

## CHAPTER 5

# NORTH AFRICAN INVOLVEMENT IN TRANSNATIONAL TERROR NETWORKS

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Counter-terrorism strategies during the 1990s in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia assisted the spread and development of transnational terrorism networks in Europe. Political exclusion, mass arrests and convictions forced those involved or suspected of being involved in political opposition or acts of violence and terrorism to leave for countries where they would have more freedom to continue their activities (protected under the guise of political asylum). From these safe havens a number of individuals directed operations against their countries of origin.

At the same time, the absence of effective counter-terrorism strategies in much of Europe further assisted the spread of terrorism. Initial freedom to recruit and disseminate information had enabled members of the FIS, AIS, GIA, GSPC and GICM to establish support networks in Europe. Initially settling in France for language reasons, the GIA began a two-pronged strategy of facilitating acts of terrorism in Algeria and committing violent acts on French soil. As France's own counter-terrorism strategies improved, the networks spread to other European countries. As will be seen in this chapter, these networks also facilitated training in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya and, later, participation in the insurgency in Iraq.

While Afghanistan war veterans had exercised a great influence on domestic campaigns in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, Bosnian terrorists contributed predominantly to the spread of networks and subsequent operations in European countries. Europe was no longer considered as only a facilitation network. It became a battleground, fuelled by the resentment of North African immigrant communities.

Unlike the people involved in the 9/11 attacks on the US, who were mostly Saudis and Egyptians, most of the attacks in Europe have been carried out by North African groups such as the GIA, GSPC, GICM and allied groups in Libya and Tunisia. *Al-Qa'eda*, as mentioned earlier, made use of these established networks, particularly those of the GIA/GSPC, through common ideology, training and operations, to enhance its own operations in Europe.

It is therefore essential to place recent developments in Europe in a historical context. In countries with the most developed systems of political asylum and basic human rights and civil liberties, it was relatively easy for groups such as the GIA/GSPC from Algeria, the GICM from Morocco and others from the Middle East to set up structures to support campaigns in their countries of origin. Networks that had previously concentrated on propaganda and fund-raising transformed themselves into networks for recruitment and for facilitating the transnationalisation of what had previously been domestic terrorism.

While a detailed discussion of the importance of Europe to the development of transnational terrorism and the role of North Africa is beyond the scope of this chapter, some salient points should be noted.

The establishment of immigrant communities in Europe provided a safe haven for individuals coming from their respective countries of origin. The question of integration and associated isolation enhanced a sense of brotherhood of these communities. The close proximity of Europe and liberal immigration laws made entry to these countries relatively easy. Activities such as the illegal narcotics trade and the forging of official documents, in which some members of the immigrant communities often participated, made it relatively easy to merge organised crime and terrorism. As with France, networks were established in Italy, Germany, the UK and other countries for the procurement of weaponry destined for Algeria.

A sophisticated forgery cell in Rouiba, Algeria, led by an unnamed businessman from Bordj Menaiel, had some 20 members and specialised in the production of fake seals and stamps, residence documents, visas and passports. Active between 2000 and 2006, this cell also organised the escape of members of the GIA/GSPC members from Algeria to Spain. The cell's network extended to Algiers, Boumerdes and Tizi Ouzou. Among the items seized by the authorities in February 2006 were fake seals from the air and border police, the Algerian customs service and Algerian consulates in Spain (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2006l).

Prior to the events of 9/11, some European security agencies were believed to have turned a blind eye to these support networks as the perception existed that they did not present a domestic threat. This perception dramatically changed after 9/11 and especially after the Madrid and London bombings when it became clear that terrorist networks and some members of immigrant communities had changed their focus to include attacks in their host countries.

European countries also realised that in addition to the involvement of individuals wanted in other countries who had made use of political asylum, or of other illegal networks, a number of individuals involved in attacks such as the London bombings had had no previous connection with extremism or criminal activities but had been second and third generation immigrants, who had been radicalised by established extremists often wanted in other countries.

Three generations of *al-Qa'eda* supporters were thus discernable – newly radicalised established immigrants representing the third generation, those trained in *al-Qa'eda* training camps representing the second generation, and those who had participated in the war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan as well as the war in Bosnia representing the first generation.

Unemployment, racial intolerance and a growing perception that the war against terrorism was a war against Islam made it relatively easy for already radicalised individuals from countries such as Algeria, as well as individuals linked with the Afghan *Mujahideen* and Bosnian fighters, to recruit willing followers. For example, Mohamed el Maghrebi, an Algerian who had settled in Paris, played an important role in the radicalisation of Willy Brigitte, a French national who had received training under *Lashkar-e-Taiba* in Pakistan. Brigitte was later arrested on suspicion of coordinating a plot to attack Australia's energy network (Australian Broadcasting Committee, 2004).

It should be noted, as established in earlier chapters, that activities particularly in Europe, were not limited to individuals representing similar nationalities. Instead transnational networks were well established and interacted with other networks across borders. In addition, European support cells became specialised, at least to a certain extent. For example, a cell in France run by Karim Bourti made use of a network of fake brand-named clothing for fundraising (Pecastaing 2004:156), while Bourti also sent recruits to *al-Qa'eda* camps via London to Afghanistan. A second example, was the cell in Spain which specialised in forging documents and passports (Schanzer 2002). Also, the six members of the GSPC arrested in Italy in June 2003 included Tunisian as well as Moroccan nationals. The depth of the GSPC's network in Europe had already become apparent when in April 2000 police broke up cells in Italy and France that were believed to be planning to bomb a French market.

These networks were predominantly influenced by Afghanistan and Bosnian *Mujahideen*. Nationals from the three countries under review continued their involvement in the conflicts in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Chechnya as well as the second wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The particular influence of the Bosnian *Mujahideen* will be apparent throughout this monograph. For

example, Abu el-Ma'ali, alias Abdelkader Mokhtari, as well as former GIA commanders Abu Muhajir al-Djazairi and Abu Sabir al-Djazairi, established an Algerian cell in Bosnia, while Al-Hajj Boudella, an Algerian combat instructor, transferred from the Al-Sadda training camp in Afghanistan to Bosnia in 1992 (Kohlmann 2004:20;62).

Fuelling perceptions of a coordinated strategy in Europe, Spanish court documents referred to the fact that Moroccan, Libyan and Tunisian terror groups had met in February 2002 in Istanbul, Turkey, under the auspices of Abu Musab al Zarqawi, the Jordanian radical who led *al-Qa'eda* in Iraq, to plot how to bring holy war to Europe (Johnson et al 2005). This development spelled serious consequences for European security forces.

The involvement of Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian nationals in transnational acts of terrorism were however not limited to Europe: Among many examples of the involvement of Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian nationals in networks in Europe was the 3 July 2005 killing in Riyadh by Saudi security forces of the country's most wanted man, the *al-Qa'eda* leader in Saudi Arabia, Younis Mohammad Ibrahim al-Hayyari, who was originally from Morocco and who was also suspected of being involved in attacks in Riyadh carried out four days before the Casablanca suicide bombings. Two Moroccans were also accused of planning to hijack an aircraft in order to crash into a building in Jeddah (AFP 2004k). Other examples that will be discussed in this chapter include Lebanon and Iraq.

The following country-by-country discussion summarises the involvement of Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian nationals in terrorism networks in Europe and the Middle East.

## Lebanon

In September 2004 a GSPC cell was implicated in the recruitment for foreign fighters for Iraq near Tripoli, Lebanon, and the Ayn al-Hilwah Palestinian refugee camp, also in Lebanon. Lebanon served as an important part of the network for Algerian fighters. According to *Algeria News*, in July 2007 Syrians and a Lebanese living in Beirut were in charge of the reception of volunteer *jihadists* (Algeria Events 2007). These new recruits received training in combat and explosives before being sent to Iraq or Algeria.

Tunisian and Algerian nationals were also involved in *Fatah al-Islam* in Lebanon. On 20 May 2007, the Tunisians listed below, who were among a

group of 59 individuals which also included Syrian, Saudi Arabian, Yemeni, Egyptian and Palestinian nationals, were charged with a number of terrorist and related offences.

The Tunisians involved were:

- Al-Bashir Bin Muhammad al-Tayyib al-Arimani (22), alias Abu-Khubayb
- Ahmad Bin Ammar Bin Uthman Shawwat (21), alias Abu Asim al-Tunisi
- Al-Azhar Bin Bashir Bin Ibrahim Ghawfah (21), alias Abu-Ramzi al-Tunisi
- Ali Bin al-Mabruk Bin Sa'd al-Jari (21), alias Abu-Ramzi al-Tunisi
- Ali Bin Ammar al-Mahdi Bin Muhammad Buqadimah (19), alias Abu-Muhannad al-Tunisi
- Adil Abd-al-Sadiq Bin Muhammad al-Rahmani (32), alias Abu-al-Basir al-Tunisi
- Mahmud Bin al-Bashir Bin Abdallah Shawwat (25), alias Abu-al-Shayma al-Tunisi
- Muhammad Bin Ammar Bin Ali al-Jari (21), alias Abu-Abd-al-Haq al-Tunisi
- Abd-al-Razzaq Bin Ma'tuq Bin Misbah al-Tuwway (21), alias Abu-Ubaydah al-Tunisi
- Fathi Bin Nasr Bin Husayn al-'Asadi (25), alias Abu-al-Fida al-Tunisi

Algerians in the group included:

- Faysal Isma'il al-Uqlah (26), alias Abu-Shu'ayb al-Jaza'iri. Although born in Algeria, he carried a forged Syrian identity card in the name of Basim Hasan Muhammad Kilani and a forged Palestinian identity card in the name of Basim Bassam Ya'cub. According to Lebanese security forces, he was in charge of the *Shari'a* committee of *Fatah al-Islam*
- Nasr al-Din Bin Abdo Belqaem (21), alias Abu-Yasir al-Jaza'iri. Although born in Algeria, he carried a forged Syrian identity card in the name of Muhammad Ali Abbud

- Izz al-Din Bin Abd-al-Qadir Bin Musa (32), alias Abu-Mu'taz al-Jaza'iri. Although born in Algeria, he carried a forged Syrian census card in the name of Sami Ahmad Baydun

A month later, on 20 June 2007, Syrian security forces in Lebanon announced that they had arrested 40 Algerians who were attempting to join *Fatah al-Islam* (BBC Monitoring Newsfile 2007b).

## France

France was the first choice for Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian immigrants, as well as Islamists fleeing prosecution in their countries of origin. As already indicated, a common language was one of the primary reasons. As a result of attacks directed at French residents of Algeria (referred to in Chapter 2), French security forces began to crack down on GIA networks in France.

In addition to its network to support its operations in Algeria, Gunaratna (2002:162-163) confirmed that *al-Qa'eda* had infiltrated the FIS and the GIA in the early 1990s with the aim of demonising France among Algerians living in France. Subsequently, in addition to targeting French and other Western residents in Algeria, the GIA was able to mount several attacks against France in 1995 and 1996. Three examples of detonations in Paris were:

- An explosive device detonated in July 1995 at the Saint-Michel metro station near the Notre Dame cathedral, which killed eight people and injured a further 150
- A nail bomb in August 1995, which injured 17 people
- A car bomb in December 1996, which killed four people

Confirming the involvement of Algerian nationals, French police arrested ten suspects, including Boualem Bensaid (28), an Algerian student, in Lille in November 1995. Bensaid appeared to have acted as a go-between for terrorist cells operating in France and the GIA. Investigators revealed that the GIA recruited potential terrorists in suburban slums in France populated by North African immigrants, many of them unemployed. Confiscated material included documents, computers and accounting statements that shed light on how the terrorist network received logistical and financial support from outside France (Drozdiak 2005).

Khaled Kelkal, who held Algerian and French citizenship and who was directly linked through his fingerprints on an unexploded device, ran an information bureau in contact with Human Concern International, based in Stockholm and Zagreb which served as a staging point for the GIA's transnational operations. Kelkal, who was trained in Afghanistan, was also involved in an international Arab-Afghan network. He was killed in a shootout with French police in October 1995. A firearm found in his possession had been used earlier to kill Sheikh Abdelbaki Sahraoui, a co-founder of the FIS. Kelkal was believed to be a member of a group which travelled across Europe to hunt down Algerian dissidents in exile who were against the use of violence in Algeria (Kohlmann 2004:142).

Ahmed Ressay, an Algerian and a member of the GIA, worked with the Roubaix cell as well as *al-Qa'eda* on another Paris metro bombing, this time in 1996 at Port Royal, killing and injuring 91 people. Ressay was also implicated and prosecuted for his involvement in the 2000 plot to blow up Los Angeles international airport (the millennium plot) (Williams 2002:123). Two members of this cell, Boualem Bensaid, the mastermind of the Saint-Michel attack, and Smain Ait Ali Belkacem, the group's bomb expert, were sentenced to life imprisonment in 2002.

