech. (Sources: [Ministero degli Affari Esteri](#) [19], [Normattiva](#) [20], [Library of Congress](#) [21], [Istituto Superiore di Studi Penitenziari](#) [22], [La Repubblica](#) [23], [Independent](#) [24])

Internationally, Italy complies with all EU counterterrorism regulations and is a signatory to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism. Italy also reportedly cooperates with Albania, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia on matters related to counterterrorism and plays a key role in the Global Coalition to Counter ISIS. In addition, during the 2017-2018 fiscal year, Italy contributed 1,099 personnel and \$255 million to U.N. peacekeeping missions. (Sources: [Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale](#) [25], [Council of Europe](#) [26], [Global Coalition](#) [27], [InfoBalkans](#) [28], [Agence France-Presse](#) [29], [European Affairs](#) [30], [United Nations](#) [31], [Economist](#) [32])

Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

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Far-Left Extremism and the Red Brigades

Far-left extremism spread throughout Italy in the late 1960s. Young communist militants—many of whom were students—carried out violent attacks in an attempt to weaken, and ultimately topple, Italy’s capitalist government. (Source: [An Analysis of Left and Right Wing Terrorism in Italy](#) [33])

The Red Brigades (“Brigatte Rosse”) was Italy’s most prominent and well-organized far-left terrorist group. Active between 1970 and 1984, the group sought to replace Italy’s democratic, capitalist government with a proletariat-led dictatorship. Members of the Red Brigades carried out violent attacks against right-wing politicians, factories, law enforcement, and other symbols of capitalism and state repression. At its height, the Red Brigades had thousands of members and supporters, predominantly based in Northern Italy. (Sources: [Stanford Mapping Militant Organizations](#) [34], [An Analysis of Left and Right Wing Terrorism in Italy](#) [33])

The Red Brigades kidnapped former Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro in March 1978. Moro’s corpse was found 55 days later in the trunk of a stolen Renault station wagon parked near government headquarters in Rome. During those 55 days, the Red Brigades sent messages to the government in which it described the kidnapping as the “proletariat trial” of Moro for his crimes against the working class. The group ultimately murdered Moro after the government refused to meet its demands of releasing Red Brigades prisoners. The government responded to the incident by advancing its training and funding of Italian security forces. (Sources: [An Analysis of Left and Right Wing Terrorism in Italy](#) [33], [Guardian](#) [35])

In 2016, most left-wing incidents of violence in Europe occurred in Italy. Of the 27 left-wing attacks recorded in Europe in 2016, all but nine occurred in Italy. (Source: [Europol](#) [36])

Far-Right Extremism and Forza Nuova

Since the late 1960s, far-right terrorists in Italy have sought to destabilize the government, hoping that political turmoil would lead to a neo-fascist coup. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, far-right terrorist groups such as New Order (“Ordine Nuovo”) and Black Order (“Ordine Nero”) carried out wide scale bombings targeting train stations, government buildings, banks, and anti-fascist rallies. More recently, in December 2014, members of a neo-fascist group calling themselves Avanguardia Ordinovista (“Vanguard Order”) were arrested by police after allegedly plotting to attack immigrants and left-leaning politicians. The group’s members had reportedly been inspired by the ideology of New Order. (Sources: [An Analysis of Left and Right Wing Terrorism in Italy](#) [33], [Corriere Della Sera](#) [37], [Associated Press](#) [38])

Indeed, in recent years far-right political sentiment has grown in Italy due to a weakened economy and the arrival of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa. Political parties such as Forza Nuova (“New Force”)—which subscribes to ultra-nationalist, conservative, and neo-fascist ideology—are capitalizing on these issues in order to attract supporters. Forza Nuova’s members have committed high-profile acts of violence, though Forza Nuova itself claims to be non-violent. The party has offices and followers in nearly every region of Italy. (Sources: [Forza Nuova](#) [39], [Corriere della Sera](#) [40])

The cornerstone of Forza Nuova’s conservative ideology is best illustrated by its mantra, “Italians First!” Forza Nuova encourages ethnic Italian population growth and seeks to ban abortion and reinstate the Catholic Church as the official church of the Italian Republic. Forza Nuova also opposes gay marriage and adoption by gay couples. One of its most notorious campaigns, which denounced homosexuals in Italy, included billboards with slogans like “No more f-gs!” (Sources: [TG Regione](#) [41], [Forza Nuova](#) [42])

Forza Nuova lobbies to deport recent immigrants from Italy and bar further immigration into the country. The group makes speeches and places billboards around Italian cities, warning the population of what they claim to be the dangers of immigration, citing that immigrants will bring “scabies, meningitis, tuberculous and Ebola” into Italy. After Mada Kabobo, a Ghanaian immigrant to Italy, killed an Italian citizen with an ax in May 2013, Forza Nuova launched a campaign called “Immigration Kills.” Billboards for the “Immigration Kills” campaign feature photos of immigrants who have been convicted of violent crimes, their photos splattered in blood. “Who will be next?” the posters and billboards read. (Sources: [Forza Nuova](#) [42], [Huffington Post Italia](#) [43], [BBC News](#) [44])

Anti-Semitism is also a key component of Forza Nuova’s ideology. In June 2008, Forza Nuova President Roberto Fiore spoke of his support for Iran’s then-president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. When asked about his brief conversation with

