CHAPTER 3
TERRORISM IN MOROCCO

The French protectorate in Morocco came to an end in 1956. Differently from the Algerian experience, independence was not achieved as a result of a bloody liberation struggle. The ulemas, who supported Mohammed V, recognised the Islamic legitimacy of the king. Under his son, Hassan II arrogated to himself all authority to speak for Islam, claiming direct descent from the Prophet and adopting the title of Commander of the Faithful (*amir al mouminine*), by which he made his very person sacred. As such, he received the act of allegiance (*bay'at*) of the ulemas, of the descendants of the Prophet, and of the other members of the dynasty; but this allegiance had no contractual dimension (Kepel 2003:54-55).

While Algeria was confronted with a political legitimacy crisis as well as poor socio-economic conditions, Morocco's Achilles heel was predominantly socio-economic. Although Morocco's religious as well as secular authority is seldom questioned, Morocco still suffers from the same social and economic problems that drive political dissent in other Arab states.

As in the case of Algeria and Tunisia, a number of small Islamist organisations had been active from the 1960s and 1970s, especially on university campuses. These included *al-Islamiya* (the Islamic Association), *al-Adl wal Tanmiya* (the Justice Organisation) and *al-Adl wal Ihsane* (Justice and Spirituality). Fuelling these organisations were the following circumstances:

- Deteriorating social and economic circumstances led to the 1965 Casablanca riots, which were comparable with the Algerian bread riots of more than 20 years later. Growing urbanisation contributed to increasing unemployment, and a shortage of housing led to the burgeoning of shantytowns, a source of future radicalisation and acts of terrorism. King Hassan II reacted by suspending the constitution, disbanding parliament and limiting the influence of political parties

- The political vulnerability of King Hassan manifested itself in two coup attempts, in 1971 and 1972. In 1974 the king reasserted Morocco's historic claim to the Western Sahara as a way of mobilising society as a

whole to defend Morocco's territorial integrity. The monarchy became a symbol of the nation, with most organisations subsequently accepting the legitimacy of the monarchy

- However, under the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, 20 underground organisations had come into being by 1986 in Rabat alone, each with its own structure, leadership and ideology (Shahin 1997:172)

As provided by Article 2 of Dahir No 1-58-376 of 15 November 1958, regulating the right of association, as amended by Dahir No 1-02-206 of 24 July 2002, 'any association pursuing a cause or an objective which is illicit or contrary to the law and morality or which aims at undermining the Islamic religion, territorial integrity or the monarchy or at inciting discrimination shall be void' (UN Security Council 2006:5). Within these boundaries, the activities of groups and associations are usually tolerated.

Although the above three basic principles provide a framework for religious organisations and associations, international developments – such as the Iranian revolution and other developments discussed in the chapter on Algeria – led to a change in the perception of the Moroccan government. Subsequently, these structures were closely monitored, explaining mass arrest campaigns and closer monitoring of activities at mosques.

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss all the groups active in Morocco, brief reference will be made to the following organisations:

- *Jam'yya al-Ba'th al-Islami* or the Association of Islamic Resurrection. Founded by Islail al-Khatib in Tetouan, the association aimed to create an awareness that Islam was the only solution. Considered as a Salafi organisation influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood, the Association of Islamic Resurrection did not challenge the legitimacy of the monarchy. Although critical of its non-Islamic features, it opted to work within the monarchy (Shahin 1997:174-175).

- *Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin* or the Muslim Brotherhood in Morocco. Although a number of groups exist that were influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, a similar organisation came into existence in Morocco. Based in Casablanca, the Muslim Brotherhood formed a number of cells in other cities. Establishing an Islamic state through legal channels was also the Muslim Brotherhood's main objective. However, its challenge to the official religious establishment, its claim that the monarchy was un-Islamic and its view that political parties were not acting in the best interests of the Muslim

community set it on a collision course with the establishment. Unlike the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood remained covert and did not openly attract support. In addition to a lack of growth, internal differences detrimentally affected the Muslim Brotherhood's effectiveness and sustainability (Shahin 1997:178-179).

- *Al-Shabiba* or the Moroccan Youth Association. Founded by Abdel Karim Mouti in 1969, this was another covert organisation aimed at achieving reform through an Islamic revolution. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood also influenced it, particularly the ideas of Sayyid Qutb. As a clandestine organisation, the association was structured in cells, some of them based in universities, secondary schools and mosques. In addition to its covert cell structures, *al-Shabiba* initiated an overt structure and agenda. In presenting *al-Shabiba* as an apolitical religious association advocating the preservation of Islamic values through non-violent means, Mouti attempted to divert growing government suspicion and to attract public support. Following the lead of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, *al-Shabiba* began providing basic services, such as public health and adult education in addressing illiteracy. However, the arrest of the association's key leaders was effective in dismantling the organisational structure. *Al-Shabiba's* decision not to support King Hassan in the Green March in 1975 led to its banning in 1975. The Moroccan government accused *al-Shabiba* of having assassinated Omar Bin Jelloun, the leader of the General Union of Moroccan Workers. Security forces subsequently prosecuted 71 *al-Shabiba* members for 'forming an association of criminals, plotting the overthrow of King Hassan, creating an Islamic republic, distributing Iranian-style literature and belonging to the banned Islamic Youth Association'. Mouti was put on trial in absentia, but escaped to Saudi Arabia (living allegedly currently in Libya). *Al-Shabiba* split into a number of smaller organisations, including the Revolutionary Commission, the Islamic Students Vanguard and the Islamic Group and the Movement of the *Mujahideen*. In October 1985, 30 members of the *Mujahideen* were tried in Marrakesh on charges of attempting to overthrow the government. They received sentences ranging from one year to life (Shahin 1997:184-188).

- *Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya* or the Islamic Group. This was one of al-Shabiba splinter groups. Previously known as the Rabat group, the split took place under the leadership of Abd al-Ilah Benkiran in 1981. Shahin (1997:189) summarised the objectives of this religious organisation as 'renewing the understanding of religion, calling for the respect of individual rights and public freedom, advocating the implementation of the *Shari'a*, improving the material and living conditions of Muslims, performing charitable work,

achieving comprehensive cultural renaissance, working to accomplish Muslim unity and condemning violence'. In 1992 *al-Gama'a* changed its name to *Harakat al-Islah wa al-Tajdid al-Maghribyya*, or the Moroccan Movement for Reform and Renewal (HATM), in an attempt to prevent misperceptions of the aims and objectives of the organisation. HATM participated in the political process after forming a partnership with the Constitutional Popular Movement, an established political party.

- *Al-Adl wal Ihasne*. This organisation was founded by Abdesslam Yassin in 1979 as an offshoot of *al-Gama'a*. In placing *al-Adl wal Ihasne* on a collision course with the monarch, Yassin claimed that he was a member of the sharifian family and, like King Hassan, a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. Although, from the time of its formation, *al-Adl wal Ihasne* differed from the other organisations referred to in this discussion in having an extremist undertone, it was not implicated in any acts of violence. Its recruitment policy targeted university and high school students, civil servants, teachers and ordinary workers in the larger cities. The organisation was banned in 1985 (Shahin 1997:193-195). As a result, one of Morocco's largest opposition groups was excluded from the political process on the grounds that it wanted to limit the king's power. *Al-Adl wal Ihasne* also rejected the king's role as Commander of the Faithful (*amir amoumine*) (Ghanmi 2007). Following the lead of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, *al-Adl wal Ihasne* promoted itself as a party of the masses able to help improve social conditions.

