Through the Lenses of Hollywood: depictions of Terrorism in American Movies

by Thomas Riegler

Abstract

This article argues that Hollywood cinema has shaped, and sometimes distorted, the perception of terrorism since the late 1960s. It does so by discussing emblematic movies in a comparative way. The main thesis is that Hollywood never seriously tried to offer an accurate assessment of terrorism. Instead, it offered a mediated version that transcends reality and is firmly rooted in a pop culture framework. Nonetheless, since movies are, according to cinema theorist Siegfried Kracauer, a "mirror of the prevailing society", they too reveal something about the historical evolution of terrorism and modifications in its understanding. Another issue briefly addressed is the question whether "real" terrorists tend to re-enact or copy (cinema)"reel" violence – given the fact that terrorists too are subject to the influence of cinematic images and metaphors.

Introduction

Italian novelist Umberto Eco once claimed that 70 percent of our knowledge derives from watching Hollywood movies. Could this also be true for our perception of terrorism? It can be argued that for a large part of its audience, American cinema, besides television (the substantial role of TV is not explored in this article), is one of the primary sources of information.[1] The perception of what terrorism means, how it can be understood, is shaped by cinematic images. This is also of importance on a political front as mass cultural representations of terrorism tend to be often stereotypical and ideologically biased. Cinema generally affirms the political and cultural status quo from which it originates: movies reproduce, charge, and disseminate interpretations, ideologies, and world views in contemporary society by constructing and filling an imaginary space, where the hegemonic constants of the public discourse come to life. Terrorism, often described as the "scourge of our times", is one of them and a reoccurring theme of American movies since the 1970s.

The 1970s: hijackers and "lone wolfs"

When reviewing Hollywood's output on terrorism, it is obvious that it correlates with the waves and historical development of political violence: previously sporadic encounters with terrorism in Hollywood cinema, like Alfred Hitchcock's *Saboteur* (1942), became more frequent in the 1970s, at a time when international terrorism and especially hijackings of jetliners orchestrated by Palestinian groups made headlines and featured in newsreels. Thus, the Arab gunman, who

threatens innocent passengers and strikes at Western installations, became a typical Hollywood villain: John Frankenheimer's *Black Sunday* (1976) depicted seductive terrorist Dahila Iyad (Marthe Keller) of German-Palestinian background enlisting an alienated Vietnam veteran Michael Lander (Bruce Dern). Together they plan an attack on the Super Bowl finale in Miami: a Goodyear blimp loaded with scrap metal is launched as a cluster bomb attack aimed to kill thousands of sport fans, including President Jimmy Carter.[2]

During the 1970s major acts of terrorism had not yet struck the US homeland. Therefore the entertainment industry mainly looked abroad for inspiration and major foreign events were dramatised for the silver screen: William A. Graham staged the Munich hostage massacre of 1972 four years later in *21 hours at Munich*. Only five months after the real event Marvin J. Chomsky re-enacted the spectacular Entebbe rescue mission in the studio, featuring a big star cast, including Burt Lancaster as defence minister Shimon Peres, Anthony Hopkins as Yitzhak Rabin, and Liz Taylor as a relative of a hostage (*Victory at Entebbe*, 1976). The story was also adapted for TV in *Raid on Entebbe* (1977), starring Charles Bronson. The formula for these movies is basically the same: high-ranking politicians in crisis centres make daring decisions, while elite commandos first train meticulously for their mission and then free the hostages in a climactic shoot-out sequence. It is a triumphant celebration of the commando's capacity to dare and win – a myth to which Israel contributed by commissioning its own cinematic version of the events in *Operation Thunderball* (1979).[3]

Home-grown terrorism is almost exclusively the work of lunatics and psychotic types with little political background: in *Airport* (1970) a self-made bomb explodes on board of a Boeing 707 bound for Rome. Responsibility rests with demolition expert D. O. Guerrero (Van Heflin), a desperate man with a long history of mental illness who wants his wife to benefit from a life-insurance he just purchased. The damage caused by the mid-air explosion in the hull of the plane results in Guerrero being sucked out of the jetliner, which the pilots manage to landed safely. In *Skyjacked* (1972) it is the suicidal Vietnam veteran Jerome K. Weber (James Brolin), who takes command of a domestic flight and directs it via Anchorage to Moscow, where the plane is surrounded by aggressive Soviet troops. The would-be defector is finally challenged by the heroic Captain Henry O'Hara (Charlton Heston) and shot by the soldiers.