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Ahmadinejad, Fiore said, “We at Forza Nuova are against any event of war wished for by the Jewish-American lobby against the Iranian population.” Hours before his arrival in Rome, Ahmadinejad stated that Israel will “disappear off the geographical scene.” Forza Nuova leader Roberto Fiore has also [publicly denounced](#) [45] U.S. wars that, he claims, were started by “the people who put Christ on the cross.” (Sources: [Corriere della Sera](#) [46], [Reuters](#) [47])

Islamic Extremism

Jihadist networks have operated within Italy since the 1980s. In the 1990s, jihadists began using the country as a transit point en route to conflicts in the Balkans and North Africa. Up until the early 2000s, jihadists reportedly refrained from directly targeting Italy in order to avoid a crackdown by authorities. That changed following Italy’s participation in the U.S.-led interventions in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). During the 2000s, Italy experienced a number of lone-wolf terrorist plots perpetrated by Islamic extremists. More recently, since the start of the Syrian civil war and the rise of ISIS, Italian authorities have worked to combat the growing threat from ISIS- and al-Qaeda-linked cells inside Italy and internationally. Nevertheless, Italy has not experienced a jihadist-related attack comparable in size to al-Qaeda’s 2003 Madrid attacks or 2007 London bombings, nor ISIS’s November 2015 Paris attacks or March 2016 Brussels bombings. (Sources: [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [8], [Jamestown Foundation](#) [9])

However, in the run-up to the Christmas holidays in November and December 2017, the pro-ISIS group Wafa Media Foundation released propaganda posters threatening attacks on the Vatican City, the papal enclave within Rome, as well as Pope Francis himself, the head of the Catholic Church. Earlier in the year, head of Italian Police Franco Gabrielli warned of a domestic ISIS attack, telling reporters in January that “we only hope it is going to be as restrained as possible, but we are under threat.” ISIS views Italy’s capital city, Rome, as an important symbolic target given its status as home to the Catholic Church and its spiritual leader. ISIS’s then-spokesman Abu Mohammad al-Adnani declared, “We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women,” and in ISIS propaganda, the “army of Rome” represents modern Western forces who are destined to be finally annihilated at Dabiq, near Aleppo in Syria. (Sources: [Fox News](#) [48], [International Business Times](#) [49], [Guardian](#) [50], [Local](#) [51], [Il Giornale](#) [52], [Al Arabiya](#) [15], [Atlantic](#) [53])

On January 31, 2018, Interpol released a list of 50 Tunisian ISIS members it believed had entered Italy by boat between July and October 2017. On March 28, 2018, Italian Interior Minister Marco Minniti told newspapers that “the security threat to Italy from supporters of [the] Islamic State was higher than ever.” (Sources: [Guardian](#) [50], [Reuters](#) [3])

As of May 24, 2017, Italian police were searching for 36-year-old Fouad Khaskhoussi, born in Tunisia and carrying German identity papers, with suspected ties to terrorism. Authorities believed he traveled by car into Italy with another man, Wassim Ben Hassem, 31. Khaskhoussi was able to enter Italian despite being included in an Italian database of terrorism suspects. (Source: [New York Times](#) [54])

Between March 15 and March 29, 2018, Italian police carried out four counterterrorism operations resulting in the arrest of at least eight men accused of supporting or planning ISIS-inspired terror attacks in the country. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [55], [Reuters](#) [3], [Reuters](#) [56], [Reuters](#) [57])

The majority of Islamic extremist activity inside Italy is believed to be concentrated in the north, in particular the Lombardy region, which is home to 26.5 percent of Italian Muslims. According to the Italian Military Center of Strategic Studies, the city of Milan—located in the Lombardy region—is “the epicenter of radical Islam in Italy” due to its high rate of terrorism-related arrests. Between 2001 and 2011, more than half of all terrorism-related arrests in Italy took place in Milan. (Source: [Dossier Sulla Comunità Islamica Italiana: Indice di Radicalizzazione](#) [58])

Major Arrests on Terror Charges

Italian authorities—experienced in combatting organized crime and radical far-right and far-left movements—have also investigated Islamic terrorist suspects inside the country. Italian police have made several large-scale terror-related arrests in which they detained multiple members of clandestine cells or networks. In April 2015, for example, police arrested nine al-Qaeda-linked individuals suspected of plotting to attack the Vatican and other sites in Italy. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [59], [Wall Street Journal](#) [60])

Authorities have also detained ISIS sympathizers and would-be lone wolves, including Lassa Briki and Muhammad Waqas

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in Brescia in July 2015. The men had planned to carry out domestic attacks against military institutions and civilians, before attempting to travel to Syria to fight with ISIS. Briki is believed to have had online contact with Syrian-based ISIS fighters. The men had also been active on social media, reportedly tweeting: “We are already in Rome...it won’t be long, our knives are sharpened and ready for the slaughter.” Also in July 2015, Italian and Albanian authorities jointly arrested five people—three Italians and two Albanians—on charges including planning to travel abroad to commit acts of terrorism. Among the arrested were family members of Maria Giulia Sergio, an Italian national and convert to Islam who traveled to Syria in September 2014 to join ISIS. Maria Giulia Sergio had reportedly convinced her family members to join her in Syria. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [59], [Wall Street Journal](#) [60], [La Repubblica](#) [61], [Huffington Post](#) [62], [International Business Times](#) [63], [Il Sole](#) [64], [Wall Street Journal](#) [65])