In addition to the country's political circumstances, Morocco's high unemployment, inadequate social services and rapidly growing population have inevitably led many Moroccans to feel disenfranchised and dissatisfied. Making matters worse is the question of illiteracy, a major social issue in a country where nearly half the population of 30 million cannot read or write (MEED Quarterly Report 2003).

Illiterate Moroccans, rather than educated Moroccans, have formed the majority of those falling under the spell of the Wahhabi version of Islam promoted by a number of wealthy private Saudi Arabians throughout North Africa since the 1970s. Relying on books, cassettes and later DVDs for its communication, Wahhabism presents a fanatical and puritanical view of Islam that is more intolerant than traditional Moroccan Islamic teaching towards Jews and women. Such preaching cannot be underestimated in a country where the state has so evidently failed to educate all its citizens. Coupled with the spread of extremist ideology within poor communities, cell structures have also gradually spread to university campuses. Therefore targeting both

educated and uneducated members of society. Morocco has a population of mostly Sunni Muslims with small Christian and Jewish communities.

The reforms of recent years have not been accompanied by improved employment opportunities or better living standards, with the result that many Moroccans have become vulnerable to extremism. When King Mohammed began to encourage the idea of greater rights for women, Islamic parties resisted and Morocco remains in many ways a deeply conservative society.

History of terrorism in Morocco

As a smaller number of Afghan *Mujahideen* returned to Morocco, the political environment was quite different from that in Algeria. As part of King Hassan II's rule with an iron fist, the smaller Islamist movements, particularly the ones that were active at universities, were firmly controlled. Two of these were the above-mentioned *al-Adl wal Ihasne* and *al-Islamiya*. The second of these presented itself as having a conservative policy and negotiated with the Moroccan government to participate in the political process in the mid 1990s, leaving more militant activists to support *al-Adl wal Ihasne*, some of whose fighters also participated in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Chechnya, Bosnia and Kosovo (MEED Quarterly Report 1999). Although extremism could not really spread under the protection of political freedom, the deteriorating situation in Algeria had a ripple effect on neighbouring countries.

Alleged Algerian involvement in Morocco manifested itself on 24 August 1994 when gunmen shot dead two Spanish tourists – and injured a third as well as a Moroccan woman – in the Atlas-Asni hotel in Marrakesh, before making off with 10 000 dirhams (US$1 130) in cash (Reuters 1994). The Moroccan authorities arrested two Algerian nationals, Redouane Hammadi and Stephane Ait Idir, as well as two Moroccans for their involvement in this attack. Before the attack, the four suspects were alleged to have received radical training in France from Abdelilah Ziyad, a Moroccan college teacher who had gone to Afghanistan in 1992 (Roy 2004:316). One of the Moroccans arrested was Hamel Marzouk (28), who was originally from Oran but who carried a French passport in the name of Abderrahmane Ouakka. Marzouk acknowledged his involvement in the 1993 attacks on McDonalds in Casablanca, a bank in Oujda and the Atlas-Asni hotel (Reuters 1994a). He also claimed that after Ziad had instructed him to attack a Casablanca synagogue he had instead decided to bomb a Jewish cemetery. Firearms were also found in his possession (Reuters 1994b).

After Algerians had been implicated in this attack, Algerians were required to obtain visas before entering Morocco. In retaliation, Algeria closed its border with Morocco, further straining relations between the two countries (Hughes 1994). On 16 June 1994 a military court in Rabat convicted two Algerians for gun-running. The two were arrested after they fired at a security roadblock in Fez (Hughes 1994a). In April 1998 an armed Islamist group killed ten Moroccans near the border town of Oujda (BBC Monitoring Middle East 1998).

In 1999 most of the Afghan veterans joined a splinter group of *al-Adl wal Ihasne*, headed by Sheikh Mohammed al-Bachiri. This group was believed to have been behind a number of smaller Islamist organisations, including one known as 'Promotion of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice', which was responsible for stoning a man to death on 27 February 2002 (*Daily Star* 2002).

Casablanca bombings

Concern that Morocco had become the latest battleground in the war on terrorism increased after synchronised suicide bombings in Casablanca killed 44 and injured many more. The attacks were a disturbing reminder of the strength of the underground Islamist movements in Morocco. They were a serious setback to the efforts of King Mohammed VI to integrate Islamist parties into mainstream politics. Prior to the Casablanca bombings, Morocco's own militant groups had not launched any significant attacks.

On 16 May 2003 five attacks, executed almost simultaneously throughout the coastal city of Casablanca, left 45 people dead – including the 12 suicide bombers – and 100 injured. Three Spaniards were killed and four Spaniards were injured inside the Casa de Espana restaurant, while 20 others, including a Spanish truck driver and two businessmen, died in the same blast, which was set off by powerful explosives in coordinated attacks. Two other bombings were at the Farah (Safir) hotel and the Israeli Alliance community centre, while the remaining two targets were an old Jewish cemetery and a Jewish-owned Italian restaurant next to the Belgian consulate (EFE News Service 2003).

The choice of targets suggested that the terrorists wanted to destroy symbols of Morocco's religious tolerance and modernity – restaurants where the elite of different religions gathered, Jewish targets, and the hotel, which had a popular nightclub. One might argue that the selection of targets – places unacceptable to the principles of extreme Islamists – was in line with the agenda of local extremists influenced by a transnational agenda and striving to impose an Islamic state on Morocco.

Except for the synchronised timing of the explosions, the Moroccan bombings could be described as relatively unsophisticated. They were Morocco's first suicide attacks. The killing and injury of so many local citizens came as a shock to ordinary Moroccans who, unlike Algerians, were not accustomed to acts of violence and terrorism. In the case of the Jewish cemetery, the blast apparently detonated prematurely, killing three squatters who were standing near a communal water spring outside the graveyard walls. Although a number of organisations were suspected of being implicated in the bombings, it became clear that the radical nature of the attacks had been influenced by the poor socio-economic conditions of Sidi Moumen and that the actual bombings had been carried out by a cell of people who knew one another. Most of those who were directly involved in the attack were killed in the operation.

Groupe Islamique Combattant Marocain or the Moroccan Islamic Combat Group

In the aftermath of the Casablanca bombings, the security forces focused their attention on the *Groupe Islamique Combattant Marocain*, or the Moroccan Islamic Combat Group (GICM). The GICM was established in the late 1990s by Moroccans who had fought the former Soviet Union in Afghanistan (following a similar trend as the other countries under review). It was believed that the initial role of the GICM was to provide logistical support to *al-Qa'eda* operatives when they passed through Morocco. When the Moroccan government began to cooperate with the US on security-related issues after 9/11, the GICM decided to rethink its initial role (AFP 2004). The GICM was headed by Abdelkrim Thami Mejjati until he was killed in a shoot-out with security forces in Saudi Arabia in 2005.

