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Form Approved  
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1. REPORT DATE <b>2011</b>		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2011 to 00-00-2011</b>	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>Radicalization, Linkage, and Diversity: Current Trends in Terrorism in Europe</b>				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>RAND Corporation, National Defense Research Institute, 1776 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA, 90407-2138</b>				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

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# Radicalization, Linkage, and Diversity

Current Trends in  
Terrorism in Europe

Lorenzo Vidino

Prepared for the Office of the Secretary of Defense

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NATIONAL DEFENSE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The research described in this report was prepared for the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD). The research was conducted within the RAND National Defense Research Institute, a federally funded research and development center sponsored by OSD, the Joint Staff, the Unified Combatant Commands, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the defense agencies, and the defense Intelligence Community under Contract W74V8H-06-C-0002.

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Published 2011 by the RAND Corporation  
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## Preface

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Although it has not suffered a successful attack since the July 7, 2005, bombings in London, Europe perceives itself to be under a constant threat from jihadist-inspired terrorism. Based on a survey of legal documents, intelligence reports, academic literature, and media sources, and on conversations with experts and government officials, this paper provides an overview of current trends in jihadism in Europe from an operational perspective.

This research was jointly sponsored by the Modeling and Simulation Coordination Office of the Office of the Secretary of Defense/Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation, the Inter-agency Task Force of Special Operations Command, and the Joint Staff/J-8. It was conducted within the International Security and Defense Policy Center of the RAND National Defense Research Institute, a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the Unified Combatant Commands, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the defense agencies, and the defense Intelligence Community.

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## Summary

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Although it has not suffered a successful attack since the July 7, 2005, bombings in London, Europe perceives itself to be under a constant threat from jihadist-inspired terrorism. Terrorist organizations inspired by other ideologies are still active throughout the European Union, but the 2010 Europol annual report clearly states that “Islamist terrorism is still perceived as the biggest threat to most Member States,” and statements from the highest-ranking officials in most European countries confirm this observation.<sup>1</sup> Authorities base their assessment on the extensive intelligence and investigative activities directed against jihadist networks taking place in virtually every European country. On average, in fact, European authorities arrest some 200 individuals and thwart a handful of plots of jihadist inspiration every year.<sup>2</sup> Keeping the global scenario in mind, European authorities deem this dynamic likely to continue in the foreseeable future.

Based on an extensive survey of indictments, court transcripts, intelligence reports, academic literature, and media sources, and on conversations with experts and government officials from various European countries, the United States, and a handful of non-Western countries, this paper seeks to provide an overview of the current trends in jihadism in Europe from an operational perspective. Its main finding is that most European plots appear to be independent, but the most-serious ones tend to have extensive operational connections to groups operating outside of Europe. Moreover, it finds that, contrary to common characterizations, there is little evidence indicating that al Qaeda and affiliated organizations operating outside of Europe conduct direct efforts to recruit European Muslims.

For the most part, in fact, the absorption of jihadist ideology by European Muslims is an independent process, taking place individually or, most often, with a small group of friends. In several cases, radical preachers, veterans of various conflicts, webmasters of radical websites, and, more generally, charismatic “jihad entrepreneurs” act as radicalizing agents, further exposing already sympathetic individuals to jihadist ideology. Although it is not uncommon for these radicalizing agents to possess various connections to al Qaeda and affiliated movements, rarely do they act as formal al Qaeda agents on a radicalizing drive. Similarly, al Qaeda and affiliated movements do regularly issue various forms of communications designed to attract European Muslims. However, these efforts are directed to the masses, and there is little indication of direct involvement in the radicalization of individuals. By the same token,

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<sup>1</sup> Europol, 2010, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> According to Europol data, European countries (excluding the United Kingdom) arrested 297 Islamist terrorists in 2008–2009 (see Europol, 2009, 2010). The United Kingdom does not differentiate according to ideology the individuals it arrests for terrorism-related crime. In 2008–2009 it arrested 190 individuals for terrorism-related crimes, an unspecified majority of whom were Islamists (see Home Office, 2009).

the cases in which al Qaeda sent members to Europe to recruit new affiliates are few and far between.

A significantly more common occurrence is the formation of a linkage between self-radicalized individuals or clusters based in Europe on one hand and al Qaeda and like-minded groups on the other, with the former reaching out to the latter. Moreover, based on an analysis of all plots against Europe between 2006 and 2010, this paper shows that this linkage is often the element that determines the level of sophistication of the plot. Although no completely successful attack has been registered in Europe since 2005, it is evident that attacks planned by individuals and networks with operational ties to groups operating outside of Europe tend to be more elaborate, professional, and potentially lethal than those hatched by individuals and networks who operate in complete independence. Training in handling explosives received overseas is, in most cases, the factor determining this difference. The paper also analyzes other current trends, from the travel destinations of aspiring jihadists to the growing demographic diversity of Europe-based networks.

## Acknowledgments

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Although the responsibility for the views expressed in this paper is exclusively mine, I have benefited enormously from the help and comments of various friends and colleagues. At the RAND Corporation, I would like to thank first and foremost Todd Helmus, whose help was instrumental in conceiving and developing this project. Special mention should also be made of Ambassador James Dobbins, Nora Bensahel, Kim Cragin, Erin-Elizabeth Johnson, Jocelyn Lofstrom, Mike Lostumbo, and Joy Merck. Outside of RAND, useful feedback was provided by Raffaello Pantucci and Marc Sageman. I would also like to thank Javier Jordan, Alexander Klimburg, Morten Skjoldager, and handful of officials in several countries for their help in clarifying certain details. Finally, I am particularly indebted to the paper's two peer reviewers, Peter Neumann and Angel Rabasa.



## The Evolution of European Jihadism

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The first logical step in this analysis of current trends in jihadism in Europe from an operational perspective is providing a brief overview of the evolution of European jihadist networks since their origin. Scholars have developed various approaches to characterizing this evolution, but the presence of jihadist networks in Europe can be divided into four phases: the establishment phase, the globalized phase, the homegrown phase, and, finally, the linkage phase.<sup>1</sup> It must be noted that the shifts from one phase to another are not always clear-cut and that they have neither taken place at a uniform speed throughout Europe nor necessarily erased all the elements of the preceding phase.

The first phase took place between the late 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, as a few hundred experienced jihadist militants established a base in Europe. Seeking to avoid repression in their native countries, veterans of the Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union and members of various militant organizations from the Middle East and North Africa sought, and in most cases received, political asylum in several European countries. Europe's freedoms, the presence of large diaspora communities, and a lack of attention from local authorities made Europe an ideal logistical base from which militants could continue their activities.<sup>2</sup> Such organizations as the Egyptian Gamaa Islamiya and the Algerian Armed Islamic Group created sophisticated propaganda, fundraising, and recruitment networks that provided crucial support to their own efforts in North Africa.<sup>3</sup>

This first phase is characterized by the operational separation of the various groups operating in Europe. Although they all shared the same ideological bases, outfits from different countries tended to maintain a certain degree of autonomy from one another. Aside from isolated episodes, in fact, coordination among them tended to be limited to statements of support of their brethren's cause. Another defining operational characteristic of the networks of the first phase was their hierarchical and well-defined structure. Algerian, Egyptian, and Tunisian networks, arguably the three most extensive networks in Europe at the time, were organized under a strict chain of command whose centralized leadership directed a well-compartmentalized structure of cells in all aspects of their activities.<sup>4</sup> By the same token, roles and responsibilities within each cell were predefined and strictly enforced. Militants' travels outside of Europe for

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<sup>1</sup> Several studies outlining different yet partially overlapping ways to categorize the various phases of European jihadism have been conducted over the last few years. See, for example, Nesser, 2008a, pp. 924–946; Taarnby, 2005; and Vidino, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Vidino, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin and Simon, 2002; Botha, 2008, Chapter 5.

<sup>4</sup> Neumann and Rogers, 2007, pp. 23–26.



training or fighting were facilitated by well-established support networks that provided documents, safe houses, and smuggling routes.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, it is noteworthy that, during this first phase, most networks showed no violent intent toward their new host countries, which they viewed only as temporary and extremely convenient bases of operations. Although it was apparent from their sermons and propaganda that European jihadists strongly disapproved of Europe's liberal moral standards, secularized societies, foreign policies, and perceived anti-Muslim biases, they tended to target only the regimes of their countries of origin. European countries were spared the militants' furor, provided they did not interfere with the militants' struggles in North Africa and the Middle East. In fact, the only violent acts against a European country carried out during this phase were the series of attacks that bloodied France in 1994 and 1995, a campaign orchestrated by Algerian militants to punish the French government for its support of the Algerian regime during the African country's civil war.<sup>6</sup>

The second phase of jihadism in Europe slowly took shape during the second half of the 1990s. By 1998, Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri had perfected al Qaeda's reorganization in Afghanistan, creating a global platform that was formalized with the launch of the World Islamic Front Against Jews and Crusaders.<sup>7</sup> Al Qaeda's project was the zenith of a phenomenon that had been under way throughout the 1990s in the Afghan training camps; on the battlefields of Bosnia, Chechnya, and Kashmir; and in the most-radical mosques of a handful of European cities. Thanks to these interactions, various jihadist groups operating throughout Europe began increasingly to work together, their cooperation now transcending simple moral support and becoming operational.

Moreover, Bin Laden and other al Qaeda leaders expressed the idea that the best strategy to topple secular regimes in the Muslim world was to end the economic and military support these regimes received from the United States and other Western countries.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the jihadist movement had to switch its emphasis to attacking the United States and making a continued American presence in the Middle East too painful to bear. Al Qaeda, in Bin Laden's mind, was to become the umbrella organization for jihadist groups from throughout the Muslim world; united under its banner, all would fight together against both secular regimes in the Muslim world and their protectors in the West.