In April 2016, police in northern Italy arrested four suspected ISIS sympathizers in what authorities called a “vast counterterrorism operation.” The suspects were allegedly plotting to carry out terrorist attacks against the Vatican and the Israeli embassy in Rome, and were believed to have received direct orders from Syria- or Iraq-based ISIS operatives via the messaging service WhatsApp. The following month, police arrested three members of a Puglia-based ISIS-linked terror cell who had allegedly been plotting to carry out attacks in Rome and London. (Sources: [Deutsche Welle](#) [66], [Newsweek](#) [67], [La Repubblica](#) [68], [Reuters](#) [69])

On March 30, 2017, Venetian police arrested three suspected ISIS supporters in early morning raids. The men—Italian residents from Kosovo—had reportedly planned to blow up the city’s Rialto Bridge. At least one of the suspects is believed to have returned to Italy from Syria in 2016. The suspects reportedly underwent physical training within Italy and watched ISIS videos instructing lone wolves to carry out knife attacks. During a telephone conversation that was wire-tapped by Italian police, the men celebrated the March 22, 2017 car-ramming- and stabbing-attack in London perpetrated by [Khalid Masood](#) [70]. The men had also expressed eagerness to die for jihad with one stating in another wire-tapped conversation: “I can’t wait to take an oath to Allah. If they let me take the oath, I’m ready to die.” (Sources: [BBC News](#) [71], [Telegraph](#) [72])

On August 13, 2016, Italy expelled Hosni Hachemi Ben Hassen, a Tunisian imam of the Andria mosque, who was arrested in April 2013 on suspicion of belonging to an Islamic extremist cell. The expulsion occurred after an Italian court cleared Hassen of involvement in international terrorism, while upholding a conviction on hate crime charges for which Hassen had been sentenced to five years and three months in prison. Hassen had been accused, by Italian authorities of collecting bomb-making instructions, training in the use of firearms, and trying to recruit and indoctrinate foreign fighters to travel abroad between 2008 and 2010. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [73], [Politico](#) [74])

On December 19, 2016, a Milan court convicted in absentia Maria Giulia “Fatima” Sergio, an Italian who left for Syria to join ISIS in 2014, and sentenced her to nine years in prison for international terrorism. The court also sentenced a Canadian, Bushra Haik, who grew up in Bologna, to nine years in prison for recruiting and indoctrinating Sergio. The convictions were among the first in Italy under a 2015 counterterrorism law regarding foreign terrorist fighters in a combat zone abroad. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [73])

On November 28, 2018, Italian police arrested Amin Alhaj Ahmad, a 38-year-old Lebanese man who was allegedly planning to poison the water supply of the Italian island of Sardinia. Italian authorities had been monitoring Ahmad since September 2018, when his cousin—who was detained in Lebanon after attempting to poison a water tank used by the Lebanese army—revealed information about Ahmad’s plans during an interrogation. A warrant for Ahmad’s arrest was issued after investigators discovered that Ahmad had researched and attempted to purchase ricin and anthrax on his smartphone. Police have reported that there is no evidence to suggest that Ahmad had successfully obtained the poison. However, Federico Cafiero De Raho, Italy’s chief anti-terrorism prosecutor, stated “he must have been close to doing something,” after noting that Ahmad had withdrawn all the money from his bank accounts. Ahmad, who is believed to be linked to ISIS, was arrested outside of his house in the Sardinian town of Macomer, where he lived with his wife and three children. (Sources: [Jerusalem Post](#) [1], [Independent](#) [2])

Italian Mosques and Places of Worship

There are only eight official, registered mosques in Italy, forcing the vast majority of Italian Muslims to worship at makeshift, unregistered mosques or Islamic centers. By 2011, Italian authorities had identified more than 100 unregistered mosques that authorities described as propagating “radical ideas.” According to authorities, 11 of those mosques had been

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directly or indirectly involved in terror activity. In 2007, for example, authorities discovered that the imam at the Ponte Felcino mosque in Perugia had schooled children and adolescents in various forms of combat, including how to use different types of weaponry. (Sources: [La Repubblica](#) [75], [Dossier Sulla Comunità Islamica Italiana: Indice di Radicalizzazione](#) [58], [Independent](#) [76])

In late 2015, Italian Interior Minister Angelino Alfano announced that the government would work to “close the clandestine and unregulated spots, not to hamper [Islam], but so that it [would] be practiced in a more orderly manner.” The announcement came one week after Alfano said that “garage mosques” are “where the inspiration to fundamentalism is born.” (Source: [Daily Beast](#) [77])

Domestic Islamic Extremist Groups and the Muslim Brotherhood

Several Islamic extremist groups are believed to operate within Italy. Among these are the Union of Islamic Organizations and Communities (UCOII), the Islamic Alliance of Italy, and Sharia4Italy.