Earlier, in September 1999, French prosecutors had convicted 21 other members of the Roubaix cell, including Bensaid, Belkacem and Karim Koussa to six to ten years' imprisonment (Gunaratna 2002:164). Rachid Ramda, who operated from the UK, was extradited to France in 2005 where he was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment before further charges were brought against him in 2007 for his involvement in at least three bombings, including the 1995 attack on the Saint-Michel metro, for which he had been the financier. Prosecutors also suspected Ramda of handling the group's propaganda through his contacts with GIA cell members in Lille, Lyon and Paris (Von Derschau 2007a). Koussa, who was implicated in a number of GIA terror plots, had received training in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Kohlmann 2004:143).

The Roubaix cell was linked to the GIA as well as to *al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya* (Egypt) and the *Mujahideen* in Bosnia, particularly Abu el-Ma'ali and Fateh Kamel. After a shootout with French police, the apartment that served as a Roubaix hideout blew up, killing Rachid Souindi and Said el-Laihar, two Moroccans, and Teli bel Hachen, an Algerian. However, Lionel Dumont and Mouloud Boughelane, who were leaders of the cell, escaped (Kohlmann 2004:195).

Although German authorities had primary jurisdiction over the Strasbourg plot, which involved the Frankfurt cell, French authorities conducted

their own investigations and convicted the following individuals (Vidino 2006:165):

- Slimane Khalfaoui, alias Meliani, an Algerian linked to Mohammed Bensakhria, who had been wanted by authorities since 1996, who was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment
- Yacine Aknounche, an Algerian trained in Pakistan and Afghanistan with the assistance of Abu Doha, was arrested in September 2000 and sentenced to eight years' imprisonment although he denied any involvement in the Strasbourg plot

Following several successful prosecutions of the GIA in France its members established cells in Spain, Germany, Italy, Belgium and Switzerland. As Ambassador Ramtane Lamaara told a US House subcommittee hearing on Africa in the aftermath of the bombings in France: 'The international dimensions of the Algerian terrorist groups became proven facts, as cells with links to Iran, Afghanistan and Bosnia were identified or dismantled in France, Italy, Belgium, Spain, Germany and the UK' (Lama 1998).

After 9/11, the involvement of Algerian nationals in transnational terrorism was better recorded. French authorities in particular arrested and convicted a large number of Algerians for their involvement in the GIA. For example, on 30 November 2001, 19 GIA supporters were convicted in Paris for channelling arms and false identity documents to terrorists in Algeria (Ganley 2001). One of them, Laurent Mourad, a member of the London Algerian network, had travelled to Paris in 2001 where he reported his passport stolen on five separate occasions, being issued with new passports on each occasion and handing on his old passports to other GIA members including Said Arif (Vidino 2006:173).

A more recent example was the extradition of Said Arif from Syria to France. Arif, alias Slimane Chabani, alias Abderrahmane, who was born in Oran, Algeria, deserted from the army and spent time in *al-Qa'eda* training camps in Afghanistan. According to French officials, he was one of the closest lieutenants of al-Zarqawi, the Jordanian-born terrorist behind beheadings and a number of bombings in Iraq. Arif also had close relations with the Algerian cell based in Frankfurt, Germany, which had been involved in the Strasbourg plot. He escaped capture on that occasion and reached the Caucasus, specifically Georgia, where he collaborated with *al-Qa'eda* and veterans of Afghan camps. He was later arrested in France for his involvement in the ricin plot. The network was dismantled in December 2002 with the arrest of nine suspects in the Paris suburbs of La Courneuve and Romainville (Dow

Jones International News 2004c). This cell, which was led by Merouane Benahmed, an emir of the GIA, specialised in making bombs with electronic detonators. Benahmed was trained in *al-Qa'eda* training camps in Afghanistan and Chechnya.

On 16 December 2002 French police raided an apartment in Romainville, Paris and arrested three Algerians and one Moroccan who were members of the La Corneuve cell. Canisters containing cyanide and butane were found, as well as a protective suit, used when in contact with chemical and biological weapons, propaganda material, fake identity and travel documents, instructions on the production of cyanide and other toxic materials and videos on the *jihad* in Chechnya. One of men arrested was Menad Benchellali, who had received chemical as well as military training in Afghanistan and Chechnya and who was known as an *al-Qa'eda* recruiter. Another was Belmehel Beddaïdj, who confirmed the connection with the La Corneuve cell, which planned to attack Russian targets, more details of which became known after the arrest in January 2005 of Maamar Ouazane and two other Algerians. According to Ouazane, the cells planned to attack the Russian Embassy in Paris, the Eiffel Tower, a large department store and a police station (Vidino 2006:176-177;179).

At Trappes in September 2005, four men were arrested and charged with targeting the metro at Orly airport outside Paris. They included the cell leader, Safe Bourada, a French citizen of Algerian origin (Reuters 2007k).

In June 2006 a French court convicted 25 Islamist militants of planning terror attacks in Paris and of recruiting fighters to send to Chechnya and Afghanistan. Four ringleaders, who were either Algerians or of Algerian descent, received jail sentences of between nine and ten years. Khaled Ouldali, identified as one of the suspects, was a former member of FIS who had travelled to Chechnya twice and fought under the command of Ibn ul-Khattab. Most of the Algerians who participated in the conflict in Chechnya belonged to the London network headed by Abu Doha (Vidino 2006:174).

## **The United Kingdom**

The UK has been an attractive haven for extremists, even before 9/11. As already indicated, Rachid Ramda, the financier of the 1995 Paris metro attacks, had operated from the UK before being extradited to France in 2005. In addition to financing terrorism, Ramda had been actively involved in publishing *Al Ansar*, the GIA's official newsletter. Further Nadir Remli, the former head of the GIA cell in London, was linked to Abu-Qatadah al-Falastini

(a radical Palestinian-Jordanian cleric who stayed in the UK since the early 1990s after claiming political asylum), while Abu-Hamza al-Misri used the network in London to distribute *Al Ansar* and other GIA publications (Vidino 2006:138).

The alleged head of the GIA group in London, Nadir Remli (47), and Mohamed Dnidni, who was believed to have been one of the main GIA officials in Great Britain for five years, had been under investigation in France and Britain since 1994 when Dr Benali Sitayeb, a Briton of Algerian origin, Dr Abderhamane Bihi, an Algerian, and three other Algerians, Rachid Messaoudi, Abdesallam Bandaoud and Rachid Elgerbouzi, were interrogated for their suspected involvement in the GIA in London (Reuters 1994c).

Despite a warning from Algeria, Remli had been given British citizenship after being classified as a political refugee in 1991, having lived in Britain since 1983 and being married to an Irish woman. He had subsequently been one of the founders of the Algerian Community in Great Britain (ACB), an NGO that acted as an extension of the FIS in Great Britain. During 1996, Remli continued to hand out copies of *at-Tabsirah* or 'The Enlightenment', an FIS newsletter, outside the Regent's Park mosque (*The Independent* 1996). In addition to distributing the newspaper, the GIA under the leadership of Remli in London sold video material that included footage of the murders of police and government officials. This was probably one of the first examples of video material being sold to fund acts of terrorism in Algeria (AFP 1996). In June 1999, Remli and Kanerdine Kherbane confirmed that the GIA and *El-Baqoun ala el ahd*, or Faithful to the Pledge, had merged in 1998, using the offices of the ACB as a cover for their activities (All Africa 1999). On 24 February 2005, Italian security forces arrested Remli at a Rome airport in the company of his son. Wanted since 1992 by the Algerian authorities, Remli was accused of supplying money to GIA groups in Algeria since 1992 by setting up a bank account at an Arab bank in London. They were both on an Algerian list of terrorists close to the *al-Qa'eda* network that was sent to Interpol and the UN (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2005i).

It was, however, Rashid Bukhalfa, alias Abu Doha, alias the Doctor, who played an instrumental role in the GSPC's transformation from a local armed group to an international terrorist organisation. In charge of GSPC fund-raising in London, Abu Doha, who had reached the rank of emir of an Afghanistan training camp, was also responsible for recruiting fighters for Afghanistan, Chechnya and Bosnia (Hafez 2007:204). By the end of the 1990s he had extended his focus from Algeria to *al-Qa'eda*'s broader objectives. He was, for example, in contact with al-Zarqawi and Ahmed Ressam (Joscelyn 2005).

He moved to the UK in 1999, where he helped to recruit GSPC members from the large communities of disenfranchised Algerian youth in European cities. From the beginning, Abu Doha cooperated with Seifallah Ben Hassine, a Tunisian who also lived in London, who had also been an emir of a training camp in Afghanistan and who had recruited Tunisians to fight in Algeria (Vidino 2006:143;147) .

The Finsbury Park mosque played a central role in the activities of the London network. The Algerian Afghans who had sought refuge in London were looked after by the ACB, part of the Human Concern International network, an Islamist NGO that had been blacklisted by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation. Allegedly, individuals associated with the Algerian Refugee Council, with links to the Finsbury Park mosque, also assisted in the settling in of Algerian extremists in the UK. In March 2003, Dr Mohammed Sekkoum, the chairman of the Council however revealed that a substantial number of active 'terrorists' have slipped into the country with their families, seeking asylum. When he informed the British immigration service about them, the authorities told him that it had nothing to do with him (*BBC News* 2003). The Algerian network used the Finsbury Park mosque as its unofficial headquarters, with radicals using the mosque's basement in the mid 1990s for planning attacks, forging documents and firearms training. During this period Abu Doha began to establish the network with the assistance of Abu Hamza and the religious teachings of Abu Qatadah. The mosque was also used to show video material and to distribute the literature of various militant groups. Despite warnings from North African and Middle Eastern countries, these activities were largely ignored by the British authorities. While in London in 1996, Yacine Aknouche, one of the militants sentenced for his involvement in the Strasbourg plot, had been radicalised by Abu Qatadah's sermons at the Finsbury Park mosque before being recruited by Abu Doha to go to Afghanistan. Imad Kanuni, a French-Moroccan detained in Guantanamo Bay, had spent time at the Finsbury Park mosque after returning from training camps in Afghanistan (Vidino 2006:187;189;190;191).

Further assisting Abu Doha to coordinate cells across Europe were Rabah Kadre, Tarek Maaroufi, a Tunisian living in Brussels, and Mohammed Bensakhria. Maaroufi and Bensakhria helped Doha to create a large support network in Europe that provided recruits with money, accommodation and forged documents. After being arrested on 26 December 2000 after raids on *al-Qa'eda* cells in Milan and Frankfurt, Mohammed Bensakhria, alias Muhammad Ben Aissa, alias Meliani, an Algerian who headed *al-Qa'eda*'s Frankfurt cell, gave evidence of the use of GSPC members by *al-Qa'eda* (Gunaratna 2002:173-174). Kadre, also implicated in the Strasbourg plot, was

arrested in Britain where he was charged as the mastermind in the cyanide plot against London's underground. Abu Doha himself was arrested at Heathrow airport, London, in 2000 when trying to leave for Saudi Arabia on a false passport. While in British custody, Doha had extradition proceedings brought against him by the US for the millennium plot, by Italy for the plot to attack the US embassy in Rome, and by France and Germany for the Strasbourg plot (Vidino 2006:157-158).

After 9/11, British security forces took official notice of activities they had previously disregarded. In April 2003, in the first case linked to *al-Qa'eda* in Britain, Baghdad Meziane and Brahim Benmerzouga, two Algerians, were each jailed for 11 years after being found guilty of financing terrorism (Reuters 2007). Two years later, in April 2005, Kamel Bourgass (32), alias Nadir Habra, another Algerian and suspected *al-Qa'eda* member, was convicted of plotting to launch ricin and other chemical and bomb attacks on London, as well as for the murder of Detective Stephen Oake after Bourgass's Manchester flat was raided in Manchester in 2004. Bourgass, who was sentenced to 22 years for this murder, had spent time in Afghanistan training camps (Winter 2007). In the same trial as Bourgass, another Algerian, Mouhoud Sihali, was acquitted but was re-arrested after the July 2005 bombings in London. He was then the subject of an extradition application by Algeria (AFP 2007m).

After Spanish authorities had claimed that there were a number of links between the bombers and militant figures based in Britain, London Police Commissioner Sir John Stevens confirmed that a definite link had been established between the Madrid bombers and *al-Qa'eda* sympathisers sheltering in Britain. While it had previously been thought that the British connection was restricted to financial and logistical help, the Spanish claims included an allegation that the clerics at the Finsbury Park mosque had played a pivotal role in controlling the bombers. In the months after the bombings, several links with London emerged. Jamal Zougam (30), a Moroccan detained in Madrid and accused of direct involvement in making the 13 bombs placed on commuter trains, allegedly travelled to London on several occasions for logistical help and to obtain forged documents for the *al-Qa'eda* cell in Spain.