The Taking of Pelham 1-2-3 (1974) is one of the first examples outlining a scenario of urban terrorism that is financially motivated: a gang led by a British mercenary kidnaps a New York subway train in order to extort a one million dollar ransom. This storyline of a threatened public is repeated in the thrillers *Two Minute Warning* (1976) and *Rollercoaster* (1977), where anonymous blackmailers target popular American institutions – a football stadium and an amusement park, respectively – in horrific schemes with a potential for mass casualties.[4] Political motives, no matter how twisted, appear to be reserved for traumatized war veterans only: in *Twilight's Last Gleaming* (1977) an Air Force General, who was court-martialled for his

anti-war stance, takes control over a Titan rocket silo and threatens to start World War III unless the US government releases all the real facts about the background of the Vietnam War. This demand is met by declassifying a top secret memo, which defines the war in South East-Asia as a means to enhance American credibility vis-a-vis the Soviet Union's.[5]

Since the US experienced sporadic acts of domestic terrorism by left-wing radicals from the Weather Underground or the Symbionese Liberation Army during the 1970s, the urban guerrilla is featured as a potential danger lurking at home. As a consequence, Clint Eastwood's vigilante cop Dirty Harry has to eliminate a fictitious "People Revolutionary Strike Force" (*The Enforcer*, 1976).The kidnapping of big money heiress Patty Hearst in 1975 – the most visible act of 70s left-wing terrorism – was adopted for the screen in all kind of ways: ranging from the infamous exploitation pieces *Patty* (1976) and *Tanya: Sex Queen of the SLA* (1976) - where "SLA" stood for "Sexual Liberation Army" - to a classic true crime"" story made for TV (*The Ordeal of Patty Hearst*, 1979). In 1988 Paul Schrader revisited the case in *Patty Hearst* (1988); however his presentation of the events (terrorist victim apparently becomes perpetrator) in a deliberately detached style received only limited release.[6]

The 1980s: enter religious fanatics and red infiltrators

This more or less distanced perspective on terrorism changed abruptly once the US was directly confronted with major acts of terrorism abroad: the 444 days long Iranian hostage crisis (1979), the American involvement in the Lebanese civil war (1983), and the resulting confrontation with Shi'ite extremism. Terrorism rapidly acquired an extraordinary salience in American public opinion.[7]

In *Nighthawks* (1981) – one of the first films to address the media fixation of modern terrorism – the international terrorist mastermind Wulfgar (Rutger Hauer) brags: "There is no security". His network of Palestinian, German, and Irish activists spreads terror in New York until policeman DaSilva (Sylvester Stallone) is finally prepared to absorb the lessons of his British counterterrorism mentor: terrorism has to be fought outside of the law. This is the logic of "lesser evil": in order to keep a fragile democratic system safe from its enemies one has to forget democratic niceties and the rule of law. Such emphasis on extra-legal counter-terrorism became a key motif in many movies to come: it is as if the agonising inefficacy of the US in Ronald Reagan's actual poor handling of terrorism had to be compensated in the sphere of imagination. One of the most intriguing examples is *Delta Force* (1986). The film sets off with a portrayal of the 1985 skyjacking of TWA 847 by the Shiite Islamic Jihad. While this hostage scenario was ended following secret negotiations, *Delta Force* gives free rein to a military solution inspired by Israeli Entebbe strategy to achieve "victories over terrorism".[8] In the film the counter-terrorist elite force is dispatched to liberate the hostages, who in the meantime have been taken from the airliner to the urban jungle of Beirut where they are dispersed in underground dungeons. The

rescuers blast their way through the city, kill scores of enemy fighters, and lead the American hostages back to safety.[9] The numerous enemies are portrait as Shiite Muslims with a clear connection to the Iranian regime. When the terrorists are first introduced, they are shown in an extreme low angle shot, which further distorts their already shabby appearance with their loosened ties, unkempt hair, and maniacal stare. Their savage "otherness" is a mixture of ethnicity and psychosis – most evident in the manic outbursts of their leader Abdul (Robert Foster) towards the hostages.[10]