The UCOII is the largest Islamic organization in Italy. It is a member of the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE), an umbrella group reportedly convening Muslim Brotherhood-tied organizations throughout Europe. Founded in 1990, the UCOII exercises a near monopoly over Italian mosques. Its members have endorsed suicide bombings and expressed anti-Semitic and homophobic sentiments. Founding UCOII member Roberto Hamza Piccardo downplayed the act of beheading, saying that “In war, everyone uses the means that they have.” Piccardo also answered “it depends,” when asked if suicide bombings are a legitimate form of resistance. (Sources: [The New Muslim Brotherhood in the West](#) [78], [Hudson Institute](#) [79], [Middle East Forum](#) [13], [MB Daily Watch](#) [80], [Panorama](#) [81])

The Islamic Alliance of Italy is one of 165 associations that make up the UCOII. It was officially designated as a terrorist organization by the United Arab Emirates in November 2014. According to former Italian Minister of Community Policy Andrea Rochi, the Islamic Alliance of Italy “[holds] ambiguous positions on terrorism at the national and local level.” (Sources: [Gatestone Institute](#) [82], [Il Tempo](#) [83])

Sharia4Italy is the self-styled Italian chapter of the global Sharia4 network, a radical Salafist network that aims to implement sharia in the countries in which it operates. Sharia4Italy’s founder, Italian citizen and U.S.-designated terrorist Anas El Abboubi, previously operated a blog called “Sharia4Italy” on which he propagated extremist ideology and called for an Islamic caliphate in Italy. In addition, according to Italian police, Abboubi allegedly plotted to carry out a domestic attack and had utilized Google Maps to search for potential targets. He was arrested in June 2013, but was released after two weeks and ultimately traveled to Syria to fight alongside ISIS in September 2013. It is unclear whether Sharia4Italy has evolved beyond Abboubi’s activities into an organization as prominent as Sharia4Belgium, the Belgian Sharia4 chapter whose members have allegedly radicalized, recruited, and facilitated the travel of a number of Belgian foreign fighters to Syria. (Sources: [Corriere Della Sella](#) [84], [Il Fatto Quotidiano](#) [85], [U.S. Department of State](#) [86], [Sharia4Italy](#) [87])

Foreign Fighters

By August 2016, there were approximately 100 individuals “linked to Italy” who had traveled to fight alongside extremist groups in Syria and Iraq, according to estimates by the International Centre for Counterterrorism in The Hague. Only a minority of these 100 are believed to hold Italian passports. (Source: [ICCT](#) [88])

One of the most well-known examples of an Italian foreign fighter is that of Giuliano Ibrahim Delnevo, an Italian citizen and convert to Islam. He traveled to Syria in 2012 and died there in June 2013 while fighting alongside a Chechen-led brigade with ties to ISIS. Another well-known Italian foreign fighter, convert to Islam Maria Giulia Sergio, left Italy in September 2014 and traveled to Syria to join ISIS. Sergio then reportedly persuaded her father, mother, and sister to convert to Islam, convincing them to join her in Syria. Police arrested her family members in July 2015 before they were able to travel to ISIS-controlled territory. (Sources: [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [8], [Independent](#) [89], [Corriere Della Sera](#) [90])

Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

The Global Terrorism Database (GTD) has over 900 incidents of terrorism in Italy documented between 1970 and 2017, the

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majority of which took place before 1980 and were perpetrated by far-right, far-left, and nationalist Palestinian organizations. More recently, Italy has seen a rise in Islamic extremism. Though the country has not experienced an attack similar in scale to those in France and Belgium, in March 2018, Italian Interior Minister Marco Minniti told newspapers that “the security threat to Italy from supporters of [the] Islamic State was higher than ever.” (Sources: [Global Terrorism Database](#) [91], [L’Occidentale](#) [92], [Reuters](#) [3])

According to Italy’s Interior Ministry, between March 2016 and March 2017, counterterrorism authorities stopped and questioned 160,593 persons, including 34,000 at airports, and arrested 550 suspected terrorists, 38 of whom have been sentenced on terrorism charges. (Source: [Guardian](#) [93])

July 2015 ISIS-Linked Kidnappings in Libya

On July 19, 2015, four Italian construction workers—Gino Pollicardo, Filippo Calcagno, Fausto Piano, and Salvatore Failla—were abducted in Sebrata, Libya. Then-Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni told the media that it was difficult to determine which group had carried out the kidnapping, while Ahmed Safar, the Libyan ambassador to Italy, said that he suspected “criminal motivations” were behind the attack. It was later revealed that the men were being held by ISIS operatives in Libya. In March 2016, Italian authorities reported that two of the men—Fausto Piano and Salvatore Failla—had been released, while the two other men had been killed. According to a Libyan military official, Piano and Failla had escaped by breaking down the door of the house where they were being held before finding refuge with neighbors. Alternatively, some Italian media alleged that a ransom had been paid for the men’s release. Both Piano and Failla subsequently returned to Italy. (Sources: [Chicago Tribune](#) [94], [BBC News](#) [17], [Il Sole](#) [95], [New York Times](#) [96])

July 2014 Nusra Front Kidnappings in Syria

In July 2014, the Nusra Front kidnapped two Italian citizens—Vanessa Marzullo, 20, and Greta Ramelli, 21—in Aleppo, Syria. That December, the women—dressed in black hijabs—appeared in a 23-second video on YouTube in which Ramelli warned that they were in “big danger.” The pair was freed in January 2015 after Italy allegedly paid a ransom to secure their release. (Sources: [Corriere della Sera](#) [97], [Guardian](#) [18], [Telegraph](#) [98])