Zougam and many of the other 18 suspects detained in Madrid, as well as the seven dead, were either members of or were closely associated with the GICM network in the UK. Abu Qatadah, previously referred to as one of the spiritual leaders of the Finsbury Park mosque, was described by Spanish authorities as *al-Qa'eda's* spiritual adviser in Europe, whose followers formed the command structure of *al-Qa'eda* in Spain. Until his release in 2005, he

was held at Belmarsh prison in southeast London under emergency terror legislation (Owen 2004).

Mohammed al-Guerbouzi (40), alias Abu Aissa El Meghribi, who was born in Laraich, Morocco, was one of the first to be implicated in the London bombings of 7 and 21 July 2005. Notwithstanding Morocco's earlier attempts in 2003 and 2004 to extradite Guerbouzi, the UK had not been able to assist as no extradition treaty between the two countries had yet been finalised (AFP 2005d). Although circumstances changed dramatically after the London bombings, the UK was still not prepared to grant unqualified deportation. Instead, it insisted (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2005h) that:

- Deportees should not be subjected to torture
- Deportees should not be sentenced to death
- The Moroccan government should guarantee that deportees would be given a fair trial

If the Moroccan authorities accepted the British conditions, the signing of the memorandum was due to have taken place in 2006.

Guerbouzi had been sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment in absentia by a court in Rabat on 19 December 2003 for his alleged involvement in the Casablanca bombings. Evidence presented to a Moroccan court claimed that he had helped the Casablanca bombers to obtain false passports and money. A report by the Moroccan attorney-general's office following its international arrest warrant claimed that Guerbouzi had been involved in the following activities (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2005g):

- He was in charge of studying the social, political and economic situation in Morocco, and of collecting money for the GICM
- He was providing forged documents, including passports, for members of the GICM
- He had relations with the Libyan counterpart of the GICM, and in addition to being a part of the *jihad* in Morocco he had travelled to Spain with Nouredine Nafia to recruit new members
- He was appointed deputy emir and consultant for the CIGM in June 2001 and also head of the committee charged with collecting resources for the

group. He and the other members of the group were instructed by Abu-Mus'ab on the start of an Islamic revolution in Morocco and on how to avoid the Moroccan authorities

- His last meeting with Osama bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri had been in Kandahar, Afghanistan, where he was given bin Ladin's blessing and assurance that all logistical and financial means must be made available for the achievement of his mission
- A British resident for 16 years, Guerbouzi was also accused of having links with prominent terrorists (The Press Trust of India Limited 2005), including Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the Finsbury Park mosque's Abu Qatada who was one of the detainees released from Belmarsh prison in March 2005, and Jamal Zougham who was alleged to have called landline and mobile telephone numbers in London belonging to Gerbouzi

The British Home Office revealed in 2004 that eight of the ten people then detained under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, which is monitored by the Special Immigration Appeals Commission, were Algerians (Steele 2004):

- 'A' (37) came to Britain in 1989 to study and later took part in a marriage of convenience. He had claimed asylum but disappeared before his claim was rejected. He was alleged to have used credit card fraud to support North African terrorists
- 'B' (33) appeared in Britain in 1994. He allegedly belonged to an Algerian terror group, procuring communication equipment and other support for extremists in Chechnya and Algeria
- 'G' was an active supporter of the GSPC, which was then sponsoring young Muslims in Britain to go to Afghanistan to train for *jihād*. Because of mental health problems, 'G' had been granted bail
- 'H' came to Britain in 1993. He claimed asylum and was allowed to stay as a refugee. Later, he 'expressed bewilderment' that he should be considered a security risk. He was also said to be an active supporter of the GSPC
- Mahmoud Suliman Ahmed Abu Rideh (32) came to Britain as an asylum-seeker in 1995. Since July 2002 he had been held in Broadmoor high-security hospital because he had 'real difficulties in handling stress' and found it necessary 'to spend time on his own in the dark'. He was alleged

to be an active supporter of terrorist groups, including those with links to bin Laden's network. His activities were said to include fund-raising. He claimed only to have been involved in welfare and charity work

- 'P' arrived in Britain in February 1999. His left arm has been amputated at the wrist and the right just below the elbow. He was refused asylum. In February 2001, he was charged with possession of articles for suspected terrorist purposes, conspiracy to defraud and conspiracy to make false documents. The charges had been dropped and he had been released in May 2001. Since then he was alleged to be an associate of Algerian extremists engaged in active support for various international terrorist groups, including those associated with bin Laden. He was said to have supported at least two terrorist cells planning chemical and biological attacks in the UK
- 'I' appeared in the UK in 1995 to claim asylum. He allegedly undertook 'a range of support activities including fund-raising on behalf of terrorist groups, including networks associated with bin Laden'
- 'S' arrived in the UK from Pakistan in November 1998 on a forged Belgian passport. He claimed asylum. He was allegedly 'a member of a group of *Mujahideen* engaged in active support for various international terrorist groups'
- 'U' was arrested in February 2001 on suspicion of being involved in planning attacks on Los Angeles airport and the Christmas market in Strasbourg, France. According to security forces, 'U' first came to the UK in 1994, after spending time in a *Mujahideen* training camp in Afghanistan (AP 2007j)
- 'K', an asylum seeker who was part of Abu Doha's network, formed part of the London network's financial and logistical support base. He was arrested in July 2001 while trying to enter Pankisi Gorge on his way to Chechnya on a French passport. He had in his possession the telephone numbers of Kadre and other senior GSPC members. As part of the ricin plot, 'K' stayed in the basement of Finsbury Park mosque between 1999 and 2000 (Vidino 2006:180)
- 'E' was an alleged member of the FIT

On 24 August 2005, Atamnia Yacine, an Algerian wanted by Britain in connection with the July bombings in London, was arrested in the Sukhumvit

Soi Nana area in Bangkok, Thailand. He was in possession of 180 fake French and Spanish passports and was believed to have provided false travel documents to the bomb suspects (BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific 2005). The EU had previously named Thailand as a hub for document forgery. On 3 August 2005, Mahieddine Daikh (35), a UK citizen of Algerian origin, had been arrested in Bangkok for trying to smuggle more than 450 forged European passports from Thailand to Scotland (AFP 2005e).

In July 2007, Younes Tsouli, a Moroccan, British-born Waseem Mughal and Jordanian-born Tariq al-Daour were sentenced to a total of 24 years in prison for inciting terrorism over the internet in the first case of its kind in Britain. Tsouli (23) had set up a site to host video files and other documentation that had eventually become the de facto administrator of the online *jihadi* forum *Muntada al-Ansar al-Islami*, at one time the main internet public relations mouthpiece of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Waseem Mughal (24), a law student, was found with a computer containing a 26-minute video in Arabic containing instructions for making suicide-bomb vests and home-made explosives. Tariq al-Daour (21), a biochemistry student, was charged with using computer viruses and stolen credit card accounts to set up a network of communications forums and websites inciting violence (Krebs 2007).

## Spain

An estimated 300 suspected extremists were arrested in Spain following the 9/11 attacks in the US. Many of them had been on North African wanted lists since moving to Europe in the 1990s to establish networks in European countries, including Spain. Since 9/11 and, later, the Madrid bombings of 2003, European countries acknowledged that many extremists had abused the liberal democracies and their almost open-arms policy towards political asylum seekers. Nonetheless Spanish police arrested seven GIA members in Valencia in April 1997 (Gunaratna 2002:165).

Investigations after 9/11 led to a number of arrests, convictions and deportations. Among those that received attention was a member of the Hofstad network, Muhammad Achraf, an Algerian who headed a group in Spain called 'Martyrs for Morocco', who was in contact with Mohammed Bouyer, who had been prosecuted in the Netherlands for the murder of Theo Van Gogh. In addition to procuring funds for the Hofstad group, Achraf was wanted by Spanish police for his part in an October 2004 plot to attack the country's national court, which was the headquarters of the Madrid bombing investigations (Atwan 2006:239-240).

As already mentioned, Algerians returning to France from Chechnya preferred to travel via Spain, which had a strong GSPC base. In addition to Merouane Benahmed, who used this route in 2002, Nouredine Merabet was arrested on the Franco-Spanish border on 21 December 2002 on his way to France (Vidino 2006:177). In April 2004 a Spanish judge charged four Algerian members of the GSPC with membership of *al-Qa'eda* (AFP 2004d). The four had worked in support of the French cell led by Benahmed, who was arrested in December 2002, and had received training in Afghanistan from Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. A mobile phone detonator, similar to those used in the Bali nightclub and Madrid train bombing attacks, was found in their possession (Reuters 2004b).

In July 2004 Morocco warned Spain that it had lost track of 400 of the 600 Moroccan Islamist militants who had trained in *al-Qa'eda* camps in Afghanistan, Bosnia or Chechnya (Reuters 2004c). However, a Spanish report of 17 December 2004 indicated that police had arrested four Moroccans on suspicion of belonging to an armed Islamist group, including one man believed to be linked to the 11 March train bombings that killed and injured 191 people. The arrests took place on the Spanish Canary Island of Lanzarote, off the coast of Morocco. All four were suspected of belonging to the GICM. The leader was identified as Hassan El Haski (41), who had been the subject of an arrest warrant for the Madrid bombings. He was also suspected of being behind the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh on 2 November 2004 in Amsterdam (AFP 2004e). The others ranged in age from 31 to 40 years and one was described as an imam in a Spanish mosque. Their homes were being searched. The four were suspected of attempting to establish a logistical base on Lanzarote (Reuters 2004d).

On 27 December 2004 a Madrid judge also charged three Moroccans with belonging to a radical cell that planned to buy explosives for a terrorist attack in Spain or Morocco. Majid Bakkali, Mohamed Douha and Mustafa Farhaoui were charged with being members of a terrorist group and conspiracy to buy explosives. Bakkali and Douha were arrested in northeast Spain on 22 December, while Farhaoui was picked up three days later. Police had begun watching the group in September when they made contact with a suspected intermediary in an unspecified central European country for the purchase of explosives (Dow Jones International News 2004d).

On 3 January 2006, Spanish authorities arrested Mohammed Aberrada (20), a Moroccan, on an international arrest warrant issued by Morocco on suspicion of belonging to the GSPC. Mohamed Larbi Ben Sellam, another Moroccan suspected of aiding the Iraq insurgency, was also in custody, and

in May 2006 the Spanish parliament agreed to extradite both Aberrada and Sellam to Morocco (AFP 2006c).

On another international arrest warrant, Spanish authorities arrested Mbark el Jaafari in early February 2007 in Reus. Government sources said that el Jaafari was suspected of having received training in Afghanistan and of belonging to a terrorist structure in the service of *al-Qa'eda* and to the GSPC, which were dedicated to the recruitment of volunteers for the holy war in Morocco, Iraq and Algeria. The sources said that this terrorist structure was believed to have planned over a period of nine months to send 32 suicide bombers to carry out suicide attacks in Iraq and to plan operations inside Morocco after receiving training in GSPC training camps (AFP 2007n).

On 9 February 2007 a court in Madrid sentenced five Algerian members of a group of 16 Algerians and Moroccans who had been arrested in Barcelona in January 2003 to 13 years' imprisonment. The five were Mohamed Tahraoui, Ali Kouka, Smail Boudjelthi, Souhil Kouka and Mohamed Amine Benoura. A sixth, Mohammed Nebbar, was found not guilty. According to the court, three of the five had formed a militant cell in the late 1990s after they had left Algeria. 'The cell, which had contact with other suspected Islamist radicals in Britain, France and Germany, was believed to have worked to spread extremist Islamist propaganda, to recruit followers among Muslims in Spain, and to organise safe houses for combatants on the run and storage points for material needed to carry out the attacks' (AP 2007k).

Mohammed Laksir and Miftah Idrissi, two Moroccans suspected of being members of the Islamic Party of Liberation, were arrested in Barcelona on 26 June 2007 on suspicion of planning to travel to Iraq to participate in the insurgency. Instead of standing trial in Spain, the Spanish government approved the extradition of the two suspects to Morocco in October 2007 (AFP 2007o).

### **Casablanca and Madrid bombings**

The involvement of North African countries in the Madrid bombings was confirmed when the two Moroccan Beniyach brothers wanted for the 11 March attacks were identified as being among the suspects who blew themselves up during a police raid in early April 2004. Of the seven bodies found in the rubble of an apartment building, only four had been officially identified, including suspected mastermind Serhane Ben Abdelmajid Fakhet, alias the Tunisian, and alleged logistics chief Jamal Ahmidan, a Moroccan.

Fakhet, who had moved to Spain in 1996 and who was believed to be the group's spiritual leader, also recruited young new members at his mosque. Ahmidan, a Moroccan, was a drug dealer and cleric who had used drug money to buy dynamite. Jailed in Morocco in 2000 for murder, Ahmidan was allegedly radicalised during his imprisonment (*The Guardian* 2007). Another suspect, Salahuddin Beniyach, a Moroccan who had fought in Chechnya in the Khattab Brigade, served as an example of the role of former Chechnyan fighters in the cell (Vidino 2006:208).