Saad Houssaini, who was believed by the Moroccan Ministry of the Interior to be the head of the GICM's military wing, was arrested in March 2007. He had previously travelled to Afghanistan in 1997 and was implicated in the Casablanca attacks (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007ca). Prior to his latest arrest, he had been arrested on the Iraq-Syria border in 2006 and handed over to Morocco. He had also been implicated in a suicide attack on 11 March 2007, just before he was arrested in Morocco (Dow Jones International News 2007f). According to Moroccan security forces, Houssaini, the son of a university professor, studied chemistry in college and won a Moroccan government scholarship to the University of Valencia in Spain. Before completing his studies, he had moved to Afghanistan, where he received paramilitary training. Before leaving for Afghanistan, Houssaini was arrested by Spanish police for being in possession of false

travel documents and manuals on how to manufacture explosives. In Spain he had received radical training by an unnamed Tunisian (Whitlock 2007). In 2002 Houssaini returned to Morocco from Afghanistan and began reactivating GICM cells. The military committee was tasked with setting up camps in the Rif and Atlas mountains to train new recruits and to shelter members of groups to be located at bases to be used for bomb-making. After the Casablanca bombings in 2003, Houssaini worked on the establishment of a network to recruit Moroccan fighters for Iraq. According to the security forces, he had sent 18 recruits to Iraq using funds he obtained from the GICM (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007cb).

Hassan M, an associate of Houssaini, was arrested in Syria and deported to Morocco in 2006. He had previously lived in Spain, Turkey and Syria, and from Syria he had tried to enter Iraq. Houssaini's name was mentioned in police reports on a terrorist group whose members included Taieb Bentisi and Salaheddine Benyaiche, both accused of being members of the GICM. Abdelaziz Benzine, another Moroccan who had been trained in Afghanistan and who was described as a co-conspirator in the 2003 Casablanca bombings, serving alongside Houssaini, was arrested on the same day as the 11 March bombings (Whitlock 2007).

For his role alongside Houssaini in the GICM recruitment networks for Iraq, Abdelaziz Habbouch, alias Tarek, was arrested by Moroccan authorities on 28 May 2007. Described as one of the prominent members of the GICM who had received training in Afghanistan, Habbouch was also implicated in the 2003 Casablanca bombings. During his interrogation, Habbouch provided a list of Moroccans who had left for Iraq. One of these was Abderrahman, who had been captured by US forces in Baghdad. According to Habbouch, most of the recruits had come from Casablanca, Tetouan and Ouezzan. Habbouch also confirmed that Benzine had given money to the families of those who had left for Iraq. He also referred to Zayd, who had been the recruitment coordinator in Syria (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007cc). Zayd could be Izzeddine Nawayili, whose aliases were Abu Souhayb and Abu Zayd. Nawayili facilitated the attempted infiltration into Iraq of Ben Mousa in August 2005 (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2005c). The interrogation of Houssaini confirmed that Zayd was the contact person in Syria who would greet volunteers in Damascus and arrange their passage across the border into Iraq (Whitlock 2007).

On an international level, authorities in a number of European countries arrested suspected members of the GICM who had been linked to transnational acts of terrorism (see also Chapter 5). For example, on 19

December 2004 Spanish authorities arrested Hassan El Haski in the Canary Islands for his alleged links with the Madrid bombings. He was also believed to have been the person behind the murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh in Amsterdam (AFP 2004a).

On 29 August 2005, Belgian authorities in turn announced the arrest of 18 men suspected of belonging to the GICM. They included Khalid Bouloudo, Abdelkader Hakimi and Mourad Chabarou – all suspected of having links with those responsible for the May 2003 Casablanca attacks and the March 2004 train bombings in Madrid (AFP 2005a). In France eight people were convicted in July 2007 on a charge of providing logistical and financial support to the 2003 Casablanca suicide bombers. One of those convicted was Mustapha Baouchi, who was a contact of Noureddine Nafia, a member of the GICM who is serving a 20-year sentence in Morocco for the attacks (Von Derschau 2007). The GICM was influenced by extreme Islamic teachers, including Abu Qatada, the radical preacher whom the UK seeks to expel (Dow Jones International News 2005).

Salafia Jihadia or the Jihad for Pure Islam

Salafia Jihadia or the Jihad for Pure Islam was established in 1992 by Mohamed Fisazi to oppose Arab states, including Morocco and Saudi Arabia, which joined the US-led coalition against Iraqi in 1991 (Bouzerda 2002). *Salafia Jihadia* is a loose umbrella organisation made up of a cluster of independent cells.

One of *Salafia Jihadia's* predecessor groups, headed by Ahmed Raffiki, was active in the 1980s and 1990s in the recruitment of Moroccan fighters for Afghanistan, Chechnya, Bosnia and Kosovo (BBC Monitoring Newsfile 2003). Raffiki's successor, Abu Hafs, a follower of the philosophy of Osama bin Laden, is currently in custody.

On 28 March 2005 Moroccan security forces announced that they had dismantled a *Salafia Jihadia* network operating in various Moroccan towns, including Mohammadia, 20 km from Casablanca (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2005d). *Salafia Jihadia's* links with the GSPC in Algeria and with the conflict in Iraq will be discussed in a later chapter.

A small *Salafia Jihadia* splinter group, *as-Sirat al-Mustaqim* (the Good and Righteous Path) was described as 'fuelled by a hatred of Western values' (Richburg 2003). Its leader, Youssef Fikri, who was sentenced to death for

premeditated murder and who had been wanted since 2002, had been serving a prison sentence for drug smuggling under a false identity (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2006c). Other *as-Sirat al-Mustaqim* members sentenced in December 2006 by a court in Sale, Morocco, were (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007cd):

- Youssef Addad and Abdelmalek Bouisakarne – each sentenced to death for 'premeditated murder, deliberately endangering people's lives and their safety, forming a criminal gang to plan and carry out terrorist activities, forging money, theft, expropriation of money, possession of explosives, planning to endanger public order by means of violence and praising acts which form terrorist crimes'

- Mohamed Ait Bensaid – sentenced to 30 years in jail

- Tarek Farssi, Ibrahim Hamdi, Hassan Mendaoui and Mohamed Achdad – each sentenced to 15 years in jail

On 27 October 2007, Moroccan security forces arrested three suspected *Salafia Jihadia* members in Oujda near the Algerian-Moroccan border. One of the suspects was wanted in connection with the suicide bombings in Casablanca, one was a former soldier who had visited Afghanistan and the third was a 14-year-old (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007ce). Following these arrests, Oujda became a centre of police operations, with checkpoints being set up close to the town.