Neo-Fascists’ 2014 Anti-Immigrant Plot

In December 2014, Italian police uncovered a neo-fascist plot to attack immigrants and left-leaning politicians. The plot was hatched by members of an Italian far-right movement called Avanguardia Ordinovista (“Vanguard Order”), reportedly inspired by the ideology of Ordine Nuovo (“New Order”)—an Italian far-right group that carried out acts of terrorism throughout the 1970s and 1980s. According to Italian authorities, the Avanguardia Ordinovista plotters stockpiled arms, organized over social media, and identified potential targets, including immigrants, magistrates, the Equitalia tax collection agency, and the Italian railway system. The individuals were charged with attempted terrorism, attempted subversion of democracy, and instigating racial violence. (Sources: [Associated Press](#) [38], [Huffington Post](#) [99], [Corriere Della Sera](#) [100])

- **May 18, 2017:** Ismail Hosni, 20, stabs a policeman and two army officers at Milan’s main train station after he was asked to show identification. Hosni is a Tunisian national born in Milan. Police have Facebook close his account on its platform, after discovering it contained videos praising ISIS. Source: [Reuters](#) [101]
- **March 30, 2017:** Italian police disrupt a cell of suspected ISIS supporters in Venice planning to blow up that city’s famous Rialto Bridge. Authorities arrest three suspects—all Kosovar men with Italian residence permits. The men had reportedly expressed a desire to die for jihad, and had celebrated a recent terror attack in London, according to Italian police wiretapping the suspects’ conversations. Sources: [BBC News](#) [71], [Telegraph](#) [72]
- **December 23, 2016:** Italian police in Milan shoot dead Anis Amri, the ISIS sympathizer who drove a truck through a Christmas market in Berlin four days prior, killing 12 people and wounding 48 others. Amri had reportedly traveled by train to Italy from Germany via France. Sources: [CNN](#) [102], [U.S. Department of State](#) [73]
- **July 2, 2016:** Nine Italian citizens are killed at a cafe in Dhaka, Bangladesh, when ISIS militants storm the restaurant. Source: [Ministro degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale](#) [103]
- **May 10, 2016:** Italian police arrest three members of a Puglia-based ISIS-linked terror cell who had allegedly been

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plotting to carry out attacks in Rome and London.

Source: [Reuters](#) [69]

- **April 26, 2016:** Italian police in the Italian region of Lombardy arrest four Italians of Moroccan descent who had allegedly plotted to attack the Vatican and the Israeli embassy in Rome. According to authorities, the suspects had received direct orders from ISIS militants—via the messaging service WhatsApp—to carry out attacks within Italy. The suspects had also reportedly planned to travel to Syria to join ISIS. Sources: [La Repubblica](#) [68], [Deutsche Welle](#) [66], [Newsweek](#) [67]
- **July 22, 2015:** Authorities in Brescia detain ISIS sympathizers Lassa Briki and Muhammad Waqas. The men had planned to carry out domestic attacks against military institutions and civilians, and eventually travel to Syria to join ISIS. Briki is believed to have had online contact with Syrian-based ISIS operatives. Sources: [La Repubblica](#) [61], [Huffington Post](#) [62]
- **July 19, 2015:** Four Italian construction workers are abducted in Sebrata, Libya, and held hostage by ISIS operatives. Two of the men are released in March 2016, while the other two are reported to have been killed. Sources: [Chicago Tribune](#) [94], [BBC News](#) [17], [Il Sole](#) [95], [New York Times](#) [96]
- **July 1, 2015:** Italian and Albanian authorities jointly arrest five people—three Italians and two Albanians—on charges including planning to travel abroad to commit acts of terrorism. Among the arrested are family members of Maria Giulia Sergio, an Italian national and convert to Islam who traveled to Syria in September 2014 to join ISIS. Maria Giulia Sergio had reportedly convinced her family members to join her in Syria. Sources: [Il Sole](#) [64], [Wall Street Journal](#) [65]
- **April 24, 2015:** Italian police arrest nine individuals across six cities with suspected ties to al-Qaeda on charges of “assisting in clandestine immigration” and “acts of terrorism.” The suspects are reportedly tied to the October 2009 Peshawar bombing in Pakistan. Source: [La Repubblica](#) [104]
- **December 22, 2014:** Italian authorities arrest members of the neo-fascist group Avanguardia Ordiovista. The suspects had allegedly stockpiled weapons and plotted to attack immigrants and members of the left-leaning political class. Sources: [Associated Press](#) [38], [Huffington Post](#) [99]
- **July 2014:** Italian citizens Vanessa Marzullo, 20, and Greta Ramelli, 21, are kidnapped and taken hostage by the Nusra Front while working on humanitarian projects in Aleppo, Syria. The women are freed in January 2015 after the Italian government allegedly pays the Nusra Front to secure their release. Sources: [Guardian](#) [18], [Telegraph](#) [98]
- **April 30, 2013:** Police in Puglia arrest four Tunisian men accused of planning terrorist attacks in Italy, the United States, and Israel. Investigators say the men recruited among illegal immigrants and sent those individuals to jihadist training camps in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Iraq, and Yemen. According to a police statement, the small cell was characterized by “fierce anti-Semitism and anti-Western sentiment.” Source: [Reuters](#) [105]
- **May 19, 2012:** Italian citizen Giovanni Vantaggiato detonates a bomb at the Morvillo Falcone high school in Brindisi, killing one student and injuring five others. Vantaggiato, a married father of two, is subsequently prosecuted and sentenced to life in prison. He has not offered a motive. Source: [New York Times](#) [106]
- **October 2009:** Libyan national and long-time resident of Milan Mohammed Game detonates an explosive device outside of a military base in the Lombardy region of Italy. Investigators later discover that two Milan-based North African men had assisted Game in the planning of this attack, but that Game acted alone and was radicalized online. Source: [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [8]
- **March 28, 2004:** A Moroccan man dies while detonating a car bomb outside of a McDonalds in Brescia. Sources: [Global Terrorism Database](#) [107], [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [8]
- **July 2002:** Italian authorities arrest Domenico Quaranta, an Italian citizen who converted to Islam in prison. Quaranta had detonated rudimentary explosive devices in Milan and Agrigento over the span of seven months in 2001. Source: [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [8]
- **1990:** Jihadists begin using Italy as a transit point en route to conflicts in the Balkans and North Africa. Source: [Jamestown Foundation](#) [9]
- **December 27, 1985:** Four gunmen belonging to the Palestinian Abu Nidal Organization attack the ticket counters of American and Israeli airlines at Leonardo da Vinci-Fiumicino Airport. The attackers kill 13 people and wound nearly 75 others. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [108]
- **August 2, 1980:** Suspected far-right extremists bomb a crowded waiting area at the Central Station in Bologna, killing 85 people and wounding over 200 others. The government holds the neo-fascist group Armed Revolutionary Nuclei, (“Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari”), responsible. Sources: [BBC News](#) [109], [I-Italy](#) [110]
- **March 1978:** Members of the Red Brigades kidnap former Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro. They murder him 55 days later after the government refuses to capitulate to demands to release Red Brigades prisoners. Sources: [An Analysis of Left and Right Wing Terrorism in Italy](#), [Capt. Kenneth R. Langford](#) [111], [Guardian](#) [35]
- **November 16, 1977:** Members of the Red Brigades shoot deputy editor of La Stampa newspaper, Carlo Casalegno, on the street in Turin. Casalegno dies from his wounds later that month.