Of 18 Madrid bombing suspects in custody, 14 were Moroccans. According to a report, the GICM had sleeper cells in Britain, Belgium, France, Italy and Canada. After Nouredine Nfia, its leader, had been arrested, Taeb Ben Tizi had been appointed the new leader, with Mohamed Guerbouzi his deputy. Contact with *al-Qa'eda* was established in July 2000 when Nfia met Ayman al-Zawahiri in Afghanistan. Al-Zawahiri, the leader of the original Egypt-based *Jamaat al-Jihad al-Islami*, was known to have been Osama bin Laden's second in command (AFP 2004f).

In follow-up operations, police arrested five people believed to have helped three suspects to escape from Morocco after the 2004 bombings. The three who escaped were Mohamed Afalah, who died in a subsequent suicide attack in Iraq in May 2005, and Mohamed Belhaj and Daoud Ouhane, who were believed to have joined foreign fighters in Iraq. The five arrested were Zohaib Khadiri, Djilali Boussiri, Nasreddine Ben Laid Amrii, Taha Seghrouchni and Kamal Ahbar (Dow Jones International News 2007j). During the arrest police seized false documents, receipts for telephone calls to Afghanistan, cash and three computers (Reuters 2007m). Samir Tahtah, who was also part of the network, was subsequently imprisoned after being convicted of belonging to a Syrian-based network recruiting suicide bombers to attack US troops in Iraq.

A second group, *Salafia Jihadia*, was implicated in both the Madrid and the Casablanca bombings. The GICM is believed to have been the forerunner of *Salafia Jihadia*, which was the first radical Islamist movement in Morocco. According to the US State Department, the GICM, which was formed in the late 1990s, included Moroccans trained in Afghanistan.

Three of the suspects detained after the Madrid bombings were reported to be Moroccans, including alleged *al-Qa'eda* member Jamal Zougam (30), who left Morocco three weeks after the Casablanca suicide attacks. Zougam, who was arrested two days after the bombings, was believed to have been a link between the GICM – blamed for the bombings in Casablanca – and a

Spanish *al-Qa'eda* cell, especially since Zougam met Guerbouzi, a leader of the GICM based in the UK, prior to the attack. Zougam was also understood to have been acquainted with the man assumed to have headed the former *al-Qa'eda* cell in Spain, Imadeddin Barakat Yarkas, alias Abu Dahdah (Wright 2004).

Nationals from other North African countries implicated in initial investigations after the Madrid bombings included (Johnson 2005):

- Abdel Karim Mejjati (34), a Moroccan who was killed by Saudi Arabia security officials in a shoot-out in 2005. Mejjati played a leading role in the May 2003 bombings in Casablanca. Contrary to the perception that only young people from poor socio-economic backgrounds are susceptible to extremism, Mejjati came from a privileged background and attended an exclusive French school in Morocco before turning to terrorism (Haven 2006)
- Amer el Azisi, a Moroccan and one of the alleged leaders of the GICM, was suspected to have been one of the masterminds of the Madrid bombings. Azisi, who was also an *al-Qa'eda* recruiter, was trained in Afghanistan and Bosnia in the late 1990s. He headed operations for the GICM with Abdel Karim Mejjati and Saad Houssaini, both of whom were suspected of having been involved in the Madrid and Casablanca bombings (Haven 2004)
- Hassan el-Haski, a Moroccan veteran of Afghan training camps, was arrested in December 2004 in the Canary Islands with Abdallah Mourib and Brahim Atia El Hammouchi. According to a Spanish court, documents based on Belgian and French intelligence indicated that el-Haski was a senior operative in the GICM. After the group was partly dismantled by police in Spain and Belgium in the spring of 2004, el-Haski allegedly led an effort to revive it (AFP 2004a). GICM supporters told French police in late 2004 that according to el-Haski the group carried out the Madrid attacks. El-Haski also shared an apartment with Mourib, an imam at the mosque in the Lanzarote town of Puerto del Carmen. A former head of the GICM, Nafia in turn told Spanish authorities in 2003 that other members of el-Haski's family were allegedly involved in the group. Investigators also searched for information on one of his brothers, Mehdi el-Haski, formerly a top security official inside the GICM, who went missing. Another brother, Lahoussine el-Haski, was arrested in Belgium in 2004 after having sought political asylum. Lahoussine el-Haski was also believed to have been an associate of Abdeladim Akoudad, the

Moroccan jailed for heading a militant cell and also believed responsible for the killing of Theo van Gogh (Prades 2004)

Another of the suspected radicals, Mustafa Setmariam Nasar, alias Abu Musab, had settled in Madrid in the 1980s before (according to Spanish court documents) moving to London in 1995 where he edited the internal magazine of the GIA. He left London in about 1998, apparently for Afghanistan. Spanish police believe that he may have played a role in the Madrid bombings. He briefly resurfaced on an Islamist website in June 2005 with a call to arms to Muslim youth to join the *jihād* in Iraq (Johnson and Vitzthum 2001).

On 1 February 2005, Spain's interior minister announced that security forces had arrested four members of the same Moroccan family who had been directly linked to the Madrid bombings. They were husband and wife Allal Moussaten (43) and Safia Belhaj (42) and their sons Brahim and Mohamed Moussaten. The four were believed to have had links with the GICM. They were arrested in the Madrid suburb of Leganes following police operations in Belgium, France and Spain (AFP 2005f).

Later, in December 2006, and with the agreement of the Moroccan government, Spanish authorities went to Morocco to interrogate several Moroccans suspected of being involved in the Madrid bombings. They were Khaled Isik, Mohamed Haddad, Hicham Hmidane, Abdelilah Ahriz and Mustapha Mimouni. Mimouni, who was serving a 15-year sentence in Tangiers, knew Abdelmajid Sarhane who was married to Mimouni's sister. Spanish authorities found a handwritten note and fingerprints in an apartment in Leganes, Madrid, that was blown up after the Madrid attack (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2006m).

The following individuals from North Africa were indicted on 15 February 2007 for their involvement in the 2004 Madrid bombings (AFP 2007p).

- Rabei Ousmane Sayed Ahmed (37). Egyptian. Accused of being a plot organiser. Acquitted
- Hassan El Haski (44), alias Abu Hamza. Moroccan. Accused of being a plot organiser and alleged leader of the GICM in Spain was arrested on the Canary Islands in December 2004. Acquitted on the main charge but convicted of belonging to a terrorist organisation and sentenced to 15 years in prison (Hamilos 2007)
- Youssef Belhaj (32), alias the Afghan. Moroccan. He was arrested in Belgium in February 2005. Accused of being a plot organiser. Acquitted

on the main charge but convicted of belonging to a terrorist organisation and sentenced to 12 years in prison (Hamilos 2007)

- Jamal Zougam (34). Moroccan. Suspected bomber. Accused of placing at least one of the rucksack bombs on the train. Found guilty of murder and attempted murder and sentenced to 42,922 years in prison. Zougam, who ran a mobile phone shop in Madrid, supplied most of the mobile phones used to set off the explosive devices. A fingerprint on a SIM card in an unexploded bomb connected Zougam to the bombs and the attack (*The Guardian* 2007)
- Abdelmajid Bouchar (25). Moroccan. Suspected bomber was present in the apartment in Leganés on 3 April 2004 before the police raid but managed to escape. He was later arrested in Belgrade in 2005 and extradited to Spain. He was sentenced to 18 years in prison (AP 2007m)
- Fouad El-Morabit El-Amghar (24). Moroccan. Accused of belonging to a terrorist organisation and who also had contact with Rabei Osman. He was convicted and sentenced to 12 years in prison (AP 2007m)
- Othman El-Gnaoui (23). Moroccan. Alleged to have been the right-hand man of Ahmidan. Accused of belonging to a terrorist organisation and procuring and transporting explosives. Found guilty of murder and attempted murder and sentenced to 42,924 years in prison (*The Guardian* 2007)
- Abdelilah El-Fadoaul El-Akil (38). Moroccan. Accused of belonging to a terrorist organisation (linked to a house on the outskirts of Madrid where the explosive devices were built). He was sentenced to nine years in prison (AP 2007m)
- Rachid Aglif (28), Jamal Ahmidan's right-hand man. Moroccan. Accused of belonging to a terrorist organisation, actively taking part in the negotiations in getting the explosives as well as transporting explosives. He was sentenced to 18 years in prison (AP 2007m)
- Mohamed Bouharrat (28). Moroccan. Accused of belonging to a terrorist organisation responsible for recruiting new members and gathering intelligence on possible targets and transporting explosives. He was sentenced to 12 years in prison (AP 2007m)
- Saed El-Harrak (35). Moroccan. Accused of belonging to a terrorist organisation was sentenced to 12 years in prison (AP 2007m)

- Mohamed Larbi Ben Sellam (30). Moroccan. Accused of belonging to a terrorist organisation and conspiring to commit murder was sentenced to 12 years in prison (AP 2007m)
- Rafa Zouhier (28). Moroccan. Accused of collaborating with a terrorist organisation and transporting explosives was sentenced to 10 years in prison (AP 2007m)
- Hamid Ahmidan (30) cousin of Jamal Ahmidan. Moroccan. Accused of collaborating with a terrorist organisation and drug trafficking was sentenced to 23 years in prison (AP 2007m)
- Mohamed Moussaten (23). Moroccan. Accused of collaborating with a terrorist organisation in assisting suspects involved in the attacks to leave Spain after the attacks. Acquitted (AP 2007m)
- Brahim Moussaten (24), the brother of Mohamed Moussaten. Moroccan. Accused of collaborating with a terrorist organisation. Acquitted (EFE News Service 2007)
- Nasreddine Bousbaa (46). Algerian. Accused of collaborating with a terrorist organisation and falsifying documents was sentenced to three years in prison (AP 2007m)

## **Iraq recruitment and training**

Links between Morocco and Spain were not limited to groups planning and executing acts of terrorism in Morocco and Spain. For example, after Spanish police had arrested Mbark el-Jaffari, a Moroccan, in Reus in 2007, he was charged with recruiting GSPC members to conduct operations in Morocco, Algeria and Iraq. At the time, the Spanish interior minister commented: 'This terrorist structure is believed to have made moves to send, since May last year, 32 suicide bombers, after being trained in Algerian training camps, to carry out suicide attacks in Iraq and to plan operations inside Morocco' (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007q).

El-Jaffari was, however, not the first such person arrested. In June 2005, for example, Spanish authorities arrested 20 people across Spain, suspected of belonging to cells recruiting volunteers to be sent to Iraq. They included 15 Moroccans, three Spaniards, an Algerian and a Turk. Larbi Ben Sellam, the Algerian, was believed to have organised the flight from Spain of

suspected bombers Mohamed Afalah, Mohamed Belhaj and probably Daoud Ohnane.

Later, in January 2006, Spanish police announced that they had arrested Omar Nakcha (23), a Moroccan whom they suspected of being the leader of two cells recruiting volunteers to fight in Iraq. Nakcha was also believed to have helped suspects in the March 2004 Madrid train bombings to flee the country. He was arrested near Santa Coloma de Gramanet in the Catalonia region of northeast Spain. Nakcha also organised the movement of suspects from Belgium to Iraq via Syria. In addition he also supplied fighters to the leader of an *al-Qa'eda* cell in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and had ties with the GICM and the GSPC. His cell was allegedly also in touch with sympathisers in Algeria, Belgium, France, Iraq, Morocco, the Netherlands, Syria and Turkey. The cell was also implicated in an attack in November 2003 on a military base in Iraq, carried out by an unidentified Algerian and killing or injuring 28 people, including 19 Italian soldiers. This attack was claimed by *al-Qa'eda* (AFP 2006d), confirming the complexity of networks and operations between Europe, North Africa and the Middle East.

In June 2007, Spanish security forces dismantled a cell of Moroccan nationals linked to GSPC/AQLIM and charged with recruiting extremists with the aim of sending them to training camps in the Sahel. Included were Mohamed Lachgar (23), Moulay Lahsene Drissi (27) and Mohamed Agzin (32) (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007dk). Abdellatif Zehraoui (29) was arrested near Barcelona (AFP 2007r), while the Spanish authorities arrested six people in Burgos in October 2007 for recruiting Islamist militants to fight in the insurgency in Iraq. Abdelkader Ayachine, an Algerian who allegedly led this cell, ran a Muslim butchery in Burgos. Other members were identified as Mohamed Mouas, Smaine Kadouci and Yahia Drif from Algeria, and Wissan Lotfi and Fatima Zahrae Raissouni from Morocco. Members of the group called themselves *Los Ansar*, in an apparent reference to *Ansar al-Islam* in Iraq (Woolfs 2007). According to the Spanish authorities, the suspects had used internet chat rooms to recruit militants – the first such example in Spain – as well as to distribute audiovisual material and other terrorist propaganda and to raise funds for jailed terrorists. Spanish security forces made a number of other arrests, and these cases will be discussed in the section on Iraq.