On 8 November 2007 Morocco opened a trial of 51 individuals, predominantly associated with *Salafia Jihadia*, suspected of involvement in the Casablanca suicide bombings. Members of this group had been arrested in Casablanca, El Gara, Sale, Kenitra and Agadir and included a woman identified as Hasna Moustaid (Dow Jones International News 2007g). Moroccan security sources reported that a group of *al-Qa'eda* recruiting agents had been operating in Zouerate, Mauritania, since December 2005 (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2006i).

Al-Takfir wal Hijra is another small extremist group believed to be linked to *as-Sirat al-Mustaqim* and *Salafia Jihadia*. Its leader, Zakaria Miludi, was believed to have been inspired by Mustafa Choukri, who set up a group with the same name in 1974 (Bouzerda 2002). Moroccan justice minister Mohamed Bouzoubaa claimed that the group had ties with foreign networks in Egypt and Afghanistan, including *al-Qa'eda*. The group first attracted attention when its members stoned Fuad Kardudi to death in February 2002

for drinking alcohol. Subsequently ten of its members were each sentenced to 20 years in jail for the crime. Although not an act of terrorism, these and other activities signalled a move from fundamentalism to extremism. On 15 December 2004 Moroccan police arrested six unidentified men between the ages of 23 and 48 at Layayda, near Rabat, on suspicion of membership of *al-Takfir wal Hijra* and charged them with holding subversive meetings, threatening people and using violence. Handwritten documents and religious books, some of them inciting violence, were seized at the time of the arrests (AFP 2004b).

Fitting more into the *al-Qa'eda* framework was a plot to attack Western shipping in the Straits of Gibraltar with a speedboat manned by suicide bombers. This plot was uncovered a year before the Casablanca bombings and led to the arrest of 30 people in May and June 2002. They included three Saudis and seven Moroccans believed to have links with *as-Sirat al-Mustaqim, Salafia Jihadia* and *Takfir wal Hijra*. One of the Saudis was Abu Zubair al-Hailal Mohamed al-Tbaiti, alias the Bear, who had served as a military commander in Afghanistan before joining the Arab *Mujahideen* in Bosnia as an artillery expert. While based in London, Zubair had been a recruiter for *al-Qa'eda* (Kohlmann 2004:29). The two other Saudis were Hilal Jaber Aouad al-Assiri and Abdullah M'Sfer Ali al-Ghamdi (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007cd). A number of those arrested had been in Afghanistan, fuelling speculation that Osama bin Laden's *al-Qa'eda* network was involved in some way (Bouzerda 2002).

Terrorist cells in Morocco

Cell structures

The basic unit of an underground organisation is the cell. Usually the size of the cell depends on its function as well as the perceived threat from opposing forces. It is therefore to be expected that the cell will become smaller in order to reduce infiltration. Compartmentalisation of the cell is also a common strategy to protect the cell and the larger organisation. Compartmentalisation also implies that information is restricted relating to the planned operation, but also personal information, including the identity of cell members (referred to by aliases). The degree of compartmentalisation broadly depends on the size of the organisation, the level of support from the population and the

level of threat from opposing security forces. Particularly when ordinary citizens support security forces, the broader underground organisation and cell structures will become smaller and more defensive for fear of surveillance and infiltration. In addition to cells with specific functions, cells are also geographically organised with units in various parts of the country operating autonomously. The geographical spread of cell structures also reduces the vulnerability of the larger organisation. When cells are centralised or concentrated in one area or section of the population they can be more easily infiltrated, leading to a clamp-down on the organisation. For security and capacity reasons, both of which are necessary for the survival of an organisation, the underground cells need to be diversified both geographically and across all levels of society. Cells with specific functions include:

- External command structures, which are predominantly responsible for overall direction, propaganda, financial assistance (with decentralisation, cell structures become more self sustainable) and provide limited operational assistance

- Support cells, which are predominantly responsible for identifying potential members and conducting background checks on these people or screening them before introducing them to existing members. Front organisations could also serve in this capacity. Because of their function, it is less important to compartmentalise support cells than it is to compartmentalise operational cells

- Operational cells are smaller (normally between three and eight members). With the development of decentralised cell structures driven by a common philosophy, operational cells became more independent. Local autonomy exists within the cells responsible for executing operations. Strategic assistance or guidance may come from individual(s) representing the broader aims of the operation. It is, however, essential to note that in addition to external role-players settling in a country (target country or country being used as a safe haven) these individuals need some sort of local support. The success of the operation will depend on the ability of its members to blend in. This is because these cells know more about local conditions and because they are in a better position to make decisions relating to the implementation and timing of an operation. Within operational cells tasks are also specific:

- Cells may be organised for a specific mission and be dissolved after completion of that mission (to move on to a new mission). Each member has specific responsibilities, for example, getting access to supplies, intelligence on the target, counter intelligence that focuses on security forces, constructing the device and delivery of the device
- Common and centralised training often unifies decentralised units. This has particularly enhanced the role of training camps in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Mali. Training to enhance cohesion can also be considered 'innocent' through activities such as camping, going to a firing range or play paintball
- Compartmentalisation and decentralisation serve to protect underground organisations and their cell structures against infiltration and discovery. As a result, cell structures are becoming increasingly independent, making it extremely difficult for security forces to identify, infiltrate or penetrate cell structures

Since the Casablanca bombings, the Moroccan authorities sporadically announced the dismantling of terrorism networks that threatened the country, as well as networks which recruited individuals to participate as foreign fighters in Iraq. It is important to acknowledge that the real threat of terrorism in Morocco has come in the form of small cell structures and not from large recognisable structures. Particularly when members of the cell are limited to the same family or group of friends, these structures are extremely difficult to monitor and eradicate. Although the destructive power might be less, due to limited access to resources and organisational skills, smaller cell structures can be equally destructive by creating a constant sense of insecurity and fear.

In addition to the threat from small independent cell structures, their existence serves another purpose, which is to measure public sentiment. In the absence of, or limited access to, better structured organisations – often because of government control over areas where people might meet – individuals who are being individually radicalised will not have access to better structured organisations, but they will form smaller independent cells which include people they react with that have similar viewpoints and sentiments.

In other words, the fact that Morocco is not confronted with the same level of instability is not an indication that individuals are not being radicalised. The existence of cells is an indication that domestic and international frustration

still exists. According to Judge Baltasar Garzon, one of Spain's leading anti-terrorism judges, Morocco is home to approximately 100 *al-Qa'eda*-linked cells that pose an imminent threat to Europe: 'Each cell has five to ten members – so we are talking about 900 to 1 000 people.' According to testimony, the majority of members of the cells in northern Morocco speak perfect Spanish and are able to slip easily in and out of Spain, a short distance across the Strait of Gibraltar (Dow Jones International News 2004b).

In July 2004 the security forces dismantled an 11-member terrorist cell in Agadir, southern Morocco, that was preparing to carry out acts of sabotage against undisclosed targets. This new Agadir cell was exposed on the basis of information gained from confessions by members of the Beni Mellal cell, which the security forces had previously dismantled. Preliminary information confirmed a link between the new Agadir cell and Ibrahim Hamdi, leader of the Beni Mellal cell, as well as members of an earlier Agadir cell who had been arrested in July 2003 (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2004g).