Most films of this genre in the 1980s did not address actual events like *Delta Force*, but drew ever more alarming pictures of the terrorist threat, especially in the B-movie genre (*Hostage*, 1986; *Death before Dishonor*, 1987; *Terror in Beverly Hills*, 1988). Corresponding with the aggressive stance first taken by the Reagan administration towards the Soviet Union, the spectre of Red Terror was particularly prominent in *Invasion U.S.A.* (1985). It depicted a mixed force of Cubans, East Germans, and Russians, led by the maniac psychopath Major Rostov (Richard Lynch), whose team secretly lands on a peaceful Florida beach to spread chaos and violence.[11] Since ordinary law enforcement is helpless against this onslaught, the government re-activates retired CIA-counterterrorism specialist Matt Hunter (Chuck Norris). He understands the mindset of the terrorists and devises a trap in which the enemy is consequently tricked into.[12]

The 1990s: action films and new threats

Invasion U.S.A, *Delta Force*, and later *Die Hard* (1988) were trendsetters for a whole genre of action movies in which a lone hero has to defeat single-handedly numerous terrorist enemies in a spectacular action showdown: *Die Hard II* (1992), *Red Alert* (1992), *Passenger 57* (1992), *Speed* (1995), *Sudden Death* (1995), *Die Hard III* (1995), *The Rock* (1996), *Operation Broken Arrow* (1997), or *Air Force One* (1997). The plot line of these movies stays basically the same: first the terrorists succeed in securing control over public places (skyscrapers, banks, airplanes, trains, ships, prisons, and buses), taking hostages, and defeating any countermeasures by the authorities. But their triumph lasts only for a short time as their nemesis, whether it is the policeman John McClane (Bruce Willis in *Die Hard*), Ex-US Navy Seal Casey Ryback (Steven Segal in *Red Alert*) or Ex-fireman Daren McCord (Jean Claude Vandamme in *Sudden Death*), is already in their midst – most often simply out of coincidence. The lone hero has then to engage one opponent after the other, until the spectacular killing of the terrorist ringleader releases the built-up tension.

With regard to their background, the featured villains mirror the climate of political correctness in the first post-Cold War period: a decadent British aristocrat (*Passenger 57)*, a group of "homeless" Stasi agents (*Die Hard III*), or corrupt Russian military figures in alliance with resentful Bosnian Serbs (*The Peacemaker*, 1997). But most of them are "home grown": disgruntled former employees of law enforcement agencies (*Speed*) or renegade soldiers (*Die Hard II*, *Operation Broken Arrow*, *The Rock*). What unites most of them is the simple fact that

they kill and maim mainly for money. They are depicted as ordinary criminals hiding behind a political ideology. For instance in *Die Hard I*, the "Volksfrei"-movement, a West German left-wing terrorist group, attacks a party at the headquarters of a Japanese cooperation in Los Angeles and takes the guests hostage. Their declared aim is to force the liberation of "revolutionary brothers and sisters" from prison. However, this turns out to be only a diversion; the group real aim is to rob 640 million dollars from a safe. Another telling example is the disgruntled ex-policeman Howard Payne in *Speed*. He informs his opponent via mobile phone about the sole motivation of his blackmail scheme: "Well, I want money, Jack. I wish that I had some loftier purpose, but I'm afraid in the end, it's all about the money".[13]

Yet there is also a new threat emerging in1990s cinema that has nothing to do with those apolitical gangsters – in response to renewed public interest sparked by the (largely unsuccessful) bombing of New York's World Trade Center in 1993, the radical Islamist terrorist was introduced on the movie screen with *True Lies* (1994), *Executive Decision* (1996), and *The Siege* (1999). These three films depict jihadists as backward lunatics and potential mass murderers whose onslaught had to be fought by all means necessary.

In *True Lies*, a group called "Crimson Jihad" has smuggled nuclear weapons out of the former Soviet republic Kazakhstan and attempts to blackmail the US government. To demonstrate their seriousness they detonate the first bomb on an uninhabited island of the Florida Keys. The "pillar of holy fire" that rises at this place threatens a nuclear holocaust.[14] Spymaster Trilby (Charlton Heston) urges his troops to locate ringleader Aziz (Art Malik) and his men before "somebody parks a car in front of the White House with a nuclear bomb in the trunk." This job is effectively done by Harry Tasker (Arnold Schwarzenegger), agent of the "Omega Sector", a clandestine unit specialising in counter-proliferation.[15] *Executive Decision* features Arabs hijacking a Boeing 747 with the intention of blowing up the plane, and smuggle enough nerve gas on board to wipe out the entire East Coast of the US. When a US senator, who happens to be on board, wants to negotiate to advance his own career interests, he receives a "punishing" bullet in the head. Instead *Executive Decision* aims straight for a climatic shoot-out at the very last moment a Special Forces team that had slipped into the belly of the plane in mid-flight via a "decompression tunnel" intervenes and shoots all hijackers.