One group that increasingly raised the concern of Spanish security forces was *Tanzim Tahrir al-Andalus*, or the Andalusia Liberation Organisation. Headed by Nadim al-Maghrebi, it has since its formation in 2004 called for *jihad* against Spain, particularly the liberation of Ceuta and Melilla (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007dl). *Al-Qa'eda*, through Ayman al-Zawahiri, also began to

refer to Spain as al-Andalus (Indo-Asian News Service 2007). In addition to direct *al-Qa'eda* threats against Ceuta and Melilla, Algerian members of GSPC/AQLIM using the pseudonym of Nadim al Magrebi left a message in May 2006 on *alansar*, a website with links to *al-Qa'eda*, calling for 'war against the Spanish state to liberate the occupied cities of Ceuta and Melilla' (Irujo 2006).

These developments, the Madrid bombings and the fact that 300 Islamists were arrested since the Madrid bombings, fuelled perceptions that Spain was increasingly being threatened by extremism and terrorism involving networks headed by or in contact with individuals from North Africa.

## **Belgium**

In recent years Belgium has served as a secondary base for North African Islamist extremists involved in counterfeiting, financing and providing safe havens. Although Belgium had not yet been the target of transnational terrorism, the presence in the country of networks including individuals from North Africa in Europe has been a cause for concern.

A high-profile terrorist trial in September 2003 ended with guilty verdicts against 18 people who had been charged with forging passports and visas for volunteers to travel to Afghanistan. These volunteers included Abdelsatar Dahmane and Rashid El Ouar, who assassinated Afghan resistance leader Ahmad Shah Masood two days before the 9/11 attacks in the US. Tarek Maaroufi, a Tunisian and leader of the Brussels cell, assisted Abu Doha in the UK to create a large support network in Europe to provide recruits with money, accommodation and false documents. As early as 1991, Maaroufi confessed to Belgian authorities that he was in contact with Rachid Ramda and other Algerian leaders based in London. He was convicted and sentenced to six years' imprisonment on a charge of recruiting Muslims in European countries to attend *al-Qa'eda* training camps in Afghanistan (Vidino 2006:159).

On 19 March 2004, as part of a series of some 20 raids in Brussels, Antwerp and other Belgian centres, anti-terrorist police arrested a suspect wanted for the terrorist attacks in Casablanca in 2003 and at least five other people. This followed a probe into alleged Islamist militants from North Africa who had undergone paramilitary training in camps in Afghanistan (Siuberski 2004).

On 29 August 2005, 18 men suspected of belonging to the GICM appeared before a court in Belgium. The men, most of them Moroccans, were suspected

of having links with those responsible for the March 2004 train bombings in Madrid and the May 2003 Casablanca attacks. They included:

- Khalid Bouloudo, the alleged Belgian coordinator of the GICM
- Abdelkader Hakimi, who was linked to the Madrid attacks
- Mourad Chabarou, who was alleged to have sheltered Mohammed Afalah, a suspect in the Madrid attacks. Police say his Brussels apartment contained fingerprints belonging to Afalah

These three men were also alleged to have been in contact with the Dutch branch of the GICM, the Hofstad group, in particular with Mohammed Bouyeri. Seven were held in preventive detention in Belgium, three in Spain, one in Morocco and one in Syria. The suspects were arrested in three operations, the first in March 2004 at Maaseik on the Belgian-Dutch border and the second and third in Brussels and Antwerp in June 2004. They were accused of being members of a terrorist group and of offences including use of forged documents and illegal residence, but, according to Belgian media, not for crimes directly linked to the Madrid and Casablanca bombings (AFP 2005g).

In February 2006, following the bombings in Madrid and Casablanca, a court in Belgium convicted three men of belonging to the GICM. Eight others were found guilty on lesser charges, and two were acquitted. Abdelkader Hakimi (40), was accused of heading a cell linked to the GICM, and Khalid Bouloudou (30) was identified as the group's Belgian coordinator as well as fundraiser and recruiter. Those arrested in Belgium formed part of a larger network of 18 accused, of whom 13 stood trial in Brussels. Three others were in custody in Spain before being tried and convicted by a Brussels court on 20 January 2007. They included el-Haski (see above), who was sentenced to seven years, Hakimi and Bouloudou, who were each sentenced to five years' imprisonment, and Mustafa Lounani, who was sentenced to six years' imprisonment. Another Moroccan, Mourad Chabarou (25), received a five-year sentence as a contact of Rabei Osman El Sayed, who had been involved in the Madrid bombings (EFE News Services 2006a).

In addition to the implications for Belgium of attacks in Afghanistan, Madrid, Casablanca and the Netherlands, a Belgium-Spanish network involved in the recruitment of fighters for Iraq will be discussed in the section dealing with African involvement in Iraq.

## Italy

Following developments since 2000, Italian security forces monitored the activities of a group of Tunisians in contact with Algerians and Tunisians in London. Essid Sami Ben Khemais, alias Abu al-Muhajer (Tunisian national), the head of the cell and an Afghan veteran, operated from Milan. Although the cell was not directly implicated in an attack it played a supportive role to other European cells in providing safe havens and false documents (Vidino 2006:158-159). Ben Khemais was later suspected of planning an attack on the US Embassy in Rome in January 2001. As one of four Tunisian nationals convicted of association with intent to obtain and transport explosives and chemicals, he was sentenced to five years imprisonment. Back in Tunisia, Ben Khemais had already been tried *in absentia* and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment by a military court that found him 'guilty of membership of a terrorist organisation operating overseas'. (BBC News, 2002). Ben Khemais was also implicated in the 2006/7 attacks in Tunisia (discussed in chapter 2).

The Milan network was also particularly active in recruiting suicide bombers for Iraq. Members included Lofti Rihani, Morchidi Kamal, Hamsi Said and Yousfi Ben Tikani, and their case will also be discussed later in the chapter. *Ansar al-Islam*, based in Italy, was also connected to Germany through Abderrazak Mahdjoub, who headed a network in Hamburg. A member of an *Ansar al-Islam* recruitment network in Milan, Mohammed Daki, a Moroccan, provided passports to Maxamed Cabdullah Ciise to travel to Iraq (Vidino 2006:267).

In addition to being implicated in support operations, members of a cell that planned to bomb the US Embassy in Rome were arrested by Italian security forces on 4 April 2000. In accordance with US executive order 13224 of 22 November 2002, three members of the cell were accused and prosecuted in Italy for being members of a extremist Islamist terrorist organisation established in Cremona, Italy, in 1998 with the aim of committing terrorist attacks in Italy, Morocco, Tunisia and other countries, and having contact with *al-Qa'eda* and *Ansar al-Islam* cells in Italy and elsewhere. Additionally, the group had ties to the GICM in Morocco. The Cremona cell was charged with recruiting combatants, raising funds for terrorist activities and planning terrorist attacks. The three were (US Federal News 2005):

- Ahmed El Bouhali (44), a Moroccan, who was charged with participating in a criminal conspiracy to commit terrorist activities. He had formed the Cremona cell in 1998 and headed it until the summer of 2001. Investigators confiscated instruction manuals in his possession on paramilitary activities

including the construction of weapons, bombs and instruments for detecting government communications. In addition, leaflets on clandestine Islamist organisations and videotapes containing bin Laden's and other terrorist leaders' messages inciting violence were found. These materials were used by el Bouhali to recruit people for terrorist activities in Iraq

- Faycal (alias Faical) Boughanemi (41), a Tunisian, who was charged with participating in a criminal conspiracy to commit terrorist activities. He was a member of the Cremona cell from at least 2002 until 2004, where he helped to plan and recruit individuals for terrorist attacks in Tunisia. In addition, he conspired to carry out terrorist attacks on the Cremona cathedral and the Milan metro
- Abdelkader Laagoub (32), a Moroccan, who was charged with participating in a criminal conspiracy to commit terrorist activities. He had helped form the Cremona cell in 1998, and succeeded el Bouhali as its head until February 2004

Italian investigators into organised crime and money laundering uncovered the Milan cell in 2003. This was also aligned to the GSPC. Its members included El Mahfoudi Mohamed, a Moroccan-born imam based at the Gallarate mosque, north of Milan, Abdooui Iyousef, its leader, and Ramzi bin al-Shaibah, alias Ramzi Binalshibh, who had earlier been arrested in Pakistan in 2002 on suspicion of providing logistical assistance to the 9/11 terror plot. Charges included providing financial and logistical support to Islamist terrorist networks, trafficking in illegal immigrants, receiving counterfeit documents and trafficking in stolen cars. In addition to providing logistical support, the cell also recruited members of the immigrant communities to be sent abroad for military training (Parodi 2003).

In July 2005 Othman Deramchi (51), alias Abu Yusef, a member of the GSPC, was arrested in Marseilles in a joint operation by members of the French and Italian security forces after Italy had issued a Europe-wide warrant for his arrest. Deramchi was wanted by the Italian authorities after he had been sentenced in absentia to eight years' imprisonment on charges of trafficking false identity documents in connection with terrorist activities (AFP 2005h).

Other cases that attracted the attention of Italian authorities included the following (Dow Jones International News 2005a):

- On 6 September 2005 Bourki Bouchta was arrested at his home in Turin and was deported to Morocco in terms of new security measures that

had been approved in July and which simplified the process of deporting people suspected of having links with groups deemed terrorist by the government

- Previously, in 2003, Italy had deported Imam Abdul Qadir Fall Mamour to his native Senegal after he came out in favour of attacks on Italians in Afghanistan and Iraq as allies of the US. At the time, Bourki Bouchta (see above) had spoken out strongly against the expulsion of Mamour, saying that the government had punished the preacher for his opinions. Bouchta had first made headlines in Italy in 1999 when he had led thousands of Muslims in Turin in a march to demand that women be allowed to wear veils in identity document photographs
- On 24 March 2006, Italian security forces arrested eight Moroccans and a Tunisian for allegedly planning an attack on the San Petronio church in Bologna and the Milan metro. Mohamed Benhedi Msahel (37), a Moroccan and a resident of Milan, was believed to be the leader of this group (BBC Monitoring Europe 2006)
- In October 2006, a Milan court charged three Tunisians with joining a criminal organisation with the intention of committing a terrorist act. Samir Sassi and Sharif Bin-Abd-al-Hakim were sentenced to six years' imprisonment each, while Muhammad Manna was given a 64-month sentence. The three men were accused of forming a group connected to *Ansar al-Islam* that was planning to attack the same two targets as in the previous example (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007dm)
- Extremist activities linked to Bologna had been suspected as early as 1993, when Italian police had intercepted a letter written by Mondher Ben Mohsen Baazaoui, alias Hamza the Tunisian. Baazaoui, a member of *an-Nahda*, was also a Bosnian *Mujahideen*. His letter had been written to Imam Mohamed Saidani in Bologna, who in turn knew Anwar Shaaban, a member of the European Shura Council, and Osama bin Laden (Kohlmann 2004:76)
- On 8 February 2007 a court in Tunis sentenced seven Tunisians – most of whom had been extradited from Italy – to between five and eight years' imprisonment for belonging to *Ahl al-Sunna wal Gama'a*. The principal defendant was Mehdi Kammoun, who was believed to have visited Afghanistan before serving a jail sentence in Italy for allegedly leading a terrorist cell in Milan. Kammoun was also convicted on charges of conspiracy to traffic in arms, explosives and chemical weapons, receiving

stolen goods, making and using forged documents, and facilitating illegal immigration to Italy (US Department of the Treasury 2002)

- The dismantling of the Perugia, or Ponte Felcino, cell in July 2007 kept the spotlight on the activities of foreign Muslim communities in Italy. Three Moroccans – Korchi el-Mostapha (41), an imam of the Ponte Felcino mosque, and his two aides, Mohamed el-Jari (47) and Driss Safika (46) – were arrested on suspicion of providing training in explosives. Police confiscated computer files that included videos and documents downloaded from the internet on weapons training and instructions on how to prepare poisons and explosives, how to fly a Boeing 747 and how to encrypt messages. These were claimed to have been used to recruit new followers to *jihad*. According to the investigators, the suspects were in contact with members of the GICM who had been arrested in Belgium in 2005 (Kiefer 2007). El-Mostapha was also alleged to have been in contact with Abdelaziz Ouechtati, a Tunisian living in Naples (BBC Monitoring Europe 2007a)
- As a consequence of the dismantling of the Perugia cell, security forces in Italy, France, Portugal and the UK made further arrests of 17 Algerians, one Tunisian and two others in early November 2007 on suspicion of being involved in the recruitment of suicide bombers for Afghanistan and Iraq. Among those arrested in operations in Italian centres including Milan, Bergamo, Reggio Emilia and Varese were Dridi Sabri, Mehidi Ben Nasr and Imed Ben Zarkaoui – who were believed to be senior member of *Salafia Jihadiyya*. Ali Ben Zidane Chehidi and Mohammed Salah Ben Hamadi Khemiri were arrested in the UK cities of Croyden and Manchester under an Italian arrest warrant. According to Italian security forces, Chehidi and Khemiri had forged documents to facilitate the illegal entry into Italy of volunteers for the *jihad* in Iraq and Afghanistan between 2003 and 2005 (Agnew 2007)

## Germany

GIA cells were formed in Germany and other European countries in the wake of anti-terrorism successes in France. Earlier, the AIS had based its exiled leadership council, headed by Rabah Kebir, in Germany. In addition, military cells operated through so-called charities in France and Germany were used to procure weapons for use in Algeria (Gunaratna 2002:165). Adel Mechat, an Algerian member of the FIS, was extradited from Germany to France in 1998 and given a six-year prison sentence for his involvement in plots to attack the 1998 World Cup and 2000 European football championships (AFP 2006e).