In June 2006 the security forces dismantled a group called *Jamaa al-Muslimoun al-Joudoud* or the Group of New Muslims, which was believed to be headed by Abu Issa, a UK resident. The trial of 42 alleged members of this group continued into 2007. The defendants were from Sale, Rabat, Casablanca, Berrechid, Oued Zem, Tangiers and Guelmime. The main accused, Abdelmajid Kabli, was charged with 'forming a criminal gang in order to prepare for and carry out terrorist acts; working in a non-recognised association; and organising public gatherings without authorisation' (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007cf).

In one of the biggest coup attempts, the security forces arrested 317 suspected members of the *Ansar al-Mahdi* group between August and December 2006. This group, which was established by Hassan el-Khattab, alias Abu Osama, was charged with setting up training camps in the Rif mountains, with several cells in Sale, Sidi Yehia El Gharb, Sidi Slimane, Al-Yousifiah and Casablanca, with the aim of establshing an Islamic government in Morocco (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007cg). Suspected targets included hotels, foreign missions and vital facilities in various coastal towns frequently visited by tourists (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2006d). El-Khattab was believed to have links with *Salafia Jihadia*, as well as with *al-Qa'eda* operatives in Europe and the GSPC.

Similar to the GSPC in Algeria, *Ansar al-Mahdi*, which is under the overall control of el-Khattab, is divided into northern, central, southern and eastern sectors, sub-divided into cells with an emir at the head of each cell. In August

2006 the second in command was Abu Jabir, the emir of the Casablanca cell (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2006e). El-Khattab was also believed to have appointed El Ouerdini as the emir responsible for the group's military wing. Under El Ouerdini's command, members of the group bought a piece of land in the Nador forest where they built a house, which was used as the headquarters of the military wing as well as a training base in preparation for attacks. In addition to a military training ground, the premises included a recording studio to be used in the production of propaganda material. The group financed its operations by forging banknotes (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2006f). For additional finance, El-Khattab opened stores in Sale and planned bank robberies (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2006e).

After investigations and interrogation only some 50 of the original 317 suspects were prosecuted. They included the wives of two Moroccan Air Force pilots, five soldiers, three paramilitary gendarmes and a policeman. The alleged leader of the military wing, El Ouerdini, a former military officer, denied all charges including the manufacturing of explosives and the forging of banknotes and official documents (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007ch).

Before the 2003 Casablanca attacks, fighters attached to the Rebaa cell in Meknes attacked the military barracks in Guercif, stealing Kalashnikovs (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2006g). Interior Minister Chakib Benmoussa noted in early December 2006 that *Ansar al-Mahdi* had been one of seven terrorist networks dismantled by the security forces. During these operations police questioned 320 people and charged 44 (AFP 2006a).

Several members of the security forces had been implicated, and the government initiated strategies to curb and limit radicalisation within the security forces. In an attempt to deprive *jihadists* of weapons training, compulsory military service was suspended (Black 2007a). In a strategy to further limit the possible influence of extremists, the General Directorate of Studies and Documentation (DGED), which is Morocco's secret service, arranged for religious scholars to visit military bases and barracks to instruct military personnel on tolerant Islam. A control and monitoring programme was also introduced, requiring soldiers to report anything suspicious to their commanding officers. Reacting on the seriousness of the matter, the General Directorate of the Royal Armed Forces asked for the dismissal of several army troops and non-commissioned officers who had shown signs of exaggerated religious behaviour (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007ci).

Broadening the suspected reach of *Ansar al-Mahdi,* Libyan security forces extradited two Moroccans, identified as Chami S and Aghlam A, who were

suspected to be linked to the ongoing *Ansar al-Mahdi* case in July 2007, to Morocco (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007cj). In July 2007 a court in Sale sentenced Rabi Ghanem, Rachid Souhali and Mohamed Koreaa to four years in prison for 'forming a criminal gang to plan and carry out terrorist acts as part of a collective plan aimed at seriously damaging public order; holding public meetings without prior permission; and belonging to an unauthorised association' (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007ck).

During the same period, the Interior Ministry announced that security forces had also dismantled *Jama'at al-Tawhid wal Jihad fil Maghrib* (Unification and Jihad), a cell suspected to have links to the GSPC, as well as members of the *Hizb Attahrir al-Islam* (Islamic Liberation Army). Members of the latter party were arrested for distributing compact disks as well as the internet addresses of *jihadi* organisations in poor areas in Casablanca, Agadir, Mohammedia, Settat, El Jadida and Tangiers (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2006h). Subsequently, 14 of its members were sentenced on 8 December 2006. Abdelhamid Jaafar and two others received four-year sentences and fines while the remaining 11 were sentenced to three years in jail (AFP 2006b).

In early February 2007, Moroccan security forces arrested an unknown number of unidentified members of a group believed to have been planning to target hotels and public places in Tangiers, including a Jewish neighbourhood and a supermarket chain in Marjane. The authorities announced that large quantities of firearms and explosives had been discovered in their possession (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007cl).

In another case, a court in Sale convicted members of the Nador cell on 25 July 2007 for 'forming a criminal gang to prepare for and carry out terrorist acts; holding public gatherings without authorisation; and activities in a non-authorised association'. Karim Mokhtari and Mohamed Oulichkihi received sentences of three years' imprisonment and Abdelkrim Bouchrou, Mohamed Abet, Mohamed Askyou, Mohamed El Aasraoui and Mimoun El Kakiri received two-year jail sentences (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007cm).

Followed by a case involving nine members of the Mesahel cell, which was implicated in an alleged plot to target the US Embassy in Rabat. A court on 2 March 2007 convicted Mohamed Ben El Hadi Mesahel, a Tunisian suspected of being the leader of the group, to 15 years' imprisonment (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007cn). Mesahel was alleged to have acted as a coordinator between Islamist groups in Algeria, Morocco and Libya. He was also implicated in the recruitment of Moroccans to join the armed resistance

in Iraq after taking them to Algeria with the assistance of illegal migration networks. Mesahel was also alleged to have lived in Italy, where he acted as coordinator between *al-Qa'eda* members in France, Italy and Syria planning operations including the bombing of the Milan metro, targeting the French intelligence headquarters in Paris and overseeing the operation of transporting fighters to Iraq through Syria. In January 2006 Mesahel was believed to have returned to Morocco and had contact with extremists in Casablanca and Sale who intended to participate in the insurgency in Iraq (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007co).

Mesahel's co-accused were sentenced as follows:

- Abdelghani Aouiech, ten years' imprisonment
- Adelfettah El Hidaoui, eight years
- Adelhak Touri, six years
- Lahcen Mhader, six years
- Adel Ghirar, six years
- Adel Fares, four years
- Mohamed Harmouch, two years (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007cp)

The group was arrested in March 2006 after the arrest of Anour Majrar, who told interrogators that he had visited GSPC leaders in Algeria with Mesahel and Amir Laaraj, an Algerian. Prosecutors also charged Mesahel and Majrar with being part of a terrorist network that was planning attacks on the Paris metro, Orly airport and the headquarters of the French intelligence agency, as well as Milan's police headquarters and the Basilica of San Petronio in Bologna (Smith 2007).