The enemy within and the reaction of the American public in the face of terrorist violence are the main concern in *The Siege*. To force the US government to release a terrorist leader - he had been kidnapped by American forces - several terrorist cells undertake suicide missions in New York. When the crisis reaches its peak, the president declares martial law and all able-bodied Muslims who do not cooperate, are detained behind barbed wire. Liberal FBI investigator Frank Hubbard (Denzel Washington), who managed the investigation before the army was called in, is the exact opposite of commanding General William Deveraux (Bruce Willis). While the latter uses his troops like a "broadsword", Hubbard "plays by the book" and upholds constitutional rights. In

the end he arrests not only Deveraux for murdering a prisoner, but disposes of the last attacker, who exclaims both defiant and threatening: "There will never be a last cell!"[16]

After 9/11: the changing face of terrorism

In the immediate period after 9/11, Hollywood indeed shunned away from the subject of terrorism, focusing instead on fantastical escapism, Science Fiction and family entertainment. Tellingly, the Twin Towers were edited out of most movies in the production line that showed the New York skyline.

One of the first movies to address terrorism after 9/11, *The Sum of all Fears* (2002), featured the destruction of Baltimore by an atomic bomb. Overall the film was considered as out of touch with the post 9/11 reality since the story focuses on the ensuing escalating tensions between the US and Russia. With terrorism more or less out of the picture, threats were depicted as extra-terrestrial (*War of the Worlds*, 2005), in the form of disease (*I am Legend*, 2007) or as a result of rapid climate change (*The Day after Tomorrow*, 2005). Besides commercial considerations with regard to a weary public, both domestic and international, but also because previous scenarios considered fantastic and purely entertaining had been so "brutally realized" on 11 September 2001, the subject of terrorism was not addressed in a major way for some years in Hollywood's production studios.

The War Within (2005) was one of the earliest examples of movies addressing the situation in post 9/11 America: it focuses on Hassan (Ayad Akhtar), a Pakistani engineer, who was wrongly suspected of terrorist activities and tortured in prison. The violent experience transforms Hassan into a radical who seeks revenge for the injustice done to him. He connects with a terrorist cell that is in the middle of planning an attack on the Grand Central Station in New York. But his logic is put under severe pressure by contradictions and conflicting emotions: the war, in which he sees himself, is fought "within" – in his own psyche.[17] The search for answers also motivates *Syriana*, a 2005 movie that is partly based on the memoirs of Ex-CIA agent Robert Baer. It explores the political, economic, legal, and social effects of the oil business, and how its mechanisms breed terrorism. The main character, elderly CIA agent Bob Barnes (George Clooney), is embedded in a network of power relations connecting mighty Washingtonian law firms, Texan oil business, the US government, and the corrupt elites of a Middle Eastern sheikdom. In the script, this "system" uses all means necessary to advance its political-economic interests and produces terrorism as a form of blowback. A sub- plot illustrates this on the basis of the radicalisation of two Pakistani oil workers, who simply want to improve their lives and are prevented from doing so. [18] Stephen Spielberg addressed the conflict via historical analogy in *Munich* (2005). His adaptation of a novel on the Israeli revenge for the massacre of its athletes during the 1972 Olympics was also a critical exploration of the cycle of violence engulfing the Middle East and, indirectly, a "prayer for peace".

It took more than five years for the entertainment industry to tackle 9/11 directly. In *United 93* (2006), Paul Greengrass retold the story of the hijacked flight that did not reach its intended target on September 11th. Instead it crashed into a field in Pennsylvania, supposedly because the passengers revolted against the hijackers. The director offers only a distanced portrait of the hijackers – although the first scene in the movie, a prayer ritual in the morning hours of September 11th, 2001, depicts them as devout Muslims on a mission. But since *United 93* is all about the heroic actions of the passengers and their sacrifice, the motivation and personal background of the terrorists remain rather obscure to the moviegoer. Oliver Stone's *World Trade Center* (2006) did not even show the planes hitting the towers. Instead, Stone concentrated on a human interest story based on the miraculous rescue of two survivors from Ground Zero.