The Frankfurt cell responsible for the Strasbourg bombing plot was probably the best example of North African involvement in terrorism activities in Germany. Mohammed Bensakhria, alias Meliani al Ansari al-Germi, was identified as the leader of the cell, under the direction of Abu Doha in London. Other members included Hicham el Haddad, Lamine Maroni, Fouhad Sabour, Aroubi Benali.

Meliani, who trained in Afghanistan, was a veteran of the Bosnian war, where he fought with Ahmed Ressam, who was implicated in the millennium plot. El Haddad and Maroni were Algerians who had applied for political asylum in the UK, where they resorted to crime. They were gradually radicalised under the influence of Abu Doha and were sent for training in Afghanistan, where they met Sabour who had dual Algerian and French citizenship. Sabour had earlier been arrested on suspicion of involvement in the GIA bombing of the Paris metro in 1995, but was released in the same year.

On their arrival in London, Sabour, el Haddad and Maroni sold drugs to fund their activities. Sabour and Maroni left for Frankfurt in October 2000, where they met Aroubi Benali, another Algerian. Benali had openly confessed his association with the FIS when he applied for political asylum in 1992. The German authorities denied him asylum and issued him with an expulsion order. Benali stayed, however, and the order was never enforced, which was a common practice at the time. In Frankfurt, members of the cell used forged credit cards to pay for the planned attacks on the Strasbourg cathedral and Christmas market in December 2000. However, the security forces of Germany and France arrested members of the cell before the attacks could be carried out (Vidino 2006:147-162). At their trial, el Haddad was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment, Sabour to 11 years and six months, Maroni to 11 years and Benali to ten years. Meliani was arrested in Spain on 22 June 2001 and extradited to France, where he was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment for his involvement in the plot.

Investigations revealed that the cell was in constant contact with the Algerian network in London, particularly with Abu Doha, its leader, as well as Slimane Khalfaoui. Mustafa Labsi, who was also implicated in the millennium plot in the US, was in charge of daily communications with the Frankfurt cell. Labsi was arrested in Berlin in February 2000 while using a false credit card. In addition to the above-mentioned, Rabah Kadre, Abu Doha's deputy in London, was also directly involved in the plot since his fingerprints were found in one of the cell's Frankfurt apartments. Kadre, the mastermind of the cyanide attack on the London underground, was tried in absentia in Paris for his involvement in the Strasbourg plot and sentenced to six years' imprisonment (Vidino 2006:153;156).

A number of other people originally from North Africa were also in custody in Germany, including (US Federal News 2007):

- Moustafa Djemel (34), who was born in Tiaret, Algeria, and who was awaiting trial in Germany, had a number of aliases including: Ali Barkani, born 22 August 1973 in Morocco; Belkacem Khaled, born 31 December 1979; Mostafa Djamel, born 31 December 1979 in Maskara, Algeria; Balkasam Kalad, born 26 August 1973 in Algeria; Belkasam Kalad, born 26 August 1973 in Algeria, Algeria; and Djamel Moustafa, born 28 September 1973 in Algeria
- Mohamed Ismail Yasser (34), alias Abu Shaweesh, born in Benghazi, Libya, who was detained in Germany in January 2005. He was arrested with an Egyptian travel document and two Egyptian passports
- Mustapha Nasri bin Abdul Kader (45), alias Ait El Hadi, born in Tunis, Tunisia, was also listed as an Algerian
- Mounir El Motassadeq (34), born in Marrakesh, Morocco, had been in detention since May 2007

A prominent Moroccan – in addition to the many Algerians – who was involved in terrorist plots and support operations in Germany, Mounir el Motassadeq was sentenced on 19 August 2005 to seven years in prison for membership in an *al-Qa'eda* cell whose members had included 9/11 suicide pilots Mohamed Atta, Marwan al-Shehhi and Ziad Jarrah. According to the judge, el Motassadeq became part of the Hamburg cell in 1999, before its leading members travelled to Afghanistan and were recruited for the attacks in the US. El Motassadeq had previously been convicted in 2003 on all the charges and given the maximum sentence. However, a German federal appeals court in 2004 overturned the conviction, ruling that he had been unfairly denied testimony from *al-Qa'eda* suspects in US custody. He had been freed shortly afterwards, but had soon been rearrested. At his retrial, which opened in August 2004, the US Justice Department provided summaries from the interrogation of Ramzi Binalshibh, a key 9/11 suspect held by the US. According to the statements, Binalshibh – believed to have been the Hamburg cell's liaison with *al-Qa'eda* – said that he and the three suicide pilots alone comprised the cell. El Motassadeq was one of two people charged in Germany in connection with the attacks. The other, a friend of el Motassadeq and also a Moroccan, Abdelghani Mzoudi, was tried on identical charges by another Hamburg court in 2007, but was acquitted due to a lack of evidence (Dow Jones International News 2005b).

In March 2007 Sweden extradited Abdelali Miftah, a Moroccan, to Germany (AFP 2007t). Germany also tried a man identified as Redouane EH (37), a Moroccan who held German citizenship, for funding the Iraqi insurgency. Redouane, who was arrested in Kiel in July 2006, allegedly transferred money to Egypt and Syria between August 2005 and July 2006. In addition to funding the insurgency in Iraq, Redouane had contact with extremists including Said Bahaji, who had close ties to three of the 9/11 pilots and who lived and studied in Hamburg, and Mohamed Atta. Bahaji escaped from Germany shortly before the 9/11 attacks and is wanted on an international arrest warrant issued by Germany. Redouane also had contact with other extremists in other European countries, including Sweden, where Abdelali M (25), another Moroccan, had been arrested on a German-issued warrant and handed over to Germany in May 2007. According to German prosecutors at his 20 December trial in Karlsruhe, Abdelali had assisted Redouane in supplying foreign fighters to Iraq and in forming a terror group in Sudan. He had also assisted in smuggling three men into Germany – a Moroccan, an Egyptian and a Saudi Arabian (Dow Jones International News 2007k). Thaeer A, a Jordanian, was being prosecuted separately, with three other people (BBC Monitoring Europe 2007b). It is interesting to note that immediately after their involvement in the 9/11 attacks these accused had redirected their attention to facilitating recruitment for Iraq.

## **The Netherlands**

One of the best-known instances of involvement by members of the GSPC and GICM in the Netherlands was the Hofstad network, which had been implicated in the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh. Mohammed Bouyeri is currently serving a life sentence for the murder. Bouyeri however did not act alone as originally thought, but was part of the Hofstad network, which had connections throughout Europe including cells involved in the bombings in Madrid and Casablanca. Dutch police subsequently took another 13 suspected members of the group into custody, including Rachid Belkacem, who had been arrested in London on 22 June 2005 and who was alleged to have had links with Muhammed Achraf, an Algerian in Spain (Atwan 2006:239).

In December 2006 a court sentenced four Islamist militants to jail for planning terrorist attacks on politicians, including Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende, and the headquarters of the Dutch intelligence agency. The court sentenced Dutch-Moroccan Samir Azzouz to eight years in jail for plotting the attacks. In September 2007, another Dutch court found Azzouz guilty on a charge of

planning attacks on government buildings, and added four years to his eight-year sentence for his involvement in the plots to attack Schiphol airport, a power station and the parliament building. This case had first been heard in 2005 but Azzouz had been acquitted. However, after his first conviction in 2006, this case against him had been reopened in 2007 (Reuters 2007n).

Reconfirming the central role of radical imams in mosques in Europe, the El-Tawheed mosque in Amsterdam was alleged to have played a central role in the radicalisation of Bouyeri and Azzouz. While the mosque is open to the public, radicalisation usually took place in smaller discussion groups. Other suspects included (Sterling 2006):

- Nouredine al Fatmi, who was already serving a five-year sentence in a separate terrorism case and who was given an additional four years' imprisonment for plotting attacks and for recruiting other members
- Mohammed Chentouf, who was also charged with plotting attacks, was also sentenced to four years
- Soumaya Sahla, al Fatmi's ex-wife, was given a three-year sentence for conspiracy
- Another defendant was convicted of passport fraud and given a three-month sentence
- A last defendant was acquitted of all charges

## Greece

To a large extent, Greece was considered to be a safe haven or a 'facilitating' country in Europe. European security forces, including those of Britain, Portugal, France, Italy and the Netherlands, have made a number of arrests of people found with forged Greek identity cards and passports.

Anwar Mazrar was the best-known of these. He was arrested on 13 September 2005 at the Kipon customs office after being wanted by French and Moroccan authorities. First sought by the Moroccan police, Mazrar escaped to France where according to French intelligence he set up a network of Muslim extremists. Before he could be arrested, however, he escaped using a forged French passport. French intelligence informed the Greek authorities that Mazrar would try to enter Greece from Turkey on

a bus travelling from Istanbul to Thessaloniki. Based on this information, Mazrar had been arrested (BBC Monitoring Europe 2007).

## United States and Canada

In addition to the involvement of Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian nationals in Afghanistan (a list of Guantanamo Bay detainees is included as an annex) and Iraq, other Algerians arrested in the US and Canada included (Williams 2002:120-121):

- Hamid Aich, who was involved in a plot to smuggle explosives from Canada to the US
- Bouabide Chamchi, a member of the GIA, who was arrested in the US in December 1999, when he tried to enter the country with a false passport
- Abdelmajid Dahoumane, an accomplice of Ahmed Ressay (see below) and also linked to the GIA, who was arrested in Port Angeles, Washington, for his involvement in the 2000 millennium plot to blow up the Los Angeles international airport
- Mokhtar Haouari, a member of the GIA, who assisted in establishing an *al-Qa'eda* cell in Montreal, was implicated in the millennium plot and faced charges for forging travel documents
- Abdel Ghani Meskini, another Algerian, who was also implicated in the millennium plot

Ahmed Ressay, an Algerian, was convicted on 27 July 2005 for his part in the millennium plot and sentenced to 22 years in prison (Joscelyn 2005). At the outbreak of the conflict in Algeria, authorities had charged Ressay with arms trafficking. He however escaped first to France and then to Montreal, Canada. By January 1995, in addition to thieving, he became involved in credit card fraud and the falsification of documents. The mastermind behind this activity, Fateh Kamel, employed Ressay, making use of his criminal skills and radicalised him through a mosque with other cell members, including Abderraouf Hannachi, a Tunisian. Ressay, as a member of another group, also raised funds for Islamist groups in Algeria – in 1997 alone \$100 000 was collected. With the assistance of Hannachi, Ressay moved to Afghanistan for the period from March 1998 to early 1999, where he trained under Abu Zubaydah in the Khalden training camp. After Ressay returned, he and

other cell members, including Atmani, planned a number of bank robberies in order to finance the millennium plot. However, on 14 December 1999 he was stopped by a US border patrol near Vancouver, where investigators found explosives and timing devices (Kohlmann 2004:203-209).

During Ressam's cross-examination in the case in the US against Mokhtar Haouari in June-July 2001, it became known that Kamel had worked closely with Karim Said Atmani, alias Abu Hisham (linked to the Roubaix cell) who was living in Montreal. Both were Bosnian *Mujahideen* veterans. Atmani, a Moroccan, actively participated in the Algerian conflict during the 1990s and served as part of the Mansour Meliani commando group that was part of the GIA, responsible for the bombing of the Algiers international airport on 26 August 1992. Atmani, who was in contact with Abu Ma'ali, worked as Kamel's second in command with the Bosnian *Mujahideen*. In 1994 and 1995 Atmani was responsible for smuggling fighters from Europe to Bosnia. On his arrival in Canada, Atmani resorted to robberies to fund the smuggling activities. While befriending a group of young immigrants originally from North Africa, Atmani was arrested by Canadian authorities on 14 October 1998 with two other Algerians, but was later released despite the interest in him from French officials (Kohlmann 2004:203).

### **African involvement in Iraq**

As a result of documents recovered in Sinjar, Syria, in September 2007, US security forces learned that of more than 700 foreign fighters brought into Iraq since August 2006, 305 had come from Saudi Arabia, 137 from Libya, 64 from Algeria, 50 from Morocco, 38 from Tunisia, 14 from Jordan, six from Turkey and two from Egypt. In other words, 291 of these 700-plus fighters, or about 39%, had come from North African countries. This was a far higher proportion than the previous military estimates of ten to 13 per cent from North Africa (Organisation of Asia-Pacific News Agencies 2007).