The result of these two developments was that, by the end of the 1990s, many of the networks that had been formed throughout Europe had fallen, with varying degrees of allegiance, into the orbit of Bin Laden's project. Al Qaeda established only a small direct presence in Europe and for the most part co-opted already existing networks, particularly the Algerian ones.<sup>9</sup> Because of their familiarity with the West, Europe-based militants led two of the first operations planned by the jihadist movement against the American homeland: the failed Millennium bombing of the Los Angeles International Airport in 2000 and the attacks of September 11, 2001.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Nesser, 2008b.

<sup>6</sup> Kepel, 2002, pp. 8–13; Lia and Kjøk, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 2004, pp. 63–70.

<sup>8</sup> *The 9/11 Commission Report*, p. 67.

<sup>9</sup> Gunaratna, 2002, p. 114.

<sup>10</sup> *United States v Abu Doha*, 2001.

The two attacks are indicative of important developments. The Millennium bombing showed that a network that was still heavily involved in a bloody civil war in its country of origin (Algeria) was willing to put its forces at the service of al Qaeda's global project, signaling a clear break with the national focus maintained by jihadist groups in the past.<sup>11</sup> By the same token, the core 9/11 hijackers, having radicalized together in Hamburg, represented a clear indication that Europe was home to small clusters of militants that, although unaffiliated with any organization at their outset, could be easily co-opted and used by the global jihadist movement.

Despite these shifts, Europe did not become a primary target of jihadist networks during this phase. Algerian networks did plan some attacks in Europe during the second phase, but, aside from the 2000 plot to bomb the annual Christmas market in Strasbourg's Place Kléber, most of them did not mature beyond the initial stage. Europe was home to a growing number of militants, many of whom, unlike the pioneers of the first phase, had radicalized in Europe itself. It was also a major logistical hub for various jihadist outfits, and, tellingly, most of the attacks perpetrated by al Qaeda at the time had at least some link to Europe. Yet, Europe itself remained only an occasional target.

The events of September 11, 2001, caused a seismic change in jihadist networks worldwide and launched the beginning of the third phase in Europe. The resulting U.S. invasion of Afghanistan brought havoc to al Qaeda's leadership. Some of its top leaders, including those in charge of coordinating operations throughout the world, were captured or killed. Others were driven underground and rendered unable to communicate effectively. The Afghan training camps that had served as a meeting point for militants from all over the world were bombed into ashes. The loss of the Afghan sanctuary was a major blow to al Qaeda, which became, at least temporarily, unable to direct the activities of its affiliated networks worldwide, including in Europe.<sup>12</sup>

As U.S. forces hunted down al Qaeda in Afghanistan, police and intelligence agencies throughout the world began dismantling networks linked to the organization. This global crackdown further reduced the ability of the al Qaeda core to control its cells and affiliated groups worldwide. Arrests were particularly numerous in Europe, where authorities often moved against networks they had been monitoring for years. At least two plots to carry out attacks in Europe (one in Belgium and one in the United Kingdom) were uncovered and thwarted in the immediate aftermath of 9/11.

Military actions in Afghanistan and a less permissive environment in Europe rendered communications between al Qaeda's leadership and networks in Europe difficult. Neither was completely annihilated in the crackdown, but the chaotic situation that followed the loss of the Afghan sanctuary forced Europe-based jihadists to act in a different fashion. Although a certain level of coordination still existed, European networks began to operate more autonomously, remaining loyal to al Qaeda's ideology and goals but becoming virtually independent in their day-to-day operations.<sup>13</sup> As Marc Sageman writes in his influential book *Leaderless Jihad*,

<sup>11</sup> The intensity of the connectivity between Algerian networks operating in Europe and groups operating in Algeria (whether the Salafist Group for the Preaching and Combat at the time of the Millennium bombing or al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb today) is widely debated. See, for example, Marret, 2010, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Hoffman, 2004, pp. 551–552.

<sup>13</sup> Hoffman, 2004, p. 552.

[t]he present threat has evolved from a structured group of al Qaeda masterminds, controlling vast resources and issuing commands, to a multitude of informal local groups trying to emulate their predecessors by conceiving and executing operations from the bottom up. These “homegrown” wannabes form a scattered global network, a leaderless jihad.<sup>14</sup>

If outside pressure was arguably the main driver behind this shift, the demographic change taking place inside European jihadist networks also played a crucial role. Small numbers of European-born Muslims had joined jihadist networks well before 9/11, but the vast majority of militants operating in Europe in the 1980s and 1990s were first-generation immigrants. After 2001, due both to the waves of arrests and deportations that targeted the first generation of militants and to the surge in numbers of European Muslims joining jihadist networks, the trend was rapidly reversed.

Although patterns differ, in some cases quite significantly, from country to country, by 2003, many European authorities began to witness the growth of small clusters of homegrown jihadist networks. A quintessential example of these networks is the so-called Hofstad group, the loose network of jihadists that came to life in late 2002 between The Hague and Amsterdam.<sup>15</sup> From an operational perspective, its main characteristics, often seen in similar networks, were

- **Lack of recruitment and self-radicalization.** In the 1990s, individuals were typically introduced to jihadist ideology through personal interactions with preachers and recruiters in such places as prisons and radical mosques. In most cases, an older, more experienced militant guided this process and subsequently inserted the new adept in one of the network’s compartmentalized cells. Although a more senior, self-styled Syrian preacher did play a role in the initial formation of the Hofstad group, this process was largely absent in the Hofstad case and in many of the networks that had appeared throughout Europe by the mid-2000s. Individuals tend to radicalize independently, often through the Internet, or in small groups of peers, but with little or no outside intervention.
- **Lack of hierarchy and structure.** Unlike the hierarchically structured cells of the 1990s, most homegrown networks lack the clearly dominant, charismatic figure of the recruiter at the top and, in consequence, develop a more egalitarian spirit in their internal dynamics. Members who are most knowledgeable, most faithful in attending meetings, and most charismatic naturally stand out, but they do not generally take on the traditional role of a leader. In the absence of a formal structure, every member is free to act on his own, without awaiting the direction of some superior. More closely resembling street gangs than the jihadist groups of the 1990s, homegrown clusters do not have a clear division of roles or a compartmentalized structure. It is telling that, in the case of the Hofstad group, apparently no other member of the network was aware that Mohammed Bouyeri, one of Hofstad’s key members, had planned to assassinate Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh.
- **Lack of ties to external organizations.** The homegrown clusters that have appeared throughout Europe since the mid-2000s often lack any connection to al Qaeda or any other outfit. Although some occasionally manage to link up with external forces, these

<sup>14</sup> Sageman, 2008, p. vii.

<sup>15</sup> Vidino, 2007.

connections seldom have implications at the operational level. From day-to-day logistical operations to planning attacks, homegrown clusters operate independently. Although they perceive themselves as part of a global movement and share all aspects of jihadist ideology, such clusters as the Hofstad group possess no operational ties to al Qaeda or its affiliated movements.

- **Increased focus on domestic issues and targets.** Although such global events as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict unquestionably contribute to the radicalization of the new generation of European jihadists, events that take place in Europe—such as the Danish cartoon controversies—and the foreign policies of individual countries play an increasingly important role in the process. As the motives for European jihadists’ radicalization have become increasingly domestic, so have their targets.<sup>16</sup> The Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst (AIVD), the Netherlands’ domestic intelligence agency, describes this new phenomenon as “European jihad,” a new phase of jihadism in which the key actors are “European Muslims who are prepared to commit attacks in their own country” and are motivated primarily by domestic issues.<sup>17</sup> As homegrown networks began planning attacks in several countries, Europe shifted from occasional to frequent terrorist target. The consequence of the lack of ties to external organizations was that most of the attack attempts were highly amateurish. Devoid of the operational knowhow their predecessors had obtained in the training camps of Afghanistan, homegrown jihadists either failed in their attempts or conducted extremely unsophisticated attacks.

The growth of homegrown networks does not mean that the traditional model of the 1990s has been completely supplanted. Rather, the current panorama of jihadist networks in Europe is an extremely diverse one and can be visualized as a continuum. At one extreme, we find homegrown groups à la Hofstad: small clusters of mostly European-born radicals with no ties to external groups and that act with absolute operational independence. At the opposite end of the spectrum, we see compartmentalized cells contained in a well-structured network and subjected to a hierarchical structure, as was the model of jihadist groups operating in Europe in the 1990s.

Between these two extremes is a whole spectrum of realities, positioned according to the level of autonomy of the group. The most common model seems to be that of the July 7, 2005, London bombers: a small group of young men, most of whom were born and raised in Europe, who know each other either from the mosque or from the neighborhood and become radicalized in Europe.<sup>18</sup> Some of these locally groomed jihadist “wannabes” travel abroad to gain from various al Qaeda–affiliated groups the necessary bomb-making expertise that will allow the group to jump from an amateurish cluster of friends to a full-fledged terrorist cell.

The presence of a linkage between homegrown networks and al Qaeda and affiliated movements (AQAM) characterizes the fourth and current phase of jihadism in Europe. The line between Europe and AQAM was never completely broken, even in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. Europe-based North African networks, both homegrown and traditional, retained ties

<sup>16</sup> See Crone and Harrow, 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst, 2006, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> House of Commons, 2006, pp. 13–21.

to Algerian and Moroccan groups throughout the early 2000s. And, even in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, UK-based homegrown clusters consistently managed to retain or establish ties to AQAM in Pakistan.<sup>19</sup> These ties, often built through the family connections of many British Muslims of Pakistani descent, allowed British jihadists to acquire a level of expertise vastly superior to that of their continental European counterparts. Therefore, not surprisingly, by the mid-2000s, not only was the United Kingdom the most frequently targeted country, but several plots against it were significantly more sophisticated than the plots hatched by homegrown networks in the rest of Europe.