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Sources: [La Stampa](#) [112], [Mapping Militant Organizations](#) [113]

- **August 4, 1974:** Members of the far-right group Black Order detonate a bomb on an Italicus train traveling from Rome to Munich, killing 12 people and wounding 48 others.
Source: [La Repubblica](#) [114]
- **May 28, 1974:** Members of the far-right group New Order detonate a bomb in a trash bin at an anti-fascist rally in the northern city of Brescia, killing eight people and injuring over 100.
The Italian government later hands life sentences to two New Order members for the bombing. Sources: [La Repubblica](#) [115], [BBC News](#) [116]
- **April 18, 1974:** Members of the Red Brigades kidnap Genoa Assistant State Attorney Mario Sossi in what they call an attack “on the heart of the state.”
The group frees Sossi on May 23 in exchange for a court order to release eight Red Brigades prisoners. The court order is never upheld. Source: [Mapping Militant Organizations](#) [113]
- **December 17, 1973:** Gunmen belonging to the nationalist Palestinian group Black September enter the Leonardo Da Vinci-Fiumicino airport in Rome, killing two people.
The militants then attack Pan American flight 110 on the runway, throwing phosphorus hand grenades through the front and rear doors of the aircraft. Twenty-nine passengers are killed. The militants then take five Italian hostages into a Lufthansa airliner, force the pilot to fly to Athens, and demand the release of two Arab terrorists. The plane lands in Kuwait, where the terrorists release the hostages before being taken into custody. Sources: [BBC News](#) [7], [Global Terrorism Database](#) [117]
- **December 12, 1969:** Suspected members of the far-right group New Order bomb the National Agrarian Bank in Milan, killing 17 people and wounding more than 100 others.
Sources: [BBC News](#) [118], [Italian Neofacism, Anna Cento Bull](#) [119]
- **1960 - 1980:** In a period known as the Years of Lead, far-right and far-left Italian extremist groups carry out acts of terrorism throughout the country.
Nationalist Palestinian groups also carry out attacks within Italy. Sources: [BBC News](#) [4], [ADST](#) [5]

Domestic Counter-Extremism

March 2018 Counterterrorism Operations

Between March 15 and March 29, 2018, Italian police carried out four counterterrorism operations resulting in the arrest of at least eight men. Acting on a tip from the FBI, Italian police arrested Latvian-born Italian citizen Denis Illarionovs on March 15. Illarionovs was found in possession of partially constructed pipe bombs, which he had intended to use to target a kindergarten. Authorities also discovered that Illarionovs had praised a number of terrorists on social media, including Sayfullo Saipov, who killed eight people in an October 2017 New York City truck attack. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [57], [CNN](#) [120])

On March 27, police arrested Abdel Rahman, a 59-year old Egyptian-born Italian who ran an Islamic center in the town of Foggia. Rahman is accused of using his position to indoctrinate youth on behalf of the Islamic State and was recorded telling local children to “fight the unbelievers, with your swords cut off their heads, with your explosive belts blow up their bodies.” (Source: [Reuters](#) [56])

On March 28, police arrested Elmhadi Halili and an undisclosed number of accomplices who were accused of planning a truck attack on behalf of the Islamic State. Halili, a Moroccan-born Italian man, was previously arrested on 2015 for running a website in support of the Islamic State but was only handed a suspended two-year sentence. (Source: [Reuters](#) [3])

On March 29, Italian police arrested five Tunisians connected to the Berlin truck attacker Anis Amri, who plowed a truck into a crowd of people at a Christmas market, killing 12 people. While the men appeared to have no direct link to the December 2016 attack, they were discovered through Amri’s telephone records. Police believe Amri may have been arranging to obtain false documents from the men prior to his death in Milan. Four of the men have been charged with conspiring to aid illegal immigration while the fifth man is accused of plotting terror attacks. (Source: [Reuters](#) [55])