Ansar al-Islam

In addition to Moroccan organisations and small cell structures which have external alliances, *Ansar al-Islam*, based in the Middle East and Europe, was claimed to be spreading its influence to North Africa, and especially Morocco. Founded by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, *Ansar al-Islam* originally concentrated its operations in Iraq. In 2007 it posted a communiqué on the internet calling for the liberation of Al Andalus and the replacement of the monarchy in Morocco with an Islamic government (Cembrero 2007). Linked to Moroccan operations in Europe, particularly Spain (see also Chapter 5), the threat to liberate Al Andalus is of considerable concern to Moroccan authorities, particularly in Tetouan, close to Ceuta and Melilla. This topic will be returned to later in this chapter.

Suicide attacks in 2007

The impact of smaller independent cells was again confirmed in an attack on 11 March 2007 when Abdelfettah Raydi (23), a Moroccan, detonated his explosive vest in an internet café in Casablanca, killing himself and wounding three others. It appeared that the café was not Raydi's intended target as he detonated his device following a confrontation with the owner of the café after he could not get access to a particular website. His accomplice, Youssef Khouidri (26), dropped his suicide belt and ran away, but was later arrested and taken to hospital. Prior to the attack Raydi had been sentenced to five years' imprisonment in 2003 for his alleged involvement in the Casablanca attacks. He had, however, been pardoned in 2005. Both Raydi and Khouidri were unemployed and came from Douar Skouila, a poor neighbourhood in Casablanca. Raydi, the eldest of seven children, grew up without a father (Abdennebi 2007). According to articles reporting this event, the two were part of a group of five recruited in Hay Mohammedi, Casablanca. Other intended targets were Casablanca's police and paramilitary headquarters as well as restaurants and hotels (Ghanmi, 2007).

As a result of investigations, a number of suspected terrorists died or were killed in Casablanca during the course of 10 April. Mohamed Rachidi, alias Salah or Mustapha, who was identified as the first suspect, blew himself up in the early hours, while a second, Mohamed Mentala, alias Warda, was shot dead before he could detonate his explosive vest. In a second incident during the afternoon, an unnamed alleged terrorist barricaded himself into an apartment and detonated an explosive device, killing himself and wounding three policemen, one fatally, as well as a child. Rachidi and Mentala had also been implicated in the May 2003 bombings in Casablanca (AFP 2007h). In a third incident, five people were injured after a man had blown himself up in an apartment. Later in the evening a fourth suspect detonated his explosives, injuring five people including two policemen, as he blew himself up in the main road of the Hay al Farah district (AFP 2007i). Among those who killed themselves on this day was Ayyoub Raydi, the brother of Abdelfettah Raydi (BBC Monitoring Newsfile 2007a).

In the aftermath of the March and April attacks, Moroccan authorities arrested a number of other suspects. For example, on 21 March authorities announced that they had arrested 24 suspects, aged between 18 and 27 from Sidi Moumen, where one of the attacks had occurred, as well as Tangiers, Tetouan, Ouezzane and Chefchaouen. Twelve of the suspects were described as potential suicide bombers (AFP 2007g). The 24 were identified as Youssef Khouidri (the suicide bomber who had failed to blow himself up

on 11 March), Abderrahim Serri, Khaled Aref, Hamid El Gharbaoui, Hicham Ettouini, Youssef Ouaziz, Abderrahim Boudhrif, Zakaria Bouchama, Abdelhaq Hidri, Mohamed Essalhi, Mohamed Ettalbi, Mustapha Hidri, Youssef Boujiad, Mohamed Hamdaoui, Abdessamad Chardoudi, Hassan Ait El Baz, Abdellatif Aine, Abdellah Ennajm, Touhami Laanaya, Mourad Erraidhi, Abdallah Kricha, Ousama Ould Jomaa, Hicham Amlili, and a minor, Ala Eddine M (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007cq). On 29 March 2007 Hicham El Moumni, originally from Casablanca and described as the coordinator of the suicide bombers, was arrested in Dakhla while attempting to leave for Mauritania and Mali to join a GSPC/AQLIM training camp. He was claimed to have had links with Abdelfettah Raydi but left after the 11 March explosion.

On 14 April 2007 two brothers detonated their suicide vests in Casablanca. The bombers killed themselves near the US consulate in Casablanca and the American Language Centre in the Boulevard Moulay Youssef. The bombers were identified as Omar Maha (23), who had been one of the suspects in the March 2007 suicide bombings in Casablanca, and Mohamed Maha (32), previously unknown to the security forces (*Kuwait Times* 2007).

Moroccan Nationals linked to GSPC/AQLIM in Algeria

Although Algeria and Morocco do not have the best of relationships, they work together on security matters (particularly on a tactical level), while admitting that there is still much room for improvement in their cooperation. Algerian terrorist groups historically used Morocco as an important supply route. The following examples and court cases further emphasise the importance of cooperation between the two countries.

Moroccan relationships with the GSPC exist on two levels. One is regional or cross-border cooperation with extremist movements in Algeria, particularly in smuggling supplies through networks. The second is Moroccan participation in the GSPC international network, particularly in Europe. An example of Moroccan involvement in the GSPC in Europe manifested in the arrest and trial of Yassine Chekkouri, a Moroccan, who was found guilty on 2 February 2004 of collaborating with the Milan cell of the GSPC in recruiting and sending volunteers to Afghanistan, Algeria and Tunisia (AFP 2004c). Chapter 5 will continue this discussion.

The arrest of a French national, Robert Richard Antoine Pierre, alias Lahj, alias Abu Abderrahmane, alias Yakoub, in the aftermath of the 2003 Casablanca attacks, led to the identification of 16 members of *Al Oussuoud*

Khalidine (Timeless Lions), a *Salafia Jihadia* cell created by Pierre, who had previously received training in Afghanistan. Members of the cell fled to Spain via Ceuta. Eight members of the cell captured in Morocco confessed that Pierre had taught at a workshop on 'mines, grenades, bombs and guerrilla tactics' in woods near Tangiers known as Gueznaya. The cell members had also received psychological indoctrination and training in weapons handling and the preparation of explosives. Leading members of the cell were named as Brahim Hamdi, Abdeslam Dachraoui and Rachid Aharez, while other cell members were Meftah Abdelaziz, alias Moul Sossess, Lassiri Ismail Abu Houdeifa, Ayatm Mustafa Al Azkari, Abdelilah Hisnou, Abu Ali, Mohamed Maataoui, alias Souinaa, alias Chouaib, and Ahmed Baraka. Links had already been forged with the GSPC through Abdelaziz Benyaich, who was arrested in Algeria (Rodriguez 2003).