Yet, by the second half of the 2000s, the pattern witnessed by British authorities began to be observed by their counterparts throughout Europe. In its 2008 annual report, Europol tellingly stated that “the foiled attacks in Germany and Denmark in 2007 demonstrated that contacts between networks in the EU and al-Qaeda–affiliated groups in the Pakistan-Afghanistan region are not a problem for the UK alone.”<sup>20</sup> Homegrown clusters throughout Europe slowly managed to establish links to AQAM, traveling outside of Europe to obtain training and operational guidance. Because few established such ties through family connections, as British jihadists did, many succeeded in linking up with AQAM in other ways, including through the Internet. Linkages were established not just with al Qaeda and affiliated groups in Pakistan but also with al Qaeda offshoots in Yemen and Somalia.

This fourth phase of jihadism in Europe is arguably the most complex, characterized by the lack of uniformity in the attributes of the networks operating on the ground. Although the pioneers of the first phase have virtually disappeared, networks with characteristics typical of the second and third phases are very much present. The novelty of the fourth phase is the increased frequency of the linkage between homegrown networks from several European countries on one hand and AQAM on the other. The next chapter describes the operational impact of this linkage.

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<sup>19</sup> Sageman, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Europol, 2008.

## Linkage as the Key

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To understand the recent dynamics of jihadism in Europe, it is necessary to clarify the difference between three separate, albeit interconnected, phenomena: radicalization, recruitment, and linkage. Although various scholars and institutions adopt different definitions, *radicalization* can be described, in the words of Charles Allen, as “the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence, as a method to effect societal change.”<sup>1</sup> Over the last few years, scholars and policymakers have devoted significant attention to understanding the reasons why individuals radicalize, often achieving scarce results. Radicalization is a complex and highly individualized process determined by the interaction of various structural and individual factors, and it is therefore very difficult to exactly capture in all its dynamics. From an operational point of view, it is nevertheless possible to observe that, in the case of the vast majority of European Muslims who join jihadist networks, radicalization is a bottom-up process.

Studies by Sageman have convincingly demonstrated that the popular image of a terrorist recruiter “lurking in mosques, ready to subvert naïve and passive worshippers” does not describe reality, particularly in Western Europe.<sup>2</sup> A top-down process in which a member of a jihadist group seeks out a potential recruit, introduces him to jihadist ideology, grooms him, and eventually inserts him into the group is a highly uncommon phenomenon. A similar pattern was more common in some of the North African networks of the 1990s, where individuals were often introduced by relatives or friends to midranking members of jihadist groups who oversaw the entire radicalization process from the beginning.<sup>3</sup> There are reports that members of al Shabaab, the Somali al Qaeda affiliate, approach nonradicalized individuals in Europe with the idea of grooming them and eventually enlisting them in the group.<sup>4</sup>

For the most part, however, the absorption of jihadist ideology by European Muslims is an independent process, taking place individually or with a small group of friends. In several cases, radical preachers, veterans of various conflicts, webmasters of radical websites, and, more generally, charismatic “jihad entrepreneurs” act as radicalizing agents, further exposing already sympathetic individuals to jihadist ideology. Although it is not uncommon for these radicalizing agents to possess various connections to AQAM, rarely do they act as formal al Qaeda agents on a radicalizing drive. By the same token, there is no question that websites and other

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<sup>1</sup> Allen, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Sageman, 2004, p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> Nesser, 2009, p. 89.

<sup>4</sup> Interviews with various European intelligence officials (The Hague and Brussels, December 2009; Paris, February 2010; and London, April 2010).

forms of propaganda created by AQAM serve the purpose of radicalizing European Muslims. However, these efforts are directed to the masses, and there are few indications of direct, face-to-face involvement of AQAM in the radicalization of individuals.

If radicalization is largely a bottom-up process, so is a closely related phenomenon: *recruitment*. Recruitment is the process through which a terrorist group inserts an already radicalized individual into its ranks.<sup>5</sup> In the case of many terrorist organizations outside of Europe, from Hamas to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, it is fair to speak of a top-down effort, where members of the group act as enlistment officers, scouring schools, social clubs, and other venues for new militants.<sup>6</sup> Al Qaeda–affiliated groups act in a similar manner in various parts of the world, from Somalia to the Philippines. But, in Europe, the dynamics are quite different. Although some exceptions do exist (Europe-based al Shabaab support networks, for example, reportedly conduct what can be properly considered recruitment efforts), there is little evidence of a concerted effort by AQAM to recruit already radicalized European Muslims. Contrary to public perceptions, there are few indications of a consistent top-down effort by AQAM to attract and recruit new militants on the Old Continent by deploying recruiters to spot new talent on the ground.

What is instead a significantly more common occurrence is the *linkage* between the already radicalized individual or cluster in Europe and AQAM. And, in the vast majority of cases, this linkage is initiated by the individual or cluster rather than by AQAM. If any form of loosely defined recruitment exists, it is because the “applicant” reached out to the “employer,” and not the other way around. Limiting its assessment to the Netherlands but incidentally describing a trend seen throughout Europe, in 2010, the AIVD stated that “contacts between active jihadist networks or individuals here and long-established transnational networks elsewhere” are established in various ways. But, added the Dutch intelligence agency, “the initiative for first contact usually seems to come from the Dutch side; there appears to exist no planned recruitment strategy on the part of the transnational networks concerned.”<sup>7</sup> Aside from limited exceptions, recruitment in Western Europe exists not as a traditional, top-down phenomenon but rather only in the sense of a bottom-up process that is better defined as *linkage*.

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<sup>5</sup> Gerwehr and Daly, 2006, pp. 73–87.

<sup>6</sup> Helmus, 2009, p. 77.

<sup>7</sup> Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst, 2010, p. 6.

## Analysis of Case Studies

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Although the abovementioned dynamics of radicalization, recruitment, and linkage are at play in all sorts of jihadist activities, including fundraising, propaganda, and traveling overseas for training or fighting, they become particularly relevant in the actual planning of terror attacks. The author therefore decided to create a database listing all plots against targets inside the European Union from January 1, 2006, to December 31, 2010, and to analyze their characteristics and level of connectivity with AQAM (see Table 3.1 at the end of this chapter). Before outlining the evidence derived from the database, it is necessary to explain the methodology employed in creating it.

In the database, incidents are considered plots and are therefore included when they involve the case of an individual or a network that executed, attempted to execute, or concretely planned to execute an act of violence motivated by jihadist ideology. The first two instances are inherently easier to identify; the third can require difficult and subjective choices. Therefore, a plot is deemed to have been planned either when authorities possessed concrete evidence pointing to some concrete plan being hatched, irrespective of whether explosives and weapons were found in connection with it, or when there were no known plans but an individual or group was found in possession of weapons or explosives and there was clear evidence that those involved embraced jihadist ideology and expressed violent views.

Adopting this admittedly broad definition of *plot*, the author of the database decided to include some “borderline” cases. First, irrespective of each country’s relevant legal definitions, which can differ tremendously, the author decided to include the cases of individuals or clusters that clearly embraced jihadist ideology and were found with explosives. In many of these cases, authorities were not certain of the target or whether a plot was actually in the making but could only make an informed assumption that, given the suspects’ ideology and the presence of explosives, some attack was likely being contemplated.

Second, cases that were not officially considered acts of terrorism by courts are included if they meet the abovementioned requirements. The 2006 shooting of an Oslo synagogue by a known jihadist sympathizer, for example, was considered simply an act of vandalism by a Norwegian judge (although prosecutors had attempted to qualify it as an act of terror). Because legal definitions vary from country to country, acts of violence motivated by jihadist ideology are included irrespective of the legal developments of the case.

Third, the database includes cases in which individuals involved in an alleged plot were acquitted or not prosecuted, if it is clear that this outcome was due to legal reasons (such as the impossibility of introducing key evidence during the trial) and if authorities stood by their



claim that a plot was in the making. This was the case, for example, in the 2009 arrest of two clusters in Manchester and Liverpool with alleged links to al Qaeda.<sup>1</sup>

Although a broad definition of *plot* was adopted, not included in the database are

- cases in which an individual or a group made threats, in some cases quite specific, about a terror attack, if no evidence was uncovered to substantiate that any concrete planning existed. Even cases in which individuals were convicted for “making terrorist threats” are not included.<sup>2</sup>
- cases that authorities initially considered or suspected to be terrorist plots but, after closer scrutiny, were deemed not to be. That was the case, for example, in the dismantling of the Brussels-based network led by Malika El Aroud and Moez Garsallaoui by Belgian authorities in December 2008. Initially suspected of planning a suicide attack, possibly against the European Union summit, the members of the network were later charged and convicted only of recruiting for a terrorist organization. Because no evidence of any concrete plan for an attack was found, and because the charge was dropped by prosecutors during the trial, the case is not included in the database.
- cases that might well have been terror plots in the making but for which little or no evidence is publicly available. That was the case, for example, in the October 2010 plot, allegedly linked to al Qaeda, to execute Mumbai-style attacks in various European capitals. Although the plot was likely real, there are no publicly available indications that associated arrests were made in Europe, and all the information about it is vague or highly classified.
- instances in which there is no concrete evidence of a jihadist link. That was the case, for example, in the discovery of the five sticks of dynamite placed outside the Le Printemps department store in Paris in December 2008, allegedly by a group calling itself the Afghan Revolutionary Front. Various aspects of the case raise serious doubts about the group’s authenticity and motives.<sup>3</sup>
- plots planned inside the European Union but to be executed outside it. Plots targeting flights directed to or originating from Europe are, on the other hand, included in the database.
- cases in which individuals talked about possible attacks but there is no evidence of any concrete preparation for them. That was the case, for example, in the October 2009 arrest of two French brothers who discussed potential targets for attacks in France among themselves and with members of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) online. Because

<sup>1</sup> For an overview of this counterterrorism operation, known as Operation Pathway, see Carlisle, 2009. It is also telling that the United States has sought the extradition of Abid Naseer, the alleged ringleader of the Pathway network.