With growing distance, movie makers began to focus on the War on Terror, its progress and implications, both domestic and international. In *Body of Lies* (2008), CIA agent Roger Ferris (Leonardo Di Caprio) sets up a fictitious terror group, equips it with fake bank accounts, and plants messages in fundamentalist chat rooms. A staged attack on a US Army base in Turkey aims to flush out a jealous Al Qaeda mastermind - the Syrian born, American educated Al-Sameen (Alon Aboutboul). The plan works although the situation becomes desperate for the agent. He has to endure torture when caught by Al-Sameen and is about to be executed on video when Jordanian intelligence agents burst into the room and kill all terrorists. It turns out that Ferris's principal ally, the deceptive spymaster Hani Salaam (Mark Strong), is a far more effective manipulator than previously assumed, making the most of a partnership of convenience. [19]

Finally, *The Kingdom* (2007) can be read as an alternative scenario to the real life War on Terror in its depiction of successful counterterrorism as the result of cooperation between Western and Middle Eastern police forces. A team of FBI investigators works closely with the Saudi police Colonel Al Ghazi (Ashraf Barhom) to hunt down Abu Hamza, a mid-level al- Qaeda operative, who is responsible for a bombing attack on an American compound in Saudi-Arabia.[20] Overall the film offers a "utopian spectacle of wounded Americans heading home, mission accomplished," as Jim Hoberman remarked.[21]

Comparing depictions of terrorism: 1970s – 2000s

In order to clarify the relationship between context and cultural output, the four ten year periods are put in comparison with each other. This analysis highlights how the differing depiction of terrorism indicates shifts in the public's understanding – in line with the specific political and social "Zeitgeist" of the decade, or in reference to hegemonic ideas about the interpretation of terrorism in the public discourse.

In 1970s cinema terrorism was escapist entertainment with little basis in reality. Nevertheless it featured many characteristics like air piracy, attacks on vital city infrastructures and mass gatherings. Fitting the Cold War framework the enemy "other" consisted of left-wingers, Third World guerrillas, as well as "home-grown" radicals and "lone wolfs". Where Middle Eastern terrorists appeared, their background was primarily secular, national liberation on their agenda. What unites this diverse lot is the more or less subjective motivation: the real driving forces for the perpetrators are not political, but hatred of society, psychosis, or simply greed.

This mode of representation changed during the 1980s – greatly influenced by the engagement of the US in the Middle East and the experience of devastating attacks like those in Beirut in 1983. The terrorist"" was finally established as a sworn public enemy of everything America stands for: - be he a Communist infiltrator or a Shiite extremist. Against this threat the whole arsenal of military might is mobilised'. To fight fire with fire is depicted by many movies as the most effective way to deal with terrorism (*Nighthawks*, *Invasion U.S.A*, *Delta Force*). Terrorism is now no longer the brainchild of twisted minds, but a form of proxy warfare – organised, equipped, and paid for in secret by rogue states like the Soviet Union or Iran. The message is that terrorism can not claim any "true" political underpinning or legitimate causes – it's either the product of "loony" fanaticism or of a criminal enterprise orchestrated by its secret paymasters.

The 1990s were both a time of easing and one of heightening awareness of new threats: since the ideological struggle of the Cold War had ended, the former stereotypical villains lost much of their symbolic value. They kept appearing, like the East-Germans in *Die Hard*, but had morphed into a criminal syndicate. At the same time 90s cinema envisioned a crumbling world order with failing state power, the emergence of asymmetric threats, and new players in the form of transnational networks. In doing so, the movies captured the phenomenon of decentralised local initiatives replacing the old-fashioned state sponsored terrorism of the 1970s and 1980s quite accurately. Films like *The Siege* or *Executive Decision* made it clear that the mode of operation had changed as well. The first attack on the World Trade Center in 1993 and the Embassy bombings of 1998 in East Africa had demonstrated that the "new Jackals" aimed to achieve spectacular violence against highly symbolic targets while also inflicting mass casualties. Prior to that, terrorist groups had observed some limits of violence since it would have weakened their base of popular support. The terrorist cells in *The Siege* and in *Executive Decision* act according to this modus operandi: they orchestrate suicide bombings, rely on the media to broadcast their message, and intend to set off a chain reaction of escalating violence.