The following individual cases further reflect on the relationship between extremists in Morocco and Algeria:

- In July 2007 Moroccan security forces announced the arrest of 15 suspected *al-Qa'eda* members. According to security sources, the suspects came from Algeria, but planned to execute acts of terrorism in Morocco (Reuters 2007h)

- In September 2007 the court in Sale condemned 21 suspected terrorists who included Mohamed Reha and Mohamed Zemouri, two Belgians of Moroccan origin who were planning to set up 'a terrorist cell in Morocco and preparing to send its members to Algeria to train in *jihad* and to join the GSPC/AQLIM'. The cell that had been dismantled in November 2006 was led by Reha and Khalid Azig, who had links with Brahim Benchekroun and Mouhamed Mazouz, former Guantanamo detainees who had been arrested in Afghanistan (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007cr). According to the security forces, Azig had studied theology in Syria and had made frequent trips between Syria and Turkey, while Reha, who had also travelled to Syria, had links to Islamist radicals in Europe (Reuters 2007i). Confirming the broader threat and impact, Reha told police that 'not only were we preparing *jihad* operations in Morocco, but we were working to expand our *jihadist* movement to all the countries of the Maghreb with the help of our Algerian brothers from the GSPC' (Guitta 2007). Reha, Zemouri and Azig were sentenced to ten years' imprisonment after being found guilty of 'forming a criminal gang to plan and commit terrorist acts as part of a collective plan aimed at seriously harming public order; and collecting and procuring money with the purpose of using it for terrorist acts'. The court sentenced two defendants, Hassan Alouan and Brahim

Benchekroun, who had previously been detained in Guantanamo Bay, to ten years in prison. Four-year sentences were handed down against six defendants – Bouchta Boujemaa, Mohamed Benzouhair, Omar Mahdi Takhtaoui, Yassine Alioua, Ahmed Alilouch and Anouar El Jabri – after they had been found guilty of charges of 'forming a criminal gang to plan and commit terrorist acts as part of a collective plan aimed at harming public order'. The court passed three-year sentences on Abderrahim Zajli, Ahmed Boukir and Yasser Al Otmani and two-year sentences on Mohamed Mazouz, a former Guantanamo detainee, and Driss Benlaakoul. Abdelkabir Chlieh was given a one-year term for being guilty of not informing the authorities. The court acquitted Hamid Daouiane, Farid Moussaid, Da Ali Ali and Ibrahim Draoui (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007cs). Of a total of 18 Moroccan who had been detained in Guantanamo Bay, ten had already been handed over to Morocco. Said El Boujaadia, Abdellatif Nassir and Younes Chagouri were among those waiting to be deported to Morocco, where they are likely to stand trial (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007ct)

- In August 2005, Moroccan authorities dismantled a cell linked with the *Salafia Jihadia*, arresting 30 people in Sale, Casablanca, Rabat, Fes and Tetouan suspected of having been in contact with the GSPC. Thirteen of the 30 were charged alongside six Moroccans handed over by Algeria who were alleged to have received paramilitary training in Algeria (Reuters 2005) and who were identified as Mustapha El Khayri, alias Abu El Oualid, Abdelouahab El Bahloudi, Abdelhak El Basrawi, Khaled El Marabiti, Abdelilah El Roudani and Mimoun Rahhou. They were suspected of having made contact with Tarek Charkaoui through the GSPC website run by Adel El Sakr, alias Abu Yaser El Sayyaf (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2005c). El Khayri, who was believed to be the leader of the cell, and the others were charged with 'threatening public safety, theft, extortion, illegal possession of weapons, formation of a gang to prepare and commit terrorist acts and membership of an unauthorised association' (AFP 2005b). Mohamed D, who was arrested in the suburbs of Dakhla in Western Sahara, had entered Western Sahara illegally from Mauritania. He admitted that he had received paramilitary training at a camp run by the GSPC in the Malian Sahara (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2006j). The six Moroccans handed over by Algeria were some of the 19 involved in this case who had entered Algeria secretly to join the GSPC for military training

- In another case, Anouar Mjerar, alias Anwar Mazrar, a Moroccan, was sentenced after being extradited from Greece in October 2005 (AFP

2007j). He received a seven-year jail sentence for trying to establish links with the GSPC and for preparing terrorist acts. He was arrested in Greece on 13 September 2005 after escaping from France. According to French intelligence, Mjerar was suspected of having set up a terrorist network. French intelligence had informed the Greek authorities that Mjerar would attempt to enter Greece from Turkey on a bus travelling from Istanbul to Thessalonika (BBC Monitoring Europe, 2007)

- On 2 February 2007 a court in Rabat sentenced 18 members of the GSPC to up to ten years' imprisonment. They were Mustapha Khayri, alias Abou El Oualid (ten years), Abdelouhab El Bahlouli and Abdelhak El Basraoui (eight years), Azeddine Nouali (six years), Khalid M'rabti, Abdelilah Redouani and Ali El Abdi (five years), Mohamed Benharrous and Lahcen Benmoussa (four years), Jaouad Aouam, Tarek Cherkaoui, Mustapha Zitouni, Hassan Bouiyi and Abdelmouin Sbai (three years), Kamal Belyamani and Mimoun Rahou (one year) and Abdelilah Roudani and Abdelaziz El Ouafi (a fine of 5 000 dirhams). Younes Zitouni was acquitted on all charges (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007cu)

A fuller picture of the role Algerian nationals were playing in the threat to security in the sub-region emerged when Moroccan security forces dismantled a network of 26 suspects in February 2007 (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007cv and cx). They included:

- Khaled T, the leader of the Tetouan, El Fnidiq and Wassan cell, also referred to as the Tetouan cell, which originally specialised in the recruitment of volunteers to Iraq. During interrogation, Khaled acknowledged that while in Syria he had discussed a strategy to establish a *jihadist* network in Morocco with Abdellatif B, a Moroccan. The primary objective of the network was to attack ships at anchor in the Strait of Gibraltar. Rachid Essoussi would carry out this mission after he had completed his training in Iraq in the manufacturing and use of explosives. Other members of the Tetouan cell were Ahmed Safri, a Swedish national of Moroccan origin, and Mohamed Nadir, who died while in custody. In addition to receiving ideological training from the GSPC, the cell was believed to have received financial and logistical support from this organisation as well as from the GICM (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007cw)

- Yassine A and Fouad H were sent to Algeria to receive training in the construction of car bombs. Their sponsor was Abdelali Meftah, a Moroccan living in Belgium

- Abdelmalek B, a Morocco, helped Yassine A and Fouad H to reach Algeria with the assistance of a smuggling network operating between Algeria and Morocco. Abdelmalek also provided assistance to Karim Ouled Akka, brother of Mohamed Ouled Akka, who was killed in the suicide blast in Leganes, Spain, after the Madrid bombings

Ceuta and Melilla

The autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla are of particular importance in the counter-insurgency programmes of both Morocco and Spain. Although under Spanish authority, the fact that the cities are situated in Morocco means that they are used for *jihadist* propaganda. The living conditions of the cities' Muslim quarters make it a fertile breeding ground for extremists.