<sup>2</sup> That was the case, for example, in the 2008 conviction of Saeede Ghafoor, a British Muslim, for making threats to blow up a shopping center in England. Because no explosives and no concrete plans were found, and because there are other indications that Ghafoor’s plan was more than haphazard (for example, Ghafoor told a prison guard that he planned to bomb the Bluewater shopping center in Exeter and, when the guard pointed out that the center was actually in Kent, responded that “the plan is not finalised yet”), the incident was not included. See Crown Prosecution Service, undated-a, and “Man Admits Bluewater Bomb Threat,” 2008.

<sup>3</sup> “Explosifs au Printemps,” 2008.

French authorities stated that the men had “not committed material preparatory acts,” the incident is not included.<sup>4</sup>

- cases of training for terrorist purposes, whether conducted inside or outside the European Union
- cases against individuals found in possession of manuals and other writings to fabricate explosives, if no explosives or concrete plans for attacks were also found
- a handful of potential cases that developed at the end of 2010. During the last two months of 2010, authorities in several European countries claimed to have thwarted various unrelated plots. Given the recency of the cases and the paucity of details revealed by authorities, the author has been unable to verify the specifics of these claims. For some of them, such as alleged plots that led to arrests in France,<sup>5</sup> Sweden,<sup>6</sup> Belgium,<sup>7</sup> and the Netherlands,<sup>8</sup> it was difficult at the time of writing to know whether a plot was indeed in the making. Fewer or no doubts exist that three instances that took place in December 2010—the Stockholm suicide bombing,<sup>9</sup> the arrest of 12 militants in Wales and England,<sup>10</sup> and the joint Danish-Swedish operation against a cluster allegedly targeting the *Jyllands-Posten* building in central Copenhagen<sup>11</sup>—were indeed plots. These latter cases are therefore included in the database, but, because doing so would be premature, no determination has been made concerning the existence of links between the plotters and AQAM.

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<sup>4</sup> Samuel, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> In November 2010, French authorities arrested five men who they claimed were planning attacks inside the country. French Interior Minister Brice Hortefeux went so far as to state that “one of the five said they were ready to die for the cause” (Vinocur, 2010). Few details have been provided, and it is impossible to verify details of the case at this time.

<sup>6</sup> In November 2010, authorities in Gothenburg arrested several men allegedly involved in a plot against a local shopping center. Few details have been provided, and it is impossible to verify details of the case at this time.

<sup>7</sup> In November 2010, Belgian authorities led an operation with ramifications in the Netherlands, Germany, and Austria against a network that was allegedly planning attacks, possibly in the Antwerp area. Few details have been provided, and it is impossible to verify details of the case at this time.

<sup>8</sup> In December 2010, Dutch authorities arrested 12 men of Somali origin in the Rotterdam area, accusing them of planning attacks in the Netherlands. Within a week, all arrestees were released, although authorities still consider some of them suspects. Few details have been provided, and it is impossible to verify details of the case at this time.

<sup>9</sup> On December 11, 2010, Taimour Abdulwahab al Abdaly, an Iraqi-born Swede and longtime resident of Luton, died when one of the six pipe bombs he was carrying exploded in a central Stockholm street. Although the dynamic is still unclear, it seems that al Abdaly, whose vehicle exploded a few seconds before the pipe bombs, was trying to reach the target of his alleged suicide attack when the explosives went off prematurely. Although this was obviously a terrorist attack, and although a suspected accomplice has been arrested in Scotland, it is unclear at this point whether al Abdaly acted independently or had operational connections to external actors.

<sup>10</sup> In December 2010, British authorities arrested 12 suspects in Cardiff, London, Birmingham, and Stoke-on-Trent, accusing them of planning attacks against various targets throughout central London. Although it is apparent that a plot was indeed in the making, it is unclear at this point whether the men were acting independently or had operational connections to external actors.

<sup>11</sup> In December 2010, Danish and Swedish authorities arrested five men in Copenhagen and Stockholm, accusing them of planning a Mumbai-style attack against the Copenhagen offices of *Jyllands-Posten*. Although it seems apparent that a plot was indeed in the making, it is unclear at this point whether the men were acting independently or had operational connections to external actors.

There are inherent and unavoidable flaws and limitations involved in compiling a database of terrorist plots. Some have to do with sources and the completeness of information. Having to rely mostly on open sources inevitably provides only a partial knowledge of each case. In most cases, a wealth of information was available, including court documents, intelligence reports, media reporting, and interviews with officials. In other cases, only newspaper clippings were available. In some cases, extensive information detailing the characteristics of the plot and the individuals involved in it were not available even to authorities themselves. It is therefore not unlikely that an incident categorized as independent was, in reality, not independent and that links between the plotters and AQAM have not yet been uncovered. The opposite is also feasible, as a complete knowledge of the dynamics of a case could show that such links, in reality, did not exist. Moreover, there is an obvious element of arbitrariness in categorizing plots one way or the other and even in deciding whether a certain incident constitutes or involved a plot. Some cases are unquestionably borderline, and the author does not seek to be categorical in his decisions, admitting that it would not be unreasonable to define some incidents differently.

**Table 3.1**  
**Plots Against Targets Inside the European Union from January 1, 2006, to December 31, 2010**

Date	Name	Country	Target	Outcome	Type
March 2006	San Petronio plot	Italy	Church in Bologna	Attackers arrested	Hybrid
July 2006	Cologne train bombings	Germany	Two regional trains	Bombs failed to detonate	Independent
August 2006	Transatlantic plot (Overt)	United Kingdom	Transatlantic airliners	Attackers arrested	Hybrid
September 2006	Vollsmose case	Denmark	Targets in Denmark	Attackers arrested	Independent
September 2006	Oslo synagogue shooting	Norway	Oslo synagogue	Shots fired at night, no victims	Independent
December 2006	Operación Duna	Spain	Possibly targets in Ceuta	Attackers arrested	Independent
January 2007	Beheading plot (Gamble)	United Kingdom	Beheading a soldier	Attackers arrested	Independent
May 2007	Kamel Bouchentouf	France	Targets in France and Luxemburg	Attacker arrested	Independent
June 2007	Doctors' plot	United Kingdom	Nightclub in London/Glasgow airport	Bombs failed to detonate; only the attacker was injured	Independent
September 2007	Glasvej case	Denmark	Possible targets in Copenhagen	Attackers arrested	Hybrid
September 2007	Operation Alberich/Sauerland plot	Germany	Club and military bases in Germany	Attackers arrested	Hybrid
December 2007	Hassan Tabbakh	United Kingdom	Unknown	Attacker arrested	Independent
January 2008	Operación Cantata	Spain	Barcelona metro	Attackers arrested	Hybrid
April 2008	Andrew Ibrahim	United Kingdom	Shopping center in Bristol	Attacker arrested	Independent

Table 3.1—Continued

Date	Name	Country	Target	Outcome	Type
May 2008	Nick Reilly	United Kingdom	Restaurant in Exeter	Only the attacker was injured	Independent
June 2008	Nicholas Roddis	United Kingdom	Unknown	Attacker arrested	Independent
August 2008	Krenar Lusha	United Kingdom	Unknown	Attacker arrested	Independent
September 2008	Jewel of Medina plot	United Kingdom	Publisher in London	Attackers arrested	Independent
December 2008	Macherio plot	Italy	Various targets in the Milan area	Attackers arrested	Independent
December 2008	Rany Arnaud	France	Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire headquarters in Levallois-Perret	Attacker arrested	Independent
April 2009	Operation Pathway	United Kingdom	Possible targets in Manchester	Attackers arrested	Hybrid
October 2009	Santa Barbara bombing	Italy	Military barracks in Milan	Only the attacker was injured	Independent
October 2009	Mickey Mouse Project/Headley case	Denmark	Targets in Copenhagen	Attacker arrested	External
December 2009	Christmas bombing	Holland	Transatlantic airliner	Bomb failed to detonate	Hybrid
December 2009	Muhidin Gelle	Denmark	Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard	Only the attacker was injured	Independent
February 2010	Rajib Karim/British Airways plot	United Kingdom	British Airways plane	Attacker arrested	Independent
March 2010	Lars Vilks plot	Ireland/Sweden	Swedish cartoonist Lars Vilks	Attackers arrested	Independent
May 2010	Roshonara Choudhry	United Kingdom	British Member of Parliament Stephen Timms	Timms was stabbed	Independent
August 2010	Lors Dukayev	Denmark	<i>Jyllands-Posten</i> building	Only the attacker was injured	Independent
September 2010	Oslo plot	Norway	Possible Chinese targets in Oslo	Attackers arrested	Hybrid
December 2010	Stockholm suicide bombing	Sweden	Unclear, but possible targets within central Stockholm	Bombs were detonated prematurely	Unclear
December 2010	London plot	United Kingdom	Possible targets throughout central London	Attackers arrested	Unclear
December 2010	<i>Jyllands-Posten</i> plot (Brandbergen network)	Denmark	<i>Jyllands-Posten</i> building in Copenhagen	Attackers arrested	Unclear

NOTE: The plot names used in this table are the names most commonly used in terrorism circles. Some are derived from the plot's targets, some from associated counterterrorism operations, and some from the names of the plotters themselves, the attack location, or still other factors.