In addition to recruitment networks established in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, nationals from these countries were also responsible for recruitment networks established in Europe, including the Belgium-Spanish, French and Italian networks. The following discussion will use examples to summarise the structure and *modus operandi* of these networks:

The GICM formed the centre of the Belgium-Spanish network, which also included Italy, France and the Netherlands. This network was implicated in the following cases:

- Maymoun Belhaj was arrested in Syria on his way to Iraq in 2004. Wanted in Morocco, Belhaj had lived in Spain and later in Belgium. Belhaj contacted Abdelmajid Bouchar, a member of the GICM and implicated in the 2004 Madrid bombings, in Leganes, Madrid, as well as Mustapha Lounani, also implicated in the Madrid bombings and the brother-in-law of Serhane Bin Abdelmajid Fakhret, alias the Tunisian, who was also involved in the Madrid bombings. A member of the GICM in Schaarbeek, Belgium, Lounani was found guilty and sentenced to six years' imprisonment in Belgium for recruiting fighters to Iraq as well as for being in possession of forged passports and an instruction manual on mobile phone-controlled remote detonation devices. Lounani in turn put Belhaj in contact with Mustapha al-Jazairi, an Algerian who financially assisted Belhaj to leave Belgium. Lounani also put Belhaj in touch with Muhsin Khaibar, alias Abdelmajid al-Libi, alias Abdelmajid al-Yasser, alias Abdelqadir al-Hakimi, who was sentenced to death in Morocco in 1985 and was believed to be the leader of the GICM in Europe, based in Belgium. Both assisted Belhaj to go to Syria. Khaibar as well as al-Hakimi were arrested in Syria in May 2004 and deported to Morocco (Hafez 2007: 196-198)
- Abdelhy Asas, alias Abu Abdullah, was arrested in Syria on his way to Iraq in 2004. He was assisted by the same network that had facilitated Belhaj's travel to Iraq. His first contact person in Morocco was Abdelkarim al-Mijati, alias Abu al-Yas, who was wanted for the 2002 Casablanca bombings. Asas went to Syria with the assistance of Abbas al-Jazairi, an Algerian, and Abdelrahman al-Maghribi, a Moroccan, as well as Muhsin Khaibar, who had also assisted Belhaj (Hafez 2007: 199)

Implicated in the French network were (Hafez 2007:202-204):

- Redouane el-Hakim, a Tunisian, who was killed in Fallujah on 17 July 2004
- Tarek Ouinis, who was killed by a US patrol on 20 September 2004
- Abdelhalim Badjoudj, an Algerian, who was killed in a suicide attack on 20 October 2004. Prior to their involvement in Iraq, Ouinis and Badjoudj smoked marijuana, used alcohol, listened to rap music and wore Western clothing. Badjoudj returned to France in January 2004 to marry a French woman of Moroccan origin. Two months later he left for Iraq. Badjoudj and el-Hakim were unemployed and came from broken families. El-Hakim's brother, Boubaker, was arrested in Syria in August 2004. They were recruited through mosques, Muslim centres and militant websites run by several groups, including *Ansar al-Islam* (Smith and Van Natta 2004)

- Bazis Idris (41), an Algerian, who died in a suicide attack in February 2005. During the 1990s he spent time in Afghanistan and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Although he returned to France in the mid 1990s, he had gone back to Afghanistan in the late 1990s
- Said al-Maghrebi, a Moroccan, who was arrested by French authorities in April 2005 on his way to Iraq. He was in contact with Laurent Mourad Djoumakh and Samir Korhi, who were convicted by a court in Paris in December 2004 for their involvement in the Frankfurt cell that planned to attack the Strasbourg Christmas market in December 2000. Al-Maghrebi had spent time in Afghanistan during 1990 and had left for France in 2001 (AFP 2004h)
- Said Arif, an Algerian, who acted as a link between recruiters in France and Syria. Syrian authorities arrested him in May 2003 and extradited him to France in June 2004. Arif deserted the Algerian army and left for Afghanistan during the mid 1990s. Moving to Germany, Arif was in contact with Mohammed Bensakhria alias Meliani (see above), the leader of the Frankfurt cell. Avoiding arrest in Germany, Arif escaped to Pakistan. After the fall of the Taliban, Arif joined the Chechen rebels with Mabrouk Echiker, alias al-Moutana, an Algerian and member of the GIA and later the GSPC, who was also involved in the Strasbourg plot. Arif was also linked to Abu Doha and Rabah Kadre, based in London. After the arrest of Abu Doha, Kadre assisted Arif and Echiker in March 2001 to leave Europe. Echiker was killed in the Chechnya attacks against Russian targets carried out by the La Corneuve and Romainville cells in France (Vidino 2006:173)

The Italian recruitment network for Iraq included a cell in the Sorgane mosque that had been discovered in May 2004. Those involved included (Hafez 2007:205-207):

- Mohammed Rafik, who was a former imam at the mosque and who had links with the GICM, was arrested in October 2003 and charged with involvement in the 2003 Casablanca bombings
- Rachid Maami, an Algerian, the leader of the cell, and four other Tunisians from well-off families. Maami, linked to the GIA, used his position as imam to recruit followers

Sheikh Mahdjoub Abderrezak, an Algerian who had lived in Germany, was also implicated as one of the *al-Qa'eda* coordinators in Italy. He had arrived

in Germany as a political asylum seeker in 1992. When his application was rejected, he went to Afghanistan and later Chechnya. In 1999 he returned to Germany, where he married a German citizen. While in Hamburg, Abderrazak visited al-Quds mosque, which was headed by Shaikh al-Fazazi, who was implicated in the Casablanca bombings (Hafez 2007:205-207). Abderrezak was arrested in Hamburg by German police acting on an Italian warrant at the same time as two other suspects were arrested in Milan. They were Bouyahia Maher Ben Abdelaziz (33), a Tunisian, and Housni Jamal (20), a Moroccan. Two other alleged *al-Qa'eda* operatives, Muhammad Majid (33), an Iraqi, and a Tunisian woman, Bentiwaa Farida Ben Bechir, were wanted, while Toumi Ali Ben Sassi was already in Italian custody (Agnew 2003). Another, Jamal Housni, alias Jamal al-Maghrebi, a Tunisian, had assisted in the recruitment of Iraqi fighters and procured forged documents for *al-Qa'eda* members in Turkey (Hafez 2007:205-207).

Fadhil Saadi, a Tunisian, lived in Milan before he became an Iraqi suicide bomber in July 2003. Before he left for Iraq, Saadi had been implicated in the plan to assassinate Shah Masud in Afghanistan by delivering two Italian driver's licences, residence permits and Tunisian passports forged in Naples. In 2002 he had gone to Iraqi Kurdistan via France and then on to Iran, when he carried out his suicide attack.

Kamal Morchidi (22), a Tunisian and a member of the Ben Khemais cell, lived in Milan, Italy, before he carried out a suicide attack on the al-Rashid hotel in Baghdad on 26 October 2003, possibly targeting US Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz. He was trained in Afghanistan and was implicated in supplying forged documents to foreign fighters who wanted to enter Iraq (Rotella 2003).

Habib Waddani, alias Said, a Tunisian living in Milan, also carried out a suicide attack in Iraq. He was also wanted by Italy in September 2000 for trafficking weapons and explosives for *al-Qa'eda* training camps from Russia through Uzbekistan to Pakistan (Hafez 2007:205-207). Waddani was added to the US Treasury Department's list of individuals and groups associated with *al-Qa'eda* on 29 August 2002 (Dow Jones International News 2002).

## Algeria

At an organisational level, officials in Algeria indicated that the GSPC and a group called *al-Taifa al Mansouri*, or Chosen and Victorious, had been involved in recruiting individuals to participate in the conflict in Iraq (MacGrory and Evans 2004).

Abu al-Hammam, the leader of the *Anjad al-Islam* group, was arrested in Algeria in June 2006 shortly after his return from Syria where he had lived since 2003. The arrest was made after investigations revealed that he was leading a cell that recruited Algerians to fight in Iraq and had arranged for them to travel to Syria and stay there before joining *Qa'idat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn*, or the *Al-Qa'eda* in the Land of the Two Rivers. According to security sources, al-Hammam had also been instructed to recruit Tunisian fighters to be trained by GSPC/AQLIM before they were sent to Iraq (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007dm).

Reflecting on the effectiveness of these and other organisations and cells involved in the recruitment of Algerians in Iraq, US sources in March 2007 confirmed that about one in five suicide bombers in Iraq were from Algeria, while about one in 20 had originated from Morocco and Tunisia. The figures indicated growing cooperation between Islamist extremists in North Africa and Iraq. The US report continued: 'Moroccan groups have allocated about \$200,000 to provide transportation for "volunteers" to Iraq via Europe and Syria (...) [while they] still use other routes to Iraq through Turkey and Iran' (BBC Monitoring Middle East, 2007dn). Although it is very difficult to source verified information on the details, the names of a number of Algerians were made available. One of them was Walid Khelfallah (24), who died in a suicide operation on Green Square in Baghdad in November 2006 (BBC Monitoring Middle East, 2007do).

In September 2007 the Pakistani government announced that 45 Algerians arrested in Pakistan '(...) had enlisted in the ranks of the Taliban and [had], directly or indirectly, helped the Algerian armed Islamist groups during the terrorism decade' since the US invasion of Afghanistan. In 2006 Pakistan deported 20 Afghan-Algerians to Algeria after they had been arrested in Waziristan. Included in this group was Mehdi Rabah, who was suspected of 'being a former leading preacher who had taken part in the fighting with the American troops in Afghanistan. [Previously he] resided in Saudi Arabia during the 1990s before reaching Pakistan to occupy the post of teacher at the International University of Islamabad' (BBC Monitoring Middle East, 2007dp).

In July 2005 security forces revealed that an unnamed Egyptian Islamist had been arrested in Algeria. The suspect, the manager of a travel bureau, had been providing cover to Salafists leaving for Iraq via Syria. The case was reminiscent of the GSPC-Al-Zarqawi connection that might have been activated at the time of the abduction of Algerian diplomats in Iraq (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2005j). Some 150 Algerians were detained in 2007

alone in Syria on suspicion of attempting to cross the border between Syria and Iraq (Whitlock 2007b).

In another case, Syrian security authorities handed Adil Sakir al-Mukni, also known as Yasir Abu Sayyaf over to Algeria in September 2005. Abu Sayyaf used to be in charge of coordination between the GSPC and the Al-Zarqawiled *al-Qa'eda for Jihad Organization in the Land of the Two Rivers*. Adil Sakir, who was also in charge of GSPC's Internet website, was arrested in an Internet café. Information subsequently provided by Yasir Abu Sayyaf led to the dismantling of a Moroccan terrorist cell, whose members were on their way to Boumerdes. They were however arrested and handed over to the Moroccan authorities through the Oujda frontier post (opened exceptionally on 31 July to complete the handover process). Prior to his arrest in Syria, Yasir Abu Sayyaf had already been jailed three times in Algeria for supporting terrorist organizations. He was 17 years of age when he was first arrested. In December 2003, he decided to leave Algeria and settle in Syria (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2005k).

Iraqi recruitment networks in Algeria were particularly active in the east of the country, close to the border with Tunisia. Networks that had been operational for more than a year were in Reghiba, Guemar, Trifaoui and El-Oued, where most of the traditional fighting is concentrated. In El-Oued, the Essouafa Katibat, whose headquarters were near Tebessa, was headed by Abu el-Khettab and was the primary target of security forces. It is suspected that the network successfully enlisted several young people, estimated at 60 during the past three years. Oualid Khelfellah was one of a number of Algerians who were already involved in suicide operations in Iraq (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007dq).

In another case involving El-Oued, a 39-year-old Afghan war veteran who was a computer programmer, used internet sites from where he printed leaflets and recorded CDs which he distributed to young people with the intention of persuading them to participate in the war in Iraq. According to security forces, the suspect successfully recruited a 22-year-old relative and a second person aged 23. Both had contacted their families from Iraq (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007dq).

Subsequently on 5 May 2007, nine people aged between 20 and 30 were brought before the state prosecutor in an El-Oued court charged with being members of a terrorist organisation active within and outside the country. Detailed charges included recruitment, financing, incitement to terrorism and the distribution of subversive literature (including audiovisual films,

microcomputers, CDs, flash discs, MP4s and subversive documents produced by *al-Qa'eda*). Among the accused were a university professor, a student, a day worker and an unemployed man. Seven other people implicated in the case were still wanted. Security agencies believed that at least two of these, both university students, had reached Iraq – new recruits for Iraq go through Syria, via Algiers. This was the conclusion drawn from an analysis made from telephone calls between the El-Oued networks and their counterparts in Iraq. According to the same agencies, five young men had already completed their training as suicide bombers in a camp located in a palm grove in the village of S'hine (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2006l). GSPC/AQLIM made use of cyber cafés, mosques and bookstores to make contact with the young unemployed men and students whom the group wished to target (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007dr). However, those involved came from diverse backgrounds, as indicated in the previous paragraph.