Legislation

The Italian government established the Study Commission on Radicalization and Jihadi Extremism in September 2016, with

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the objective of recommending preventative measures in 2017. On January 5, 2017, the Commission reported to Italian Premier Paolo Gentiloni that, while Italy has been spared the extremist attacks suffered elsewhere in Europe, it must not consider itself immune and must develop strategies to prevent radicalization. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [73], [Oasis Center](#) [121], [Associated Press](#) [122])

The Italian government introduced its first counterterrorism legislative package on October 18, 2001, approximately five weeks after the September 11, 2001 attacks. The legislation, dubbed Decree Law 374, codified the crime of conspiracy to commit an act of international terrorism. It also permitted authorities to use wiretaps and to prosecute any individual promoting, creating, organizing, or financing terrorism. The Italian government also passed Law 438, which permitted authorities to surveil and intercept communication of terrorist suspects. (Sources: [Legislationonline.org](#) [123], [Counterterrorism Strategies](#) [124], [Farnesina](#) [125])

The Italian government passed additional counterterrorism legislation in 2005, known as Decree Law 155. The provision defined terrorism as acts that “cause serious harm to a country or international organization,” and are carried out in order to “intimidate people, coerce public authorities,” or “destabilize or destroy the fundamental political, constitutional, economic and social structures of a country.” The law also amended the criminal code by adding examples of what would be considered a punishable terrorist offense. Notably, the law punishes anyone who “trains [others] to prepare or use explosive materials, firearms...hazardous chemical or bacteriological substances...for the purposes of terrorism.” The law also facilitates the detention of suspects and expedites the process for deporting non-citizens who demonstrate extremist sentiments. (Sources: [Council of Europe](#) [26], [U.S. Department of State](#) [59], [U.S. Department of State](#) [126])

In February 2015, the Italian government passed new legislation—known as Decree Law 7—with regard to United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178 to disrupt the flow of foreign fighters. Decree Law 7 imposes punishment on lone wolf terrorists and foreign fighters—making it illegal to partake in a conflict in a foreign territory in support of a terrorist organization. Authorities are also now authorized to temporarily withdraw terrorist suspects’ passports. In addition, the law permits the Ministry of the Interior to maintain a list of websites that are utilized for terrorist recruiting activities, and gives authorities permission to instruct Internet service providers to block access to such websites. In March 2017, in advance of a meeting of 40 European heads of state in Rome to mark 60 years since the signing of the Treaty of Rome, Italian authorities set up a special task force to monitor “suspicious” online profiles and to intercept and decode messages referring to terrorist activity. Until the meeting’s adjournment, Italian police and police in other EU member states monitored and shared any suspicious content they found. (Sources: [Normattiva](#) [20], [Library of Congress](#) [21], [U.S. Department of State](#) [59], [Express](#) [127])

Government Agencies

The Ministries of the Interior, Treasury, Foreign Affairs, and Justice coordinate with the police in overseeing counterterrorism activity throughout Italy. In addition, the Italian Carabinieri—Italy’s national gendarmerie—operates its own counterterrorism force, known as the Special Intervention Group. The Italian law enforcement agency *Guardia di Finanza* (“Guard of Finance”) also operates a counterterrorism unit that oversees airport and seaport security and works to counter the illegal trafficking of drugs, weapons, contraband, and illegal immigration. (Sources: [Council of Europe](#) [128], [Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate](#) [129], [European Parliament](#) [130], [Guardia di Finanza](#) [131])

In addition, the Ministry of the Interior has the authority to swiftly expel non-citizens for “seriously disrupting public order, endangering national security, or religious discrimination,” even if insufficient evidence exists to prosecute the individual. According to the U.S. Department of State, the Ministry used that authority to deport more than 60 individuals in 2016 and 100 individuals in 2017. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [73], [U.S. Department of State](#) [126])

Government Programs

Italy’s Ministry of Justice Penitentiary Police finances counter-radicalization programs in the Italian prison system. Through these programs, the Penitentiary Police provide de-radicalization training to over 100 government agents working in the four Italian prisons where terrorists are incarcerated. Notably, prison employees are trained to recognize signs of radicalization among the prison population. These programs also focus on identifying high-risk inmates and separating them from other prisoners who are likely to be susceptible to radicalization. (Sources: [Istituto Superiore di Studi](#)

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[Penitenziari](#) [22], [U.S. Department of State](#) [132]

In January 2017, the Ministry of the Interior announced that it would begin funding courses on the Italian constitution for imams throughout the country. Course participants will reportedly be taught about importance of freedom of religion and speech. Through these courses, the Ministry aims to “foster a dialogue between religions and cultures, contributing to the construction of a peaceful and non-violent society,” according to a professor who is helping to lead the program. (Sources: [La Repubblica](#) [23], [Independent](#) [24])

Combatting Terrorist Financing

Following the September 11, 2001, attacks, the Italian government established the Committee for Financial Security (“Comitato di Sicurezza Finanziaria,” or CFS) within its Ministry of Economic and Financial Affairs. The CFS—led by the Director General of the Treasury—works with Italy’s government agencies to combat terrorism financing. These agencies include the Italian Ministry of the Interior, the Italian Ministry of Justice and Foreign Affairs, the Bank of Italy, the Italian police, the Italian Guard of Finance, and the Italian National Anti-Mafia Direction. The CFS is authorized to freeze the assets of individuals and groups associated with terrorist organizations. (Sources: [Ministerio degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale](#) [133], [Parlamento Italiano](#) [134])