## Classification of Plots

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With the caveats described in the previous chapter kept in mind, it is possible to categorize the plots hatched in Europe from 2006 to 2010 according to the continuum described in Chapter One. With a certain necessary level of oversimplification, it is possible to say that, of the 30 plots identified, excluding the three that were not categorized by type,

- 21 (70 percent) can be classified as independent. A plot is considered independent when the individual or cluster behind it acted with no apparent operational support from AQAM. Of those plots, some were quintessentially independent in the sense that they were carried out by attackers with no connection whatsoever not only to any group but even to any other like-minded individual. That was the case, for example, in the instances of quintessential “lone wolves,” such as Roshonara Choudhry.<sup>1</sup> Other plots were carried out by individuals who had some degree of contact with like-minded individuals or with AQAM. But a plot is considered independent if AQAM, although somehow connected to the perpetrator, had no operational involvement in the plot and if the linkage between the two did not translate into any enhancement of the plot’s quality. That was the case, for example, of Mohammed Muhidin Gelle, whose alleged links to al Shabaab in no way influenced the execution of his attack,<sup>2</sup> and of Rajib Karim, whose online communications with al Awlaki did not apparently provide him with any operational expertise.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Choudhry was a King’s College student who admitted radicalizing online by watching sermons of Yemen-based cleric Anwar al Awlaki and in May 2010 stabbed British Member of Parliament Stephen Timms to punish him for his support for the Iraq war.

<sup>2</sup> On January 1, 2010, Gelle, a 28-year-old Somali man and long-time Danish resident, forced his way into the Aarhus home of Kurt Westergaard, the cartoonist who had drawn one of the cartoons of the prophet Mohammed published by Danish daily *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005. Armed with an axe and a knife, Gelle attacked the 74-year-old cartoonist, who managed to hide in a panic room. Police officers shot Gelle in the knee and hand before arresting him. Danish security services revealed that Gelle “has close relations” to al Shabaab and that he “is also suspected of having been involved in terror-related activities during his stay in East Africa” (Politiets Efterretningstjeneste, undated). Gelle, in fact, had been arrested in Nairobi on July 30, 2009, along with four others, during a meeting of senior al Shabaab leaders. According to Kenyan authorities, the men were planning an attack against U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who visited the country in August 2009. Briefly detained, Gelle was deported to Denmark, and no charges were filed against him. Although it publicly praised the attack, al Shabaab did not claim responsibility for it. Most relevantly, there are no indications that the group had any operational involvement in the attack, which, incidentally, was highly amateurish in nature.

<sup>3</sup> Karim is a native of Bangladesh who obtained an information technology job with British Airways in Newcastle, England, in 2006. Already a member of the militant group Jammāt-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh in his native country, Karim admitted to obtaining the job and acting as a “liberal Muslim” during his time in Newcastle while in reality planning an attack all along. Through the Internet, Karim established communication with al Awlaki, the U.S.-born cleric affiliated with al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, expressing his desire to conduct actions against Britain. Karim was arrested in

- one (3.33 percent) can be classified as external. A plot is considered external if it was conceived, planned, and executed by AQAM without any support or participation from individuals inside Europe. In reality, the one external plot (the Mickey Mouse Project/Headley case) could also be categorized as a hybrid plot, since David Coleman Headley reportedly sought to recruit various Europe-based militants to carry out the attack.<sup>4</sup>
- eight (26.66 percent) can be classified as hybrid. In these cases, a homegrown group that formed independently in Europe managed to establish some ties to AQAM and obtain operational support from it. The level of support from AQAM differed in intensity in different cases. In some cases, AQAM trained individuals and sent them back to Europe with instructions to carry out attacks against specified or unspecified targets. In other cases, the connection was limited to a short training stint with the group, and, upon returning to Europe, the European militants acted without any involvement of the group that provided the training. But, for a plot to be categorized as hybrid, the linkage between the Europe-based individual or cluster and AQAM has to have had an impact on the plot's planning or execution, providing the plotters with some level of professional expertise. It must be noted that in none of these hybrid cases was there evidence that AQAM attempted to formally recruit those involved in plotting attacks. Rather, a linkage was established via the initiative of the Europe-based cluster.

The data clearly show that independent plots are by a large margin the most common kind. These numbers are consistent with patterns seen in previous years. In a 2009 report that analyzed not just plots but, more broadly, all arrests for terrorism-related activities, Europol noted that “two thirds of the individuals arrested on suspicion of involvement in Islamist terrorism could not be linked to terrorist organizations known to the authorities.” Europol concluded that this trend

could be seen as an indication of the existence of individuals or groups unaffiliated to a terrorist organization but adhering to a common ideology of global *jihad*, as promoted by *al-Qaeda*. It also underlines the fact that *al-Qaeda* is evolving into a sort of franchise organisation, which acts as a point of reference for independent terrorist groups or individuals.<sup>5</sup>

Sageman's analysis of jihadist plots against the West (which included not just Europe but also North America and Australia) between 2004 and 2008 yielded similar results. According to his database, in fact, 78 percent of the plots against the West originated in “autonomous homegrown groups without any connection, direction or control from al-Qaeda Core or its allies.”<sup>6</sup> Sageman's data also show that 60 percent of “global neo-jihadi terrorist networks from 2004 onwards did not have any formal training from foreign terrorist groups.”<sup>7</sup> It seems there-

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February 2010 and convicted a year later of four counts of preparing acts of terrorism, allegedly seeking to bomb a British Airways plane. Despite the frequent email communication between Karim and al Awlaki, in which the latter urged the former to scout targets, British authorities have not produced any evidence indicating that al Awlaki, AQAP, or any other group provided Karim with any operational skills.

<sup>4</sup> The Mickey Mouse Project, as it was called by the conspirators, was the plan hatched by U.S.-based militant Headley (aka Daood Sayed Gilani) and senior al Qaeda planner Ilyas Kashmiri to carry out attacks in Denmark, specifically against *Jyllands-Posten* (either the paper's Aarhus headquarters or its centrally located Copenhagen offices, both of which Headley scouted).

<sup>5</sup> Europol, 2009, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> Sageman, 2009a.

<sup>7</sup> Sageman, 2009a.

fore apparent that, no matter what samples, definitions, and scope are adopted in the analysis, the evidence clearly shows that the majority of European (and Western) plots, networks, and militants are homegrown or independent in nature.

However, this quantitative result should not preclude a qualitative analysis of the data. Although it is unquestionably true that the majority of plots are independent, it is also equally true that the most-sophisticated and most-dangerous plots are those involving a linkage with AQAM. Deciding what qualifies a plot as “serious” is an inevitably arbitrary and speculative task, particularly when complete information is not always available. Using a set of criteria similar to those adopted by Paul Cruickshank, this paper considers a plot serious if it killed or could have reasonably killed a significant number of people (at least a dozen) and if the alleged perpetrators had already acquired the necessary weapons and explosives with detonators.<sup>8</sup> According to these criteria, only ten of the 30 plots can be considered “serious.”<sup>9</sup> Of these ten serious plots, five are independent (the Cologne train bombings,<sup>10</sup> the Vollsmose case,<sup>11</sup> the Doctors’ plot,<sup>12</sup> Andrew Ibrahim,<sup>13</sup> and the Santa Barbara bombing<sup>14</sup>), and five are hybrid (the Transatlantic plot,<sup>15</sup> the Glasvej case,<sup>16</sup> Operation Alberich,<sup>17</sup> Operación Cantata,<sup>18</sup> and

<sup>8</sup> Cruickshank, 2010, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> At least two of the three plots from December 2010 (the Stockholm suicide bombing and the *Jyllands-Posten* plot) seem to be serious, but, given the lack of complete information, this report has refrained from classifying them as such.

<sup>10</sup> In July 2006, two Lebanese students, Youssef Mohamad El Hajdib and Jihad Hamad, placed two suitcases filled with explosives on two commuter trains near Cologne. Defective detonators failed to ignite the two homemade devices.

<sup>11</sup> In September 2006, Danish authorities arrested nine men of various backgrounds in the Vollsmose suburb of Odense, accusing them of planning attacks against unspecified targets in the country. Ammonium nitrate, metal splinters, and explosive substances were allegedly found in the arrested men’s possession. Only three of the suspects were later convicted.

<sup>12</sup> In July 2007, after car bombs they had parked outside popular London nightclubs failed to explode, two foreign doctors and long-time British residents rammed their car into the Glasgow airport’s entrance. One assailant died, and the other was arrested and later sentenced to life in prison.

<sup>13</sup> In April 2008, Muslim convert Andrew Ibrahim was arrested at his domicile in Bristol after police received a tip from the local Muslim community. Searching his apartment, police found that he had manufactured hexamethylene triperoxide diamine (a peroxide-based explosive), sewn two suicide vests, constructed a detonator, and collected shrapnel. He was sentenced to life in prison in September 2009 for “engaging in conduct with the intention to commit acts of terrorism” and “possessing articles for terrorist purposes” (Crown Prosecution Service, undated-b).

<sup>14</sup> In October 2009, Libyan national and long-time Milan resident Mohammed Game attempted to enter the Santa Barbara military barracks in the Lombard city. When confronted by the guard, he detonated an improvised explosive device he carried, severely injuring himself and lightly wounding the guard. The ensuing investigation led to two Milan-based North African men who had allegedly helped Game with his plot.

<sup>15</sup> In August 2006, British authorities arrested several UK-based militants planning to blow up transatlantic flights in mid-air by detonating explosives they would have smuggled onboard. The investigation uncovered extensive links between the men and al Qaeda in Pakistan.

<sup>16</sup> In September 2007, Danish authorities arrested eight men in Copenhagen and accused them of planning attacks in the country. Only two of them were convicted of conspiring to commit acts of terrorism and of manufacturing explosives. One of the men, Danish citizen of Pakistani descent Hammad Khurshid, had reportedly received training in explosives from al Qaeda in Pakistan.

