



(U) Emerging Patterns in the EU: Recent IED Plots in Germany and Spain



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(U) Photo: Screen capture from an IJU video
Source: Analyst acquired from a popular internet forum now unavailable

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(U) Key Findings

- (U//FOUO) Al Qaeda-directed networks intend to conduct attacks in the European Union (EU) that aim to:
 - Generate discord among Coalition and NATO forces fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan;
 - Weaken EU governments militarily and economically so that they will withdraw their forces from international operations in predominantly Muslim countries.
- (U//FOUO) German authorities arrested three men who were plotting to target U.S. and Uzbek military and diplomatic assets in Germany in September 2007.
- (U//FOUO) Spanish authorities arrested 14 suspects involved in a near-operational plot to target Barcelona's subway system in January 2008.
- (U//FOUO) Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are an essential element in both plots.
- (U//FOUO) Plots include several common characteristics, including specialization of cell members, leadership autonomy, the exploitation of small diaspora communities, and public claims of responsibility.

(U) Summary

(U//FOUO) Despite official statistics showing a decrease in the number of arrests related to Salafist-jihadist activity, EU-based security services have thwarted numerous IED-centered plots since 2003.¹ Many of the EU plots involve al Qaeda-networked terrorists in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and included plots in Spain, Germany, Italy, Belgium, and the United Kingdom (UK). Two recent plots are representative of the current IED threat in the EU: the Sauerland plot in Germany (2007) and the Barcelona plot in Spain (2008).

(U) Germany: The "Sauerland Plot"

(U//FOUO) German authorities arrested three men – two German nationals and one Turkish national – on 4 September 2007. According to contemporary reports, the suspects were arrested while in the process of mixing hydrogen peroxide-based explosives,² which according to another report would have made the equivalent of 900 pounds of explosives.³ Cell leader Fritz Gelowicz confessed to receiving three months of training and operational direction at a camp run by the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) in Mir Ali, North Waziristan, along the Afghan-Pakistan border.⁴ According to police authorities, all three suspects maintained contact with the IJU leadership in Pakistan after they returned to Germany.⁵ The group intended to target the Ramstein air base and possibly U.S. and Uzbek diplomatic missions in Germany.

(U//FOUO) The IJU claimed responsibility for the attempted attack in a “communiqué posted online on 11 September... claim[ing] that the IJU had intended to attack the United States and Uzbekistan because of their ‘injustice and brutal policies toward Muslims and Islam.’”⁶

(U) Spain: The “Barcelona Case”

(U//FOUO) Spanish authorities arrested 14 suspects involved in a near-operational plot to target Barcelona’s subway system. Presiding judge Ismael Moreno stated that “the members of the terrorist cell that was broken up planned to carry out several suicide terrorist attacks between 18 and 20 January 2008 against means of public transport in Barcelona.” Two days earlier, Spanish authorities had uncovered numerous IED components from a trash bin tossed there by one of the suspects. The bags contained batteries, electrical cable, and other components (See Figures 1 and 2). The subsequent raids uncovered “18 kilograms of a white substance...and experts concluded it was ‘a mixture of nitrocellulose and potassium perchlorate,’ commonly employed to manufacture certain industrial explosives.”

(U) Figure 1: REUTERS/Spanish Interior Ministry/Handout



(U//FOUO) Of the 14 arrested, 10 remain in custody. Of those 10, Spanish authorities believe 3 were to be suicide operatives and three others “were allegedly explosives experts.”⁷ In August 2008, a Taliban spokesman claimed responsibility for the thwarted plot.

(U) Common Characteristics

(U//FOUO) Though details of each case vary, two common characteristics stand out: specialization and autonomy. In both plots, security services were able to differentiate cell leadership, other members’ roles, and a select list of targets.



(U) Figure 2: REUTERS/Spanish Interior Ministry/Handout

(U//FOUO) Specialization is a key common characteristic. Operational cells include an identified leader, individuals trained in the manufacturing of IEDs and other specializations, such as spiritual guidance and suicide operations. Specialized IED cadres could be deployed to different cells offering plot-specific guidance on detonator fabrication and explosives recipes. It reduces the likelihood of work accidents and helps dedicate scarce training resources to fewer individuals who can then go through more extensive training. IED cadres could offer guidance based on unique local characteristics of the targets. For instance, an IED specialist could assess the size and material to be used in an attack. For example, they

could decide to use smaller IEDs composed of common drug store items, rather than large vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs) which often require large amounts of fertilizer. In previous plots, such as Operation Crevice (UK, 2004) the purchase of large amounts of fertilizer by urban and suburban-dwelling cell members raised the suspicions of authorities, leading to the plot's disruption. Thus, by employing bomb-making experts, terrorist groups improve operational security.

(U//FOUO) Specialization also provides the cell leader, or *amir*, with a large measure of autonomy. From the cases described here, the cell *amir* appears to have near operational autonomy, including target-selection, IED application, and the decision to use suicide tactics. An autonomous *amir* means target selection becomes more organic, based on localized factors that often evolve over time. This makes it more difficult for security agencies to identify and dedicate assets to specific targets.

(U//FOUO) There are other common characteristics, as well. One characteristic, exemplified in the Barcelona Plot, was the exploitation of Spain's relatively small South Asian diaspora community. Directing cells toward smaller communities may help cells avoid official scrutiny, because local and national security personnel and resources are usually dedicated to larger, more problematic communities. Another common characteristic are the claims of responsibility for failed plots. On 11 September 2007, the IJU claimed responsibility for the German plot. The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility for the Barcelona plot in August 2008.