It therefore came as no surprise when Spanish Interior Minister Alfredo Perez Rubalcaba announced at a Spanish–Algerian summit in December 2006 that a cell whose members included ten Spanish citizens and one Moroccan national had been dismantled (EFE News Service 2006). According to information, the cell was associated with the *Salafia Jihadia* and had the Darkawia mosque as its ideological centre. Its members included two brothers of Hamed Abderrahaman Ahmed, the so-called Spanish Taliban, who had spent two years in Guantanamo Bay but was freed early in 2008 after terrorism charges against him in Spain were withdrawn. The cell had allegedly planned to attack a military arsenal. During their search operations police found forged documents, a flak jacket and an air pistol as well as cash, computers and mobile phones (Reuters 2006).

Earlier, other areas around Ceuta had witnessed local acts of terrorism. Tetouan, for example, had been implicated in a few threats beyond Morocco:

- Jamal Ahmidan, a suspect in the bombings, who lived near the Hsida mosque in Tetouan, died in a suicide blast during a subsequent standoff with Spanish police in Madrid on 3 April 2004 (*Mail and Guardian* 2007a)

- Abdelmonaim el-A ani (22), a Tetouan labourer, detonated his vehicle loaded with explosives on 6 March 2006 outside a funeral tent in a village near Baqubah, Iraq, killing six people and injuring 27 (Whitlock 2007)

- Moncef bin Masaoud (21), a Tetouan student attending college in Tangiers and a close friend of Abdelmonaim el-Aani, died in another suicide attack in Baqubah, Iraq, in August 2006 (Whitlock 2007)

- Yones Achebbak (23) also left for Iraq in 2006 but his fate is unknown (Whitlock 2007)

- The Hsida mosque recruited two young residents for suicide bombings in Baqouba, Iraq, in October 2006 (*Mail and Guardian* 2007a)

Of several Iraqi recruitment networks in Morocco uncovered by the country's security forces, one, which was dismantled in May 2007, included 23 Moroccan members with links to other Moroccan nationals in Mauritania, Belgium and Syria. Khalid Azig, a Moroccan and the network's suspected leader, as well as Mohamed Reha and his uncle Mohamed Zemmouri, two Belgians of Moroccan origin, were among those arrested. Two former Guantanamo Bay detainees, Brahim Benchekroun and Mahomed Mazouz, were also believed to be part of this recruitment network (Dow Jones International News 2007h). Mohsen Khaibar, a Moroccan currently living in Syria, was named as a link between Iraqi recruitment networks in Morocco and Algeria. The role of the internet in the recruitment process was again confirmed when detainees indicated that they used the internet to communicate with Algerian and Moroccan nationals (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007cy).

The borders between Algeria and Morocco and between Algeria and Mali have always been areas of concern.

- After a raid in 1994, Said Hamaz was jailed in Casablanca for 15 years for arms trafficking between Morocco and Algeria (AFP 2001)

- In December 2005 Moroccan authorities arrested 11 suspects in Casablanca for allegedly belonging to a group active on the border between Algeria and Mali and with ties to the GSPC (AFP 2005c)

- Mohamed Said Idghiri, a Moroccan and the suspected cell leader, was arrested in Casablanca. According to police, he was trained at a secret Sahel-African Islamist paramilitary camp in the Sahel-Saharan region before returning to Morocco to organise attacks (AFP 2005c). Idghiri and 13 other suspects were believed to be linked to a group operating on the Algeria-Mali border (Reuters 2006a)

- Cross-border incursions continued during 2007. For example, in July Moroccan authorities expected that more than ten Algerians had managed to infiltrate from Algeria into Morocco (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007cz). The Misab mountains and the border region around Tlemcen saw an increase in activities during 2007. In addition to cross-border incursions,

> eastern Morocco also witnessed the setting up of mobile training camps for individuals of different nationalities. By contrast with similar camps in southern Algeria and northern Mali, the mobile training camps in eastern Morocco were used for the training of smaller groups – often between seven and ten people (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007da)

The year 2007 also saw the first fatality of a Moroccan national aligned to GSPC/AQLIM in Algeria. Algerian security forces killed Mohamed Ridha Belhachemi in late July near Tizi Ouzou (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007db). One of six Moroccans known to have been based in Algeria, Belhachemi was one of three Moroccans filmed in a video released by AQLIM. The other two were identified as Mohamed Bakkali and Mohamed Agbalou. Others wanted for their alleged association with a terrorist network active in the region were Bilal Hamam, Aziz Chakouani, alias Youssef, and Abdelali Chairi, alias Bechir (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007dc).

Organised crime and the financing of terrorism

Moroccan authorities released a 110-page report at a counter-terrorism summit in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in February 2005. Drafted by Morocco's Territorial Surveillance Directorate (DST), a counter-espionage and political police agency, and the Moroccan National Judicial Police, the report noted that Islamist terrorist organisations have branched out into other criminal activities as a means of financing their operations. It suggested that much of the money used to finance the 11 March attacks in Madrid had come from drug trafficking. 'The savage and bloody acts [of 11 March] were financed by drug trafficking endorsed by a *fatwa* from within the terrorist organisation responsible for the attacks,' the report stated, noting that the *fatwa*, or Islamic edict, 'provided religious legality for the use of criminal acts, such as drug trafficking, to finance the perpetration of any action aimed at destroying the infidel enemy'.

In stressing the growing relationship between Islamist terrorism and organised crime, the Moroccan authorities also pointed to incidents other than the 11 March attacks and the Casablanca bombings in May 2003. The report also listed terrorist plots that the police have discovered and managed to prevent, among them attacks against foreign interests, including embassies, hotels and fast-food restaurants, churches and synagogues. Nonetheless, the report argued that Moroccan security forces have managed to 'dismantle the most important' terrorist networks in the country, arresting more than 2 000 people for terrorism-related crimes (Cembrero 2005).

Conclusion

Despite reference to terror networks, the real threat of terrorism presents itself in small and independent cells, often involving members of the same family and almost always individuals with previous prison records for their involvement in dismantled terror networks or in other crime, especially narcotics-related offences. In understanding the current and potential threat of terrorism to the region, it is essential to focus on the radicalisation process as experienced in Morocco. As mentioned previously, the success of terror organisations is determined by their ability to adapt to changing circumstances and to use specific circumstances for their own advantage. Morocco's vulnerability is increased by:

- Poor socio-economic conditions concentrated in particular areas. While it is important to emphasise that not all the people in dire circumstances will turn to terrorism, previous examples have proved that poor socio-economic conditions influence a person's susceptibility to be radicalised. Conditions such as unemployment, illiteracy and slums further contribute to hopelessness and isolation

- Conviction of individuals for relatively short prison terms on the slightest suspicion of having been involved in terrorism-related activities. Radicalisation while being imprisoned has proved to be an area of concern. It was estimated in December 2006 that approximately 370 individuals were currently in prison in Morocco for terrorism-related offences. A further 260 had been pardoned in the previous few years (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2006k)

With the alignment of the GSPC with *al-Qa'eda*, an ideological framework was created to further justify violence and to train extremists in the region. The internet and individual radicalisation have been of great concern. Morocco's experience makes it clear that one does not need to have coordinated organisations in order to threaten the state and its population. How to counter this threat is another challenge that will be discussed in Chapter 6.