<sup>17</sup> In September 2007, German authorities arrested three men who had stored large quantities of explosive material for planning various attacks against American targets in southwest Germany. The men had obtained extensive training from the Islamic Jihad Union, an Uzbek al Qaeda affiliate based in Pakistan.

<sup>18</sup> In January 2008, Spanish authorities arrested a group of mainly Pakistani men who were allegedly planning suicide attacks against the Barcelona metro system. According to Spanish authorities, the men, who were convicted in 2009, had close operational links to the Pakistani Taliban (Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan).



the 2009 Christmas bombing<sup>19</sup>). It is noteworthy that independent plots, which represent more than two-thirds of total plots, constitute only half of the serious plots.

Even among these serious operations, it is fair to say that the plots in which AQAM was either directly or indirectly involved were, for the most part, significantly more sophisticated than most of the independent plots. The analysis of the plots would be flawed if it did not distinguish from a qualitative perspective between independent plots of mindboggling amateurism, such as the Cologne train bombings or the Santa Barbara bombing, and massive operations, such as the 2006 Transatlantic plot or Operation Alberich. In three of the five independent cases (the Cologne train bombings, the Doctors' plot, and the Santa Barbara bombing), the explosives failed to either properly or completely detonate. In the other two cases (the Vollsmose case and Ibrahim), authorities intervened as the suspects were still mixing the explosives. In both cases, however, it seems that bomb-making instructions had been obtained from the Internet and that no suspect had received actual training in explosives.

In four out of the five serious hybrid cases, on the other hand, no attack materialized because authorities arrested the cell members during the preparation stage. Although it is impossible to say how the plots would have developed had authorities not detected them, it is noteworthy that, in all four cases, at least one member of the cell had obtained training in bomb-making from AQAM in Pakistan (the explosives carried by Abdulmutallab, on the other hand, had been assembled in Yemen). This element is, according to most experts, of crucial importance. Although it has become fashionable to describe the Internet as a "virtual training camp," this designation might be deceiving.<sup>20</sup> The Internet unquestionably provides aspiring terrorists with a wide range of useful operational information, but most experts agree that an individual is highly unlikely to be able to assemble an explosive device solely based on instructions obtained online. And, if the individual can indeed successfully complete this highly dangerous endeavor, the bomb resulting from it is likely to be rudimentary and of limited detonating power. Most experts believe that even *Inspire*, the slick, English-language magazine first published in July 2010 by al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), is more important for its value as propaganda for al Qaeda than for any major operational impact it might have.<sup>21</sup>

In substance, most experts are adamant that Internet instructions cannot replace the necessary physical training that any aspiring terrorist must obtain from an experienced bomb maker.<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, it seems that some European jihadists share this view. Abdulla Ahmed Ali, the ringleader of the 2006 Transatlantic plot cell, testified at his trial that he found online instructions to build explosives "wishy-washy" and stated that "the whole point of us learning how to do it from someone who's done it before—or someone would know about the thing—is obviously [that] it's quite dangerous dealing with these materials. We don't want to injure

<sup>19</sup> On December 25, 2009, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, a Nigerian man who had reportedly radicalized while studying in London, attempted to detonate explosives he had concealed in his underwear in the final phase of an Amsterdam-to-Detroit flight. A flaw in the device and the prompt reaction of some passengers prevented the detonation.

<sup>20</sup> Nesser, 2008b, p. 235.

<sup>21</sup> Interviews with American and British officials (Washington D.C., January 2011).

<sup>22</sup> Kenney, 2010.

ourselves or anything.”<sup>23</sup> Not surprisingly, Sageman’s database reveals that plots hatched over the last 20 years by those who had received formal training in explosives were four times more likely to have been successful than those involving operatives without that training.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> As reported in Cruickshank, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Sageman, 2009b.



## Identifying Linkage Patterns

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Analysis of the data presented makes clear that al Qaeda central and AQAM are still very much relevant, occasionally directly planning attacks against Europe and (more frequently) indirectly planning attacks in Europe by providing European homegrown networks with the necessary expertise to overcome the knowledge gap that mars the operational skills of independent networks. It is evident that the deeper the operational connectivity between a European cluster and AQAM, the deeper the threat the former poses.

Because the linkage between the homegrown cluster and AQAM is what makes the former gain significant operational expertise and therefore become more dangerous, it is important to see where and how such linkage takes place. In many cases, identifying how this connection was made is extremely challenging, either because that information has not been made public or because authorities themselves have been unable to make a determination. Even examining cases beyond those in the dataset—i.e., looking at cases in which European clusters established the linkage and then did not plan attacks in Europe but instead decided to fight in armed conflicts, plan attacks outside of Europe, or simply go back to Europe without planning attacks there—it is apparent that only in a few cases is it possible to exactly pinpoint how the connection was made.

It is nevertheless possible, based on a review of court transcripts and media reports, to observe some general patterns. Throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s, a handful of mosques spread throughout Europe played a crucial role in connecting unaffiliated jihad enthusiasts with established groups. Such places as London's Finsbury Park mosque, the al Quds mosque in Hamburg, the Islamic Cultural Institute (also known as the via Jenner mosque) in Milan, the via Quaranta mosque in Milan, and the Multikulturhaus in Neu-Ulm were either run or extensively populated by individuals with direct connections to al Qaeda and affiliated groups, and they often served as agents of radicalization, recruitment, and linkage.<sup>1</sup>

The less permissive environment of the last few years has put an end to the era of openly jihadist mosques. Some of the old leadership of the most-militant mosques has been arrested or deported or has voluntarily left for various reasons. In some cases, the leadership has remained virtually the same but has toned down its rhetoric and stopped or significantly diminished its recruiting and linkage efforts. In some cases, to be sure, these changes are just facade, and such activities are yet taking place, but in a more discrete fashion. Some mosques still play an important role in the radicalization process and in the formation of spontaneous clusters of like-minded individuals. However, most of the activities that normally follow such initial steps no longer take place in mosques but are instead conducted in small private circles outside of

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<sup>1</sup> Vidino, 2005.

the mosques.<sup>2</sup> Although exceptions do exist—for instance, the Taiba (previously known as al Quds) mosque in Hamburg, closed down by authorities in August 2010—it is fair to state, as Europol did in its 2009 annual report, that “the role of mosques in the radicalisation and recruitment of Islamist terrorists is declining.”<sup>3</sup>

In recent years, experts and policymakers have devoted significant attention to the role of the Internet, prisons, and so-called gateway organizations in the dynamics of European jihadism. The Internet, whether through jihadist websites and chat rooms or mainstream social-networking sites, has unquestionably become a major factor in jihadist circles, in Europe as elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Authorities have been equally concerned about the presence of jihadist ideology and activists inside prisons and have attempted to devise solutions to counter them.<sup>5</sup> Finally, the role of assorted Islamist and religiously conservative organizations of various natures, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and Tablighi Jamaat, which are not directly involved in or may not even support violence but could potentially facilitate a progression in its direction, has been debated.

Concerns about these three areas are largely justified. However, the danger presented by the Internet, prisons, and gateway organizations seems to be most intense in the radicalization phase rather than in linkage. Scores of European jihadists have indeed received their first exposure to jihadist ideology in front of a computer, in a jail cell, or by interacting with members of nonviolent Islamist organizations. Yet, the number of cases in which these three venues provided an aspiring jihadist with an actual, physical connection to AQAM is limited. There have been several instances in which a conversation struck up among visitors of a chat room, a connection made behind bars, or interaction with members of gateway organizations have led to such an outcome. But the real danger posed by these three venues lies in their radicalizing potential rather than in their ability to link already radicalized individuals to AQAM.<sup>6</sup>

Basing its acceptance policy on selection rather than outreach and recruitment, AQAM tends to open itself to individuals whose background and commitment can somehow be verified.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, personal connections are of paramount importance, as they alone guarantee the necessary degree of trust. These trust relationships are built, in most cases, through extensive and face-to-face rapport established between unaffiliated jihad enthusiasts and individuals with connections to AQAM. Often, these latter individuals are committed militants who have fought in various conflicts and established solid links to various al Qaeda-affiliated networks outside of Europe.<sup>8</sup> Charismatic, generally older, and, unlike their predecessors, mostly European-born, they do not “recruit” in the traditional sense of the word; rather, they “make things happen,” connecting various European individuals and clusters with one another or with AQAM.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Neumann and Rogers, 2007, p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> Europol, 2009, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> For a recent overview, see, for example, Musawi, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> For an overview, see International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Neumann, 2008, pp. 31–34.

<sup>7</sup> Interviews with Algerian (Washington, D.C., May 2007), American (Washington, D.C., June 2010), British (London, April 2010), Egyptian (Cairo, December 2009), Italian (Milan, July 2010), and Pakistani (Washington, D.C., October 2010), officials.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Säkerhetspolisen, 2010, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Nesser, 2006.

These jihad entrepreneurs, who often operate “outside the organisational framework of mosques,” are the main actors linking European homegrown clusters to AQAM.<sup>10</sup> Such individuals as Rashid Rauf, El Aroud, and Mevlüt Kar, European jihad entrepreneurs of the last five years, have been involved in connecting various European networks to Pakistan and, in many cases, have directly participated in the planning of terrorist attacks. The ways in which they came to meet the individuals and clusters they later connected to AQAM are extremely varied. In many cases, that encounter took place in one of the abovementioned risk areas—mosques, prisons, gateway organizations and, to a lesser degree, the Internet. But such encounters could take place anywhere, from Internet cafés to gyms to universities to refugee centers. Preexisting social and family networks play a crucial role, as they reinforce trust among militants.