### **Morocco**

After his involvement in the 2004 Madrid train bombings, Mohamed Afalah fled to Iraq where he died in a suicide attack on an Iraqi military checkpoint in the Dora neighbourhood of Baghdad in May 2005, while Mohamed Belhaj and Daoud Ouhnane died in Iraq in October or November 2006 (Reuters 2007m). According to information, Ouhnane was in contact with suspected Islamist extremists in Catalonia in 2005 and 2006 (*The Irish Examiner* 2007). Samir Tahtah, also part of the Madrid train bombing network, was already in prison after being convicted of belonging to a Syrian-based network that recruited suicide bombers to attack US troops in Iraq (Dow Jones International News, 2007j).

*Salafia Jihadia* members in Morocco were also linked with the involvement of Moroccans in Iraq. For example, during investigations into the arrest of a cell in Morocco during August 2005, investigators indicated that Lehasan Ben Mousa, who had been arrested in Morocco, had intended to infiltrate Iraq via Syria. Ben Mousa contacted a friend called Ali El Abidi in Syria to facilitate his journey to Iraq in the company of Izzeddine Nawayili, alias Abu Souhayb, alias Abu Zayd. Ben Mousa admitted that he had travelled from Casablanca to Damascus, where a Jordanian and a Syrian were waiting to meet him. As they had, however, been unable to cross the Syrian border, Nawayili and another person, Ahmet Ait Barhal, went to Turkey and Syria, from where they were able to reach Iraq. But Nawayili returned to Morocco after joining a group in Iraq that asked him to carry out a suicide bombing targeting a Shi'i market. He refused to carry out the attack after he visited the market, claiming that women and children would

be killed. He was deported to Damascus, where the Syrian police arrested him. He returned to Morocco after being released (BBC Monitoring Middle East, 2005c).

In April 2006, Abdelaziz A, while being detained in Morocco, admitted that a Moroccan, identified as Husni, had carried out a suicide bombing in Iraq during 2005 (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2006n).

Two suicide bombers recruited at the Hsida mosque in Tetouan carried out their suicide mission in Baqouba, Iraq, in October 2006 (Thorne 2007). This was in spite of the fact that Moroccan security forces had in 2006 dismantled 11 networks specialising in the recruitment of Moroccans to Iraq. According to the same source, the GICM had sent approximately 40 people to Iraq (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007ds).

On 5 January 2007 Moroccan authorities announced that their security forces had dismantled an Islamist cell specialising in recruiting volunteers for Iraq and had arrested 62 people (*New York Times Abstracts* 2007; Abdennebi and Pfeiffe 2007). On the same date a court in Sale, Morocco, sentenced Ibrahim Samiri to two years' imprisonment after he was arrested in Syria on the border with Iraq (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007dt). Arrests were concentrated in Tetouan and a village close to the border with Ceuta. The majority of the suspects came from the Mezuak district of Tetouan, the same area where five of the Islamist radicals who had taken part in the Madrid train bombings in 2004 had grown up. Among those arrested was Fatala Abdelillah, the imam of the Dawa wa Tabligh mosque in Mezuak, who had previously been arrested on terrorism charges in November 2006 but had subsequently been released (Cembrero 2007a).

Also in January 2007 Moroccan security forces arrested Abdelali Ayad in Chefchaouen, Tetouan. It is alleged that Ayad recruited approximately 40 volunteers to Iraq as part of a terrorist cell established in Tetouan (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007du).

Ahmed Essafri, a Swedish citizen of Moroccan origin, was charged in Rabat on 12 January 2007 with being involved in the recruitment of fighters for Iraq. At the same time, Khaled Oussayeh, a Moroccan-born Belgian, was charged with being a member of the GICM, suspected of involvement in attacks in Casablanca in 2003 and Madrid in 2004, planning terrorist acts and falsifying documents. Oussayeh originally lived in Maaseik, a small town on Belgium's border with the Netherlands, but was extradited to Morocco after being arrested in Syria (AFP 2007u).

On 2 February 2007, Mohamed Ben Moujane, a Moroccan arrested in Afghanistan by Pakistani security forces as an *al-Qa'eda* bodyguard, was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment in Morocco after being handed over by the US, where he had been one of eight Moroccans held at Guantanamo Bay (AFP 2007j).

In November 2007 Iraqi security forces accused Mohsen Khaybar, alias Abdelmajid el-Libi (the Libyan), alias Abderrahim, a Moroccan originally from Tetouan, of being linked to *Ansar al-Islam*, which was responsible for planning terrorist attacks against the Shi'is in Iraq. Khaybar, who was believed to have lived in Damascus, Syria, also led a network involved in the recruitment of fighters for Iraq. Khaybar was considered one of the leading members of the *al-Jama'ah al-Libiyah al-Muqatilah*, or the Libyan Combatant Group, which he joined during his stay in Afghanistan, even though he is a Moroccan – which explains the reference to Libya in his alias. Moroccans arrested in Syria and deported to Morocco during the course of this case had implicated Khaybar (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007dv).

In summary, although the country experienced only sporadic acts of terrorism on its own soil, Moroccans were particularly active both in recruiting foreign fighters for Iraq and in various European terrorist networks.

## Tunisia

Tunisians responsible for or implicated in attacks in Iraq included (Vidino 2006:265-266):

- Yusri Fakhir Muhammad Ali al-Turayki, alias Abu-Qadamah al-Tunisi, a Tunisian, had been responsible for attacks on two tombs in Samarra and thereby further fuelling sectarian violence in Iraq. Al-Turayki, who was believed to have entered Iraq in November 2003, was sentenced to death in 2006 for his suspected role in the assassination of journalist Atwar Bahjat and for his involvement in the bombing of the tombs of imams Ali al-Hadi and Al-Hasan al-Askari in Samarra (BBC Monitoring Middle East, 2007dd)
- Nabil Sulaymani, a Tunisian, was arrested in Syria in an attempt to enter Iraq and was deported back to Tunisia (BBC Monitoring Middle East, 2007dd)
- Fadhal Saadi, who had previously been implicated in the preparations for the assassination of Shah Masud in Afghanistan, lived in Milan before becoming a suicide bomber in July 2003

- Kamal Morchidi, a member of the Ben Khemais cell, also lived in Milan before carrying out his suicide attack on the al-Rashid hotel in Baghdad on 26 October 2003, possibly, as earlier indicated, targeting US Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz
- Habib Waddani, alias Said, a Tunisian living in Milan (and also previously referred to), also carried out a suicide attack in Iraq. He was previously wanted for weapons and explosives trafficking for *al-Qa'eda* training camps (Hafez 2007:205-207)
- Lofti Rihani, who was a member of a cell headed by Essid Sami Ben Khemais, died with two other Tunisians in a suicide attack on US forces in September 2003
- Fahdal Nassim, who was implicated in the attack against UN headquarters in Baghdad in August 2003

In December 2006, Turkish authorities arrested Malek Charahili, a Tunisian, and raided the residences of his two accomplices, a Moroccan and a Turk, who were suspected of assisting foreign fighters to enter Iraq through supplying them with false passports. It was believed that after the imprisonment of Syrian Loa'i Mohammad Haj Bakr al-Saqa, who was charged with being the mastermind behind the suicide bombings in Istanbul in 2003 which killed 58 people, Charahili may have become *al-Qa'eda's* top operative in Turkey (Dow Jones International News 2006a).

Egyptian security forces also announced in early January 2007 that four Tunisians – Ayman Hkiri, Ahamed Lahbib, Mhamed Almadiri and an unnamed fourth person – were to be deported to Tunisia after being arrested in the Madinet Nasr district in Cairo and in Alexandria. Nine Tunisians, eight French, two Belgians, one US citizen and a number of Syrians and Egyptians were arrested on suspicion of being part of a cell involved in the recruitment of foreign fighters for Iraq (All Africa 2007).

Abu Osama al-Tunisi, an emir responsible for bringing Sunni fighters to Iraq where he was believed to have been based since 2004, was one of between six and ten *al-Qa'eda* leaders in Iraq believed to have been killed in a US air strike on 25 September 2007. According to the US Central Command: 'Abu Osama al-Tunisi was in the inner leadership circle of Abu Ayyub al-Masri, the leader of *al-Qa'eda* in Iraq, and was a likely successor.' Al-Tunisi was the military emir of Baghdad's southern belt and took over the role of emir of foreign terrorists when al-Masri became the overall leader. Al-Tunisi

helped equip foreign terrorists for improvised explosive device attacks, car-bombing campaigns and suicide attacks throughout Baghdad (US Federal News 2007a)

However, Abu Osama al-Tunisi's fate was not certain. According to *al-Qa'eda*-aligned websites, another commander with a similar name had been killed in 2006, while, according to other sources, another Tunisian with a similar name and also fighting in Iraq might have adopted the name Abu Osama al-Tunisi because it was a famous name (Zavis and Barnes 2007). The impact of transnational terrorism may be summarised in a single statistic, which is that some four-fifths of all the high-profile attacks in Iraq have been carried out by foreign terrorists.

## Conclusion

Prior to 9/11, the political freedom that existed in democratic regimes allowed terror organisations and individuals to recruit new members, to propagate their ideals and activities, as well as to organise and launch their operations, including sending Islamists for training in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya and Iraq.

Western Europe was used by a number of these groups (despite being classified in other countries as terrorist groups) to raise funds and publicise their activities. Allowing these groups to function in the so-called safe haven countries of Europe under the cover and protection of civil liberties made these countries themselves vulnerable to terrorism. Consequently many European countries gradually began to experience the devastating impact of international terrorism in much the same way as France and more recently Spain had earlier experienced.

Western European countries have also begun to understand that turning a blind eye to extremists being trained in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya and Iraq will in the end pose a threat not only to these and other more distant countries, but to their own countries as well.

While Europe had been a safe environment for many terrorists who sought political asylum as a way of preventing their extradition to their respective countries of origin, the opposite happened after 9/11, when instead of honouring one of the primary rules of extradition, which is not to extradite a person who might be tortured or unfairly treated, some countries over-reacted in their attempts to rid themselves of current or future threats. Such over-reaction led to allegations of Islamophobia.

In Spain, the government approved the extradition of the two suspects to Morocco in October 2007, while Britain signed agreements with countries with poor human rights records, including Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia.

The first person to be handed over to Algeria was Taleb Benaissa, who was suspected of having ties with Rachid Ramda. Although Benaissa had travelled to Pakistan, he had been in the education profession. British police had arrested him in 2002 and kept him in detention until 2005 without being able to make a successful case against him. Algeria, however, had on 10 November 2007 sentenced Benaissa in absentia to three years' imprisonment. Britain was also expected to hand over another three Algerians (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2007dw).

On 18 July 2007 US officials handed Abdallah Ben Amor Hajji over to Tunisian authorities after being held at Guantanamo Bay. In 1995 a military court in Tunisia sentenced him *in absentia* to a 10-year prison term for belonging to a terrorist organization. In particular for his alleged involvement in the Tunisian Islamic Front, a group thought to be the armed branch of the banned Islamist party *an-Nahda*. Hajji moved from Tunis with his family to Pakistan in 1990. Pakistani authorities arrested him in April 2002 and delivered him to the U.S. government, which sent him to Guantanamo. The circumstances in which both Abdallah and Lotfi Lagha were held after being handed over by the United States, despite all the assurances raised a number of questions (Dow Jones International News 2007l).

Subsequently, a US federal judge, citing the mistreatment of Abdallah Ben Amor Hajji and Lotfi Lagha, and blocked the transfer of Mohammed Abdul Rahman, a Tunisian who was captured in Pakistan, despite reassurances from the Tunisian government. Although a military tribunal had heard Rahman's case in 2005 and cleared him for transfer to Tunisia, Rahman had been convicted in absentia in Tunisia and sentenced to 20 years in prison, where he could be tortured (Selsky 2007).

The US Supreme Court also blocked the deportation of Ahmed Belbacha, an Algerian who had been held at Guantanamo Bay since February 2002 following his arrest in Pakistan. This decision probably followed the announcement of Algerian Justice Minister Tayeb Belaiz in October 2007 that Algeria would not accept any conditions for the repatriation of former Guantanamo Bay detainees (AFP 2007v).

It is also interesting to note that while European countries turned a blind eye in the 1990s to European-based support structures run by foreigners wanted

by their countries of origin, or those who abused lax European immigration policies, French authorities dismantled a cell suspected of providing logistical support to the GSPC/AQLIM within a week after the Algiers bombings of 11 December 2007, in which UN offices and the country's constitutional council had been targeted (Verges 2007).

While the network did not plan to target France in its attacks – which was a previous criterion for attention from the security forces – this and other security operations seem to indicate an international commitment to the view that a threat against one is a threat against all. It would be interesting to speculate whether transnational terrorism would have spread as it has if this approach had existed before European countries had had direct experience of violent extremism.