Italy participates in a number of international bodies that seek to counter terrorist financing, including the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism (Moneyval). The FATF—an intergovernmental organization that works to combat the financing of terrorism—has recommended the adoption of various measures including the criminalization of terrorist financing, the freezing of terrorist assets, and policies designed to ensure that terrorists cannot exploit non-governmental organizations. Moneyval, a monitoring body and part of the Council of Europe, is responsible for “assessing compliance...to counter money laundering and the financing of terrorism,” according to the Council of Europe website. Italy co-chairs, with the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS’s Counter-ISIS Finance Group, which seeks to enhance information-sharing among its 37 members and observer groups and to develop coordinated countermeasures to disrupt ISIS financing. (Sources: [FATF](#) [135], [Council of Europe](#) [136], [Ministerio degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale](#) [25], [FAFT](#) [137], [U.S. Department of State](#) [73], [U.S. Department of State](#) [138], [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#) [139], [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#) [140], [Financial Action Task Force](#) [141])

International Counter-Extremism

Italy complies with all EU counterterrorism regulations and is a signatory to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism. Italy also ratifies all international United Nations conventions against terrorism. (Sources: [Ministerio degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale](#) [25], [Council of Europe](#) [26])

Regional Cooperation

Italy cooperates with other European countries on counterterrorism efforts. In January 2015, for example—following the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings in Paris—Italy and Albania created a joint-counterterrorism task force. Albania claims to have the largest counterterrorism center in the Balkans, a region that has reportedly seen hundreds of foreign fighters travel to Syria. The Italian-Albanian task force will train experts and police, exchange valuable information in real-time, and create an anti-terrorism database. (Sources: [InfoBalkans](#) [28], [ABC News](#) [142])

Global Cooperation

Italy is one of 30 countries that founded the Global Counterterrorism Forum, an intergovernmental organization that convenes international counterterrorism experts and practitioners in order to reduce the threat from terrorism worldwide. Italy has also participated in counterterrorism efforts through the G-8 Roma-Lyon Group, an international body comprised of the G8 partners which convenes annually to develop strategies to combat terrorism and transnational crime. (Sources: [GCTF](#) [143], [G8 Italia](#) [144])

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Italy is believed to cooperate on matters related to counterterrorism with countries in the Middle East, including Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Italy and Pakistan have shared a defense agreement since 2009 and exchange information concerning the fight against terrorism. In April 2016, Italian Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni said that Italy would continue to cooperate with Pakistan on counterterrorism issues. Italy is also reported to work with Saudi Arabia in this field. In November 2016, Italy and Saudi Arabia pledged to cooperate closely on new security, police training, and counterterrorism initiatives. Italy pledged to provide counterterrorism training to Saudi police officers. (Sources: [Agence France-Presse](#) [29], [European Affairs](#) [30])

ISIS

Italy is a member of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIS. According to the coalition's website, Italy plays "a key role in training Iraqi forces, countering [ISIS's] financial flows, supporting the Mosul Dam project, helping civilian population[s] and protecting cultural heritage." The U.S. government estimates that Italy deployed approximately 1,400 personnel to Iraq in 2017. Italy has also supported the coalition in "aerial intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance and re-fueling capabilities from Kuwait," according to the U.S. Department of State. (Source: [Global Coalition](#) [27], [U.S. Department of State](#) [126], [U.S. Department of State](#) [73])

In January 2016, Italy began allowing the United States to fly armed drones out of the Sigonella Air Base in Sicily in order to launch defensive attacks against ISIS in Libya. (Source: [Guardian](#) [145])

Foreign Military Engagement and the United Nations

The Italian armed forces participate in 26 missions internationally, including those spearheaded by the United Nations, the European Union, and NATO. Most notably, as of late 2015, there were 760 Italian troops stationed in Afghanistan as part of NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). (Sources: [Ministero della Difesa](#) [146], [Reuters](#) [147])

Italy was listed eighth among the top 10 providers of financial contributions to U.N. peacekeeping operations in 2016. That year, it contributed 1,310 personnel and over \$368 million to U.N. peacekeeping missions. (Sources: [United Nations](#) [148], [Economist](#) [32])

Public Opinion

In October 2015, the center-right Italian political group Forza Italia conducted a series of interviews in Tuscany, asking residents to offer their opinions on terrorism and immigration. Approximately 84 percent of those interviewed said they feared that terrorists might arrive in Italy from Libya, and 76 percent indicated that they believed unemployed immigrants would be easily recruited by terrorist organizations. (Source: [Citta di Firenze](#) [149])

The percentage of the Italian population that feels threatened by Islamic extremism appears to be on the rise. In 2015, a study conducted by Statistica found that 53 percent of Italians were worried about Islamic extremism. A Pew Research Center survey that was conducted from February to April 2017 found that 89 percent of the Italians in the study were "very" or "somewhat" concerned about the threat of Islamic extremism in their country. By contrast, polls conducted in 2012 and 2014 indicated that the primary concerns of Italians had to do with poor economic conditions within the country. (Sources: [Statistica](#) [150], [Pew Research Center](#) [151], [Guardian](#) [152])