The importance of fortuitousness should not be overlooked when examining linkage patterns.<sup>11</sup> The story of the formation of a “German jihadist scene” in Pakistan is in that regard very telling and hardly an isolated case. By the mid-2000s, a network of jihad enthusiasts that had formed around the Multikulturhaus in the Bavarian town of Neu-Ulm had decided to leave Europe to fight.<sup>12</sup> Two of the members of the cluster, Fritz Gelowicz and Adem Yilmaz, hoped to reach either Chechnya or Iraq to join the local insurgencies. Prevented by logistical difficulties from doing so, they decided to travel to Damascus both to study Arabic and, most importantly, to make connections with individuals who could aid them in their effort. In Damascus, the two had a chance encounter with a group of Azerbaijani militants who told them to go train in Pakistan.<sup>13</sup>

The Azerbaijanis reportedly put Gelowicz and Yilmaz in touch with militants from the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), a splinter group of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.<sup>14</sup> Once in Pakistan, the two men received training from IJU but, instead of traveling to Chechnya or Iraq, as initially planned, decided to return to Germany and plan attacks there. In September 2007, Gelowicz and Yilmaz were arrested by German authorities for allegedly planning massive bombing attacks against various American targets in Germany (Operation Alberich). Moreover, the purely fortuitous connection with IJU established by Gelowicz and Yilmaz opened the doors of Pakistan to many other German militants who were directly or indirectly in contact with the two would-be attackers. Today, according to German authorities, dozens of German jihad enthusiasts have made their way to IJU-run camps, and, although some have settled with their families in what have been termed “German colonies” in tribal areas of Pakistan, some have been killed in action, and others have made their way back to Germany.<sup>15</sup> As one of the German militants who joined the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in Waziristan said in a jihadist chat room, “we wanted to go to one of the countries in which the jihad . . . is led. Whether the trip was to Somalia, Palestine, Chechnya, or Indonesia played no role for us. The main thing was that we went there.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Europol, 2009, p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> Interviews with American (Washington, D.C., November 2010), British (London, December 2009), Dutch (The Hague, December 2009), and German officials (Stuttgart, May 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Steinberg, 2010, pp. 14–19.

<sup>13</sup> Interviews with German officials (Washington, D.C., October 2010); Musharbash, Rosenbach, and Stark, 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Steinberg, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Musharbash, Rosenbach, and Stark, 2010; Musharbash, Stark, and Koelbl, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Quote from Yassin Chouka (aka Abu Ibrahim al Almani), cited in Roggio, 2011.



## Diversity in Destinations and Makeup

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Whether initially established in Europe, in the country of destination, or in a third country, the linkage between European individuals or clusters and AQAM in most cases leads the former to spend some time training or fighting (or both) in one of five places: Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, Iraq, or the Maghreb. The tribal areas of Pakistan are unquestionably the most common destination for European jihadists and the one where they find the best structure.<sup>1</sup> Operating in the region are a vast and complex array of groups and networks that act with varying degrees of independence but for the most part increasingly share al Qaeda's worldview and agenda. European militants have been known to link up with several of these groups and, in some cases, with more than one at the same time, highlighting the high level of interconnectivity among the actors in the region. An analysis of the hybrid plots against Europe over the last five years, and which therefore disregards the many more numerous cases of European jihadists who connected with AQAM in Pakistan and did not plan attacks in Europe, clearly shows such diversity. At least one was linked to al Qaeda central (the Transatlantic plot), one to Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (Operación Cantata), and one to the Uzbek IJU (Operation Alberich). The one external plot (the Mickey Mouse Project/Headley case) was similarly linked to Pakistan and apparently involved both the al Qaeda core and Lashkar-i-Taiba.<sup>2</sup>

The pipeline to Pakistan, well established throughout the 1990s, continued after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, as some European militants linked up with al Qaeda and various Pakistani jihadist outfits that operated camps and facilities in the country. In the first half of the 2000s, the flow from Europe was limited and involved mostly individuals who had family connections to Pakistan. Militants from the United Kingdom, home to Europe's oldest and largest Pakistani diaspora community, comprised the largest contingent of European recruits. Most jihad enthusiasts from other European countries, who did not possess these personal connections, were generally unable to make their way to the geographically and culturally imperious tribal areas of Pakistan.

By 2006, the formation of more-stable facilities in Pakistan and the presence of a greater number of well-connected jihad entrepreneurs outside of the United Kingdom made access to training in AQAM's Pakistani camps easier for militants throughout continental Europe.<sup>3</sup> Particularly remarkable is the development in Germany, where authorities believe that, in 2009 alone, some 40–50 militants traveled to Pakistan to receive training or to fight in the region (or both). Confirming this trend, in February 2009, then–U.S. Director of National Intelligence

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent overview of the importance of the region for Western jihadists, see Cruickshank, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> *United States of America v Ilyas Kashmiri and Others*, undated.

<sup>3</sup> Cruickshank, 2010; interviews with European and American intelligence officials (various cities, various years).



Dennis Blair said in testimony before the U.S. Senate that “the primary threat from Europe-based extremists stems from al-Qa‘ida and Sunni affiliates who return from training in Pakistan to conduct attacks in Europe or the United States.”<sup>4</sup>

Since its formation in January 2009 from the merger of al Qaeda–affiliated networks in Saudi Arabia and Yemen, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, based largely in Yemen, has been considered a potential threat to European security.<sup>5</sup> Since the 1990s, small numbers of European jihad enthusiasts have traveled to Yemen to study Arabic and Islam in small private schools or at the Iman University of Sana‘a, an institution headed by known al Qaeda supporter Abdul Majeed al Zindani. Authorities believe that some of these individuals, such as former London resident and 2009 Christmas bomber Abdulmutallab, have connected with local al Qaeda–affiliated networks.

Authorities harbor similar fears about Somalia. During the last five years, a small but increasing number of European militants have joined the ranks of al Shabaab, the local Islamist outfit that views itself as the East African branch of al Qaeda.<sup>6</sup> At first, most of the European-based volunteers who joined al Shabaab were ethnic Somalis driven by the wave of patriotic fervor that pervaded their communities after the 2006 Ethiopian invasion. The motivations of the wave of volunteers who traveled to Somalia in the months after the Ethiopian pullout of January 2009 may have been different, however, as al Shabaab’s appeal to patriotic sentiments had lost its main *raison d’être*. Considering this change in political landscape and the increased use of religious, global, and al Qaeda–inspired imagery in al Shabaab’s rhetoric, it is fair to state that it is likely that some of the volunteers who have recently joined the group are more attracted by its global jihadist ideology than motivated by patriotic fervor. An additional confirmation of this assessment is provided by the small yet significant number of non–ethnic Somalis who have joined al Shabaab during the last few years.<sup>7</sup>

The phenomenon of European militants traveling to Somalia seems to touch several countries. British authorities, for example, have publicly expressed their concerns over a “steady stream” of young men traveling from the United Kingdom to Somalia.<sup>8</sup> Swedish security services believe that some 20 Somalis have left Sweden to fight alongside al Shabaab in recent years and that at least five of them have been killed.<sup>9</sup> UK- and Denmark-based Somalis have also reportedly perpetrated suicide bombings in Somalia.<sup>10</sup> Although authorities have not intercepted any plot in Europe with direct connections to Somalia, they fear that European militants who have received training from al Shabaab might decide to carry out attacks against Europe in the future, and they see the Gelle case as a potential harbinger.

Although the conflict there has significantly decreased in intensity over the last two years, Iraq also continues to be a destination for European militants. Since the U.S. invasion of 2003, several Iraqi outfits have benefited from an influx of foreign fighters driven by a desire to confront American forces. Most of them have come from the Arab Gulf or North Africa, but it is

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<sup>4</sup> Blair, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Europol, 2010, p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> Committee on Foreign Relations, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> See Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> “British MP Says UK Is Recruitment Ground,” 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Plon, 2010; Ritter, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> See Brady, 2009; Kerbaj, 2010; Rugman, 2009; and “Somalisk Terrorist Kom fra Danmark,” 2009.

well documented that a small number of European militants have also participated in combat and suicide operations in Iraq.<sup>11</sup> The blowback that many experts anticipated has not materialized, as there are few cases of veterans of the Iraqi conflict who have engaged in terror activities in Europe.<sup>12</sup> However, neither the conflict nor the presence of European militants has completely waned. Networks recruiting for Iraq are still very much operating in several European countries, and the flow of militants back and forth from the country is still ongoing, albeit with a significantly lower intensity than in the past. In November 2010, for example, reports indicated that a Swedish national of Tunisian descent carried out a suicide attack in Mosul.<sup>13</sup>

The fifth major area of activities of al Qaeda–affiliated networks worldwide, the Maghreb region, is a slight anomaly from the point of view of linkage. Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, the local al Qaeda affiliate and the descendant of a long tradition of jihadist groups in the region, has suffered several operational setbacks over the last few years. The group has been forced to limit its activities in major urban areas and to operate mostly in the Sahara desert region and the mountains of Kabylie, focusing predominantly on kidnapping Westerners, smuggling, and occasional skirmishes with Algerian, Mauritanian, and Malian security forces. These challenges are arguably the main cause of AQIM’s lack of attractiveness for European jihad enthusiasts. Few non–North Africans travel to the region from Europe for training, mostly due to logistical difficulties. Nevertheless, Europe-based militants linked to the old North African networks are still very much active in providing logistical support to the group, and many of them often travel to the Maghreb to obtain training or to fight.<sup>14</sup> Various European governments—those of France and Spain in particular—consequently consider AQIM a major threat to their internal security, fearing it might concretize its increasingly harsh rhetoric against them. Somewhat counterintuitively, however, there are few indications that AQIM has actually activated the still-extensive Europe-based Algerian networks for attacks.<sup>15</sup>

Another peculiar feature of AQIM is its virtually exclusive North African nature, which is, in a sense, anachronistic. Although certain divisions along ethnic lines still exist to some degree in today’s European jihadist networks, the networks are *increasingly diverse and multi-ethnic*. Composed mostly of European-born militants and formed independently from established groups with close ties to any non-European country, many of today’s networks include individuals from various backgrounds. No better examples can be provided to showcase this diversity than the two Hamburg-based cells that formed around the al Quds (later Taiba) mosque ten years apart. If the late 1990s cell that spawned Mohammed Atta and the core 9/11 hijackers was uniformly Arab (although of different nationalities), the cell that coalesced in the late 2000s and then traveled to Pakistan, where it was linked to the October 2010 alert for Mumbai-style attacks in Europe, included ethnic German converts and first- or second-generation immigrants hailing from such places as Afghanistan, France, Indonesia, Iran,

<sup>11</sup> Hafez, 2007, pp. 189–212; Vidino, 2005, pp. 215–290.