More recent movies deliberately aim to capture the phenomenon even more realistically. To utilize politically agenda-free terrorist figures as opponents would not fit the post 9/11 environment. Yet while terrorism is the prime subject of several popular TV series – e.g. *24*, *The Unit*, or *Sleeper Cell* - it was picked up only reluctantly by the Hollywood movie industry after

2001. The commercial failure of *Body of Lies* or *The Kingdom* had apparently put a lid – at least temporarily – on terrorism-related movies.

The relationship between real and (movie) reel terrorism

Since the public's understanding of terrorism is clearly affected by the latter's mass cultural representation, the question remains if this can also be applied to terrorists themselves? There is indeed some evidence that terrorists picked ideas from movie scenarios or imitated what they saw on the screen. Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1965), a dramatization of the real life conflict between Algerian FLN rebels and the French army, inspired many left-wing revolutionary groups as well as terrorists: it is said that the IRA, the Tamil Tigers, and the Black Panthers screened it to their members for training purposes since *The Battle of Algiers* quite authentically depicts the inner workings and dynamics of an insurgent struggle and the alleged effectiveness of urban terrorism.[22] In Western Germany, the leader of the Red Army Faction (RAF), Andreas Baader, was an keen student of Pontecorvo's pseudo-documentary. According to his biographers Klaus Stern and Jörg Herrmann, Baader modelled the "Dreierschlag" of 1970 – the simultaneous robbing of three banks in West Berlin – after a key scene in his favourite movie.[23] A more recent example was used as evidence in a British trial of an Al Qaeda sympathiser in 2006. When investigators played a video he owned – *Die Hard with a Vengeance* (1995) – the tape abruptly ended after 60 minutes and instead began to show pictures of New York landmarks, while a voice in the background imitated explosion sounds.[24]

In regard to 9/11, several commentators like Tom Engelhardt even assumed that the terrorists had modelled their plot after a Hollywood scenario: "What if those pre-existing frameworks hadn't been quite so well primed to emerge in no time at all? What if we (and our enemies as well) hadn't been at the movies all those years?, they asked"[25] To claim that terrorism is simply a form of copy cat crime is of course far-fetched – even in the case of *The Battle of Algiers* it is very difficult to determine if there was any direct nexus between viewing it and the practical application of insurrectionary tactics depicted therein. What is certain is that the movie's inspirational force roused passions, made people identify with the cause of anti-colonialism and international struggles that were in full swing at that time. What can be assumed is that violent extremists tend to get inspiration and ideas from popular culture like everyone else, but for different reasons and motives.

Conclusion

For Hollywood movies terrorism was first of all a thrilling piece of entertainment: the plots are all but spectacular, the villains mostly represent archetypes of "evil", and ultimately the threat is averted by righteous forces. Although as exaggerated and deformed Hollywood's interpretation of terrorism may be, the movies can be "read" in an insightful way: as a sort of "snapshot" of the

cultural context from which they originate, the cinematic texts tell us about prevailing mass fears, fantasies, and projections about terrorism. They represent the status quo of the public discourse at that time, reproducing hegemonic ideas promoted by many politicians, the media, or think tank experts. Thus, both the meaning of terrorism and what is projected into it can not be understood, without paying close attention to what is happening on the cinema screen. This "mirror(ed) image" of terrorism is revealing because ultimately it expresses certain dimensions we prepare to confront in real life: the spectre of unspeakable atrocities, the notion of extra-legal violence to be employed against terrorists, or the establishment of a "state of siege" ending all civil liberties.

Of course there are also risks associated with this: the review of relevant movies demonstrates that the mass culture representation of terrorism is problematic due to the highly suggestive effect of imaginary combined with ideological subtext. In Hollywood movies terrorism is essentialised – that is, often presented as de-politicised and merely pathological or criminal. Its cinematic representation generates a high degree of assurance in the effectiveness of simple, quick solutions to highly complex problems. It also legitimises extra-legal and military approaches while denouncing compromise and negotiations as appeasement. In short, it tends to reduce reality's complexity to a simple dichotomy of good and evil. The result is a kind of false conscience that hampers a better understanding of terrorism and political violence in regard to its causes, intentions, and the spectrum of possibilities for counteraction. There can be little doubt that cinema and popular culture in general can provide valuable insight into shifting political and ideological trends, re-arrangements of frameworks beyond the obvious public fascination with the subject of terrorism.[26]

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Notes

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