(U) *The Groups*

(U//FOUO) Two groups dominate recent reporting: the IJU and the TTP. The relationship between these groups and al Qaeda leadership is fluid. Recent confessions and legal discovery from ongoing trials suggest that Salafist-jihadist groups operating along the Afghan-Pakistan border share logistical and financial support assets, training facilities, personnel, and tactics, techniques, and procedures. The extent of that coordination and cooperation is unclear from open sources.

(U//FOUO) The IJU is a collection of several smaller Central Asian groups, under the auspices of al Qaeda.⁸ According to one recent report, "the IJU is an umbrella term used to link a network of affiliated *jamoat* groups from Central Asia, comprised of Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Kazakh radicals, [and] linked to, but not formerly associated with the [Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan]."⁹ IJU leadership announced its intention of attacking international targets in April 2007.¹⁰ Meanwhile a Taliban spokesman claimed responsibility for the Barcelona plot in August 2008, noting that cell members pledged allegiance to Baitullah Mehsud.¹¹

(U) *Plots in Context*

(U//FOUO) Al Qaeda-directed attacks on EU targets serve both short term and long term strategic goals. The short term goal is to create discord among Coalition and NATO members, compelling them to withdraw their support for U.S.-led operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. This is borne out in numerous public threats directed toward European countries from senior al Qaeda leadership,¹² the IJU,¹³ and the TTP.¹⁴ For instance, a September 2009 video featuring a

German member of al-Qaeda threatens attacks if Germany refuses to withdraw its troops within two weeks.¹⁵ The long term goal is to weaken EU governments both militarily and economically so that they will withdraw their militaries from international operations in predominantly Muslim countries. Al Qaeda's former *amir* in the UK, Dhiren Bharot, called this tactic "flank protection" and described it in his 1999 book, *The Army of Madinah in Kashmir*:

In effect to create a big enough problem on their home front, one that is destabilizing enough to force them to sway their glances away from the Eastern Muslim world. For this, it would seem that the most favourable target would be the national economy of the western block.¹⁶

(U) ***Conclusion***

(U//FOUO) European security services have thwarted numerous ambitious IED-centered plots in EU countries involving al Qaeda-networked terrorists operating in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Two recent plots are representative of the current IED threat in the Europe: the Sauerland plot in Germany (2007) and the Barcelona plot in Spain (2008). These plots may reflect al Qaeda's long term strategy of exhausting U.S. allies to the point that they will withdraw their support for Coalition and NATO operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

(U) ***Areas for Further Research***

(U//FOUO) The Barcelona plot of 2008 shares many characteristics with the Colorado and New York case unfolding since September 2009, including the type of explosives and intended targets.

- (U//FOUO) Are there operational connections between Barcelona and the United States cases?

Endnotes

¹ European Police Office. 2008. *TE-SAT 2008: EU terrorism situation and trend report 2008*. The Hague: Europol. <http://www.europol.europa>

² Ibid.

³ “German confesses to anti-US bomb plot” (page 2) < German news | Expatica Germany. http://www.expatica.com/de/news/local_news/German-confesses-to-anti_US-bomb-plot--_55306.html?ppager=1 (accessed September 15, 2009).

⁴ Ibid. See also Evan Kohlmann, *Jihad Networks in Pakistan and their Influence in Europe*, The NEFA Foundation. July, 2008.

⁵ “Uzbek Terror Networks: Germany, Jamoat and the IJU,” The Jamestown Foundation. http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Bsword%5D=8fd5893941d69d0be3f378576261ae3e&tx_ttnews%5Bany_of_the_words%5D=IJU&tx_ttnews%5Bpointer%5D=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=4533&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=a6fffd5412 (accessed September 15, 2009)

⁶ “Germany Arrests Fuel Fear of Homegrown Terrorism,” The Jamestown Foundation. http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Bsword%5D=8fd5893941d69d0be3f378576261ae3e&tx_ttnews%5Bany_of_the_words%5D=IJU&tx_ttnews%5Bpointer%5D=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=4413&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=5faa578ca0 (accessed September 15, 2009).

⁷ news.outlookindia.com | 2 Indians' 9 Pakistanis charged with plotting suicide attacks. <http://news.outlookindia.com/item.aspx?577961> (accessed September 22, 2009).

⁸ Known as jamoat

⁹ “Uzbek Terror Networks: Germany, Jamoat and the IJU,” The Jamestown Foundation. http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Bsword%5D=8fd5893941d69d0be3f378576261ae3e&tx_ttnews%5Bany_of_the_words%5D=IJU&tx_ttnews%5Bpointer%5D=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=4533&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=a6fffd5412 (accessed September 15, 2009)

¹⁰ Petter Nesser, “Lessons Learned from the Spetember 2007 German Terrorist Plot,” *CTC Sentinel*, March 2008.

¹¹ Fernando Reinares, “A Case Study of the January 2008 Suicide Bomb Plot in Barcelona,” *CTC Sentinel*, January 2009.

¹² *Report: Latest al-Qaeda tape makes France a target - Israel News, Ynetnews*. <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3304150,00.html> (accessed October 5, 2009).

¹³ *A Unified Strategy towards Germany? — jihadica*. <http://www.jihadica.com/a-unified-strategy-towards-germany/> (accessed October 5, 2009).

¹⁴ David Morgan. 2009. U.S. looks at Pakistani Taliban threat on Washington. Reuters. <http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSTRE5306LY20090401> (accessed October 5, 2009).

¹⁵ “*Abu Talha the German Threatens to Attack Germany — jihadica*. <http://www.jihadica.com/abu-talha-the-german-threatens-to-attack-germany/> (accessed September 22, 2009).

¹⁶ Marisa Urgo, *Making Sense of Jihad: Army of Madinah Study*. http://www.makingsenseofjihad.com/army_of_madinah_study/ (accessed September 22, 2009).