<sup>12</sup> Bergen and Reynolds, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> “Svensk Självordsbombare Död i Irak,” 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Interviews with French (Paris, February 2010), Italian (Milan, July 2010), and Spanish (Madrid, October 2009) intelligence officials.

<sup>15</sup> Interviews with British (Washington, D.C., January 2010) and French (Paris, February 2010) officials.

Kazakhstan, and Russia.<sup>16</sup> The new Hamburg cell is not the exception but rather increasingly the rule when it comes to ethnic composition of European networks.

Adding an additional layer of diversity to European jihadist networks is the growing presence of converts and women. European converts have been involved in jihadist activities for a long time, and, in the past, some of them had even risen to rather senior roles.<sup>17</sup> This trend is continuing, and it is noteworthy that, in some plots, converts were either the driving force (e.g., Gelowicz in Operation Alberich) or the lone attacker (Andrew Ibrahim, Nick Reilly, and Nicholas Roddis). Women, both converts and native Muslims, are more of a novelty. Although their role is still statistically significantly inferior to that of men (Europol puts their percentage among arrestees in the single digits), there have been several cases in which women have played significant roles in jihadist networks.<sup>18</sup> And although many of them are married or related to militants whose activities they support, others operate independently.

This phenomenon is highly unusual in the male-dominated world of jihadist groups. Dutch authorities began observing this trend in the mid-2000s in the Hofstad group and noted that, “while in other European countries radical Muslim women keep a low profile and play at best a supporting role, their role in local networks in the Netherlands is becoming increasingly prominent.”<sup>19</sup> Today the trend is visible in other European countries as well. Though it is difficult to pinpoint a single reason for this enhancement in women’s responsibilities, it might be linked to the pervasiveness of the Internet. The virtual world is a great equalizer, a place where the worth of cyber-jihadists is judged more by the quality and frequency of their postings than by their experience or gender. In this gender-neutral environment, women have more opportunities to emerge and play a role equal to that of men. In this respect, Hofstad and other contemporary jihadist networks seem more similar to “traditional” indigenous European terrorist groups, such as the Italian Red Brigades or Germany’s Baader Meinhof Gang, in which women were crucial, than to their counterparts in North Africa or the Middle East. The enhanced role of women may therefore be another indication of their “Europeanness.”

Finally, it should be noted that no uniform pattern assessment for all European countries is possible, as there are marked differences within the European Union.<sup>20</sup> France, Germany, and the United Kingdom experience widespread jihadist activities on their territory and consider the risk of an attack against them very elevated. In such countries as Greece, Portugal, and most Eastern European members of the European Union, however, the situation is almost diametrically opposed. In some cases, there are opposite trajectories. Dutch authorities, for example, claim to have recently witnessed, after a spike in 2004–2005, a significant decrease in the level of jihadist activity on their territory and claim that “overall, local jihadism in this

<sup>16</sup> Scheuermann and Ulrich, 2010, pp. 24–26.

<sup>17</sup> A few notable examples include Christian Ganczarski, Dhiren Barot, and Pierre Robert.

<sup>18</sup> Europol, 2007, p. 20. Particularly noteworthy in this regard are the figures of El Aroud and Choudhry. The former is the Brussels-based widow of the killer of Northern Alliance leader Ahmed Shah Massoud. El Aroud remarried to a Tunisian militant and ran an Internet-based network that recruited militants for Afghanistan. She is currently serving a eight-year sentence in Belgium for “leading a terrorist group linked with al-Qaeda” (“Belgium Convicts Eight on Terrorism Charges,” 2010). Choudhry is the King’s College student who admitted radicalizing online by watching sermons of al Awlaki and in May 2010 stabbed Timms to punish him for his support for the Iraq War.

<sup>19</sup> Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst, 2006, p. 39.

<sup>20</sup> Europol, 2009, p. 22.

country has more or less stalled.”<sup>21</sup> German authorities, on the other hand, have monitored over the last five years a worrisome surge in the number of individuals who have radicalized, obtained training in Pakistan, and been involved in terrorist activities.

Characteristics of jihadist networks also differ significantly from country to country and, in many cases, within each country from region to region and from city to city. In most Spanish regions, for example, the most-active networks are North African, but Catalan authorities are equally or even more concerned about Pakistani militants.<sup>22</sup> Although many countries have developed various pipelines that take militants to more than one, if not all, of the abovementioned extra-European “fields of jihad,” there are diverse patterns in terms of destinations from one country to another. Swedish militants, for example, have tended to disproportionately travel to Somalia, arguably a consequence of the large Somali diaspora community in the country. German militants, on the other hand, have established a pipeline to Pakistan. As this paper relates, in most countries, networks tend to be multi-ethnic and composed mostly of second-generation immigrants. But, in countries (like Italy and Spain) where immigration is a more recent phenomenon and the second generation of locally born Muslims is only now coming of age, more-“traditional” networks with closer ties to one country are still more common.

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<sup>21</sup> Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst, 2010, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Catalan officials (Barcelona, October 2009).



## Conclusion and Recommendations

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This paper sought to capture some of the most recent aspects of the highly complex and ever-shifting dynamics of jihadist networks in Europe. As it relates, the current phase appears to be characterized by the presence of diverse networks with varying degrees of affiliation to al Qaeda and several of its affiliated groups. Although many of them have little more than an ideological affiliation to AQAM, an increasing number of European homegrown networks have managed to establish operational linkages with it. This development is worrying European and American authorities, who believe that the deeper the operational connectivity, the more severe the threat these networks pose.

The fact that none of the plots against Europe over the last five years has been successful is due partially to sheer good fortune and to the incompetence of most plotters, but it is unquestionably a testament to the ability of police forces and intelligence agencies throughout Europe, the United States, and several other countries that have often cooperated in many highly complex investigations. In the case of hybrid and external plots, it might also highlight a certain downgrading of AQAM's ability to successfully plan operations. But there is no question that the European counterterrorism community has significantly improved its understanding of the dynamics of jihadism and developed better tools to confront it. Nevertheless, there are obviously areas where improvement is still possible.

As this paper has shown, the life cycle of terrorist networks, in Europe as in other regions, can be divided between the radicalization phase and the mobilization phase, and there is room for authorities to do more to tackle both. As for the former, it is imperative that European governments increase efforts to both prevent the radicalization of new militants and encourage already radicalized individuals to disengage from militant networks. Several European governments have already done so, investing substantial human, financial, and political capital in more or less extensive counterradicalization programs. These efforts are extremely controversial and have encountered significant setbacks, but they are a necessary component of a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy. Counterradicalization programs are not a silver bullet that can eliminate radicalization, but, when appropriately designed and supported by valid research, they can contribute to at least decreasing the number of individuals embracing jihadist ideology.

There are also ways in which the mobilization phase—i.e., the subsequent stage in which a radicalized individual or cluster decides to spring into action—can be more effectively countered. The independent networks' lack of ties to international groups poses a unique challenge. Although it prevents them from acquiring professional terrorist skills, it also allows them to remain undetected by law enforcement and intelligence agencies. Community policing, close

monitoring of Internet chat rooms, and focus on so-called radicalization hot-spots (such as prisons or gateway organizations) are tactics that can improve the chances of detecting them.

As for those individuals and clusters that do establish ties to AQAM, a strategy based on intercepting travel to areas where AQAM operates and on disrupting the various ways in which the linkage is established appears to be apt to counter the phenomenon. Indeed, many European law enforcement and intelligence agencies have long been working on these parallel tracks but have in some cases lacked the necessary legal tools or resources. As for travel, enhanced cooperation with countries where European jihadists obtain training, combined with close monitoring of their communications, would increase the chances of tracking these jihadists. Countries that do not consider fighting or training abroad as crimes should consider reviewing their legislation.

This paper has shown that there are various, albeit not always clear, ways in which the linkage between European militants and AQAM is made. Closer monitoring of such areas as the Internet, prisons, and gateway organizations would, carried out in a manner compatible with the respect of civil liberties, provide a better insight into the phenomenon and allow authorities to prevent it in the first place. The paper also highlighted the importance of “jihad entrepreneurs” in “making things happen,” connecting European militants with one another and with AQAM. Some countries have allowed some of these individuals to operate almost undisturbed for years. When this has happened due to a lack of legislative tools for allowing law enforcement to arrest these individuals, lawmakers should work on expanding the legal definitions of recruitment for or membership in a terrorist organization. In other cases, it was a conscious decision made by officials, who considered it more useful to keep these individuals on the street, as, by monitoring their activities, authorities could uncover their web of contacts and obtain deeper insights into jihadist networks. This policy has led to some remarkable successes but is also highly risky, as there is always the possibility that authorities might not be able to monitor all activities. The policy’s costs and benefits should therefore be weighed on a strict case-by-case basis.

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