

## **The Afghan-Bosnian Mujahideen Network in Europe**

By Evan F. Kohlmann

### **INTRODUCTION**

Over the last two years, as a result of major terrorist attacks in Madrid and London, European leaders have finally become aware of a lurking extremist threat that has been brewing in dark corners across the continent for almost two decades. Western European democracies—many of whom thought that they were insulated from the threat of organized international terrorism—are discovering growing numbers of disaffected Muslim youth, hardened by scenes of televised bloodshed in the Middle East and the unwelcoming demeanor of some “native” Europeans. Frustrated by a perceived lack of social or political mobility, these men eventually become ideal recruits for the growing network of “pan-European mujahideen.”

However, to fully understand the current mujahideen phenomenon in Europe, one must first recognize its proper origins. Ironically, the flourishing of local Muslim extremist movements during the 1990s came primarily not as a result of Usama Bin Laden’s progress in Sudan and Afghanistan—but, arguably, rather due to a Muslim conflict much closer to the heart of Europe. Indeed, some of the most important factors behind the contemporary radicalization of European Muslim youth can be found in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where the cream of the Arab mujahideen from Afghanistan tested their battle skills in the post-Soviet era and mobilized a new generation of pan-Islamic revolutionaries. When I spoke to Al-Qaida recruiter Abu Hamza al-Masri in London in 2002, he tried to explain to me the mindset of the first volunteers who came to Bosnia at the start of the war in 1992: “People are dedicated to the [religion]... They went to Afghanistan to defend their brothers and sisters. So, they find Afghanistan now, the destruction of war and Muslims fighting against each other.” As a result, in the aftermath of the Afghan jihadi debacle, “they want to [struggle against] something that is indisputable, which is non-Muslims raping, killing, and maiming Muslims.”<sup>1</sup>

The Bosnian conflict was cynically offered by jihad recruiters to desperate youths in many European capitals as a chivalrous escape from the drudgery of their own boring urban lives. Yet even some of the smartest and most promising members of the European Muslim community were sucked into this bizarre netherworld. “Abu Ibrahim”, a 21-year old medical student from London at Birmingham University, took a break during training in Bosnia to be interviewed for a jihad propaganda video. Brandishing an automatic weapon, he scoffed:

“When you come here, people they think, ‘when you go into Bosnia you are sitting around and there are shells coming down and they are firing everywhere around you.’ They don’t know that we sit here and we have kebab. They don’t know that we have ice cream and we have cake here. They don’t know that we can telephone or fax anywhere in the world. They don’t know that this is a nice holiday for us where you meet some of the best people you have ever met in your life. People from all over the world, people

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Shaykh Abu Hamza al-Masri at the Finsbury Park Mosque; June 28, 2002.

from Brazil, from Japan, from China, from the Middle East, from America, North, South, Canada, Australia, all over the world you meet people.”<sup>2</sup>

Beyond its propaganda value, Bosnia’s unique geographic position directly between Western Europe and the Middle East was the ideal jumping-off point for organizational expansion of various Muslim extremist movements into the United Kingdom, Italy, France, and even Scandinavia. Bosnia provided an environment where trained foreign Muslim fighters arriving from Afghanistan could mingle with unsophisticated but eager terrorist recruits from Western Europe, and could form new plans for the future of the jihad. No such contact had ever occurred before for groups like Al-Gama`at al-Islamiyya and Al-Qaida, and it provided these organizations limitless possibilities for development and growth. After fighting for six months during the opening stages of the Bosnian war in 1992, Saudi Al-Qaida commander Abu Abdel Aziz “Barbaros” told journalists during a fundraising trip to Kuwait, “I have come out of Bosnia only to tell the Muslims that at this time this offers us a great opportunity... Allah has opened the way of jihad, we should not waste it... This is a great opportunity now to make Islam enter Europe via jihad. This can only be accomplished through jihad. If we stop the jihad now we will have lost this opportunity.”<sup>3</sup>

For their part, the European radicals inducted into the ranks of the foreign mujahideen in Bosnia were equally eager to make themselves useful. Babar Ahmad—a British Muslim currently awaiting possible extradition to the United States to face charges of running an Al-Qaida support cell in London—boasted in an early jihadi audiotape that the contributions of the new European mujahideen were “instrumental”:

“[I]nstrumental... not just to the jihad in Bosnia, but the world-wide jihad, for what they managed to achieve. And you think this is an exaggeration, but by the hands of the brothers they did many things that you wouldn’t believe. Books were translated and produced, in the front-lines, because you had the English brothers that could speak English and the Arab brothers that could speak Arabic and a bit of English, and they go together and translated books about Jihad. Now, these books are guiding other brothers back to the Jihad again. They’ve computerized whole computer networks because of their computer knowledge.”<sup>4</sup>

From the moment the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina began in 1992, the Bosnian Muslim government secretly tracked the arrival of foreign volunteers from Europe seeking to wage a jihad, or “holy struggle”, against the Christian Serbs and Croats. According to ARBiH military intelligence documents, “the channels for their arrival in [Bosnia] went through the Republic of Croatia, majority of them came from Western Europe and Great Britain and they have the passports from these countries. According to the operative information from the State security service, [a] large[] number of these persons were recruited and transported to the BiH area through... London and Milan, and there are some indications that some individuals also came through Frankfurt and

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<sup>2</sup> Video interview clip of Abu Ibrahim al-Brittanee; 21-years old, Goulanders Green, London.

<sup>3</sup> “The Jihad in Bosnia.” *Al-Daawah* (Islamabad). P.O. Box 3093; Islamabad, Pakistan. Publisher: Shaykh Waseem Ahmed. January 1993.

<sup>4</sup> Azzam Publications. “In the Hearts of Green Birds.” Audiocassette tape transliterated by Salman Dhia Al-Deen. <http://www.azzam.com>.

Munich.”<sup>5</sup> A second document from Bosnian Muslim military intelligence detailing the infrastructure of the foreign mujahideen brigade lists the names of prominent individual jihad financiers and recruiters based in Zagreb, London, Vienna, Milan, and Torino.<sup>6</sup>

The Bosnians also noticed something else about their new would-be European Muslim allies: while some genuinely sought to defend innocent Muslims, others were fleeing to Bosnia after being “expelled from their [home] countries for various reasons and they cannot return there.”<sup>7</sup> ARBiH memoranda suggest that the Bosnian Muslim military regarded mujahideen arriving from Afghanistan and the Middle East as potentially useful, but reserved a much more skeptical attitude towards some of their idealistic and irreverent young comrades who hailed from various capitals of Western Europe. In a report written in September 1994, sources within the ARBiH Security Service Department warned that “their not providing their personal data is most probably due to possible links with [intelligence services] or having committed criminal offenses in their countries of origin, for in case their countries learnt about their stay here, they would demand their extradition.”<sup>8</sup> A second analytical report from the ARBiH Military Security Service issued in May 1995 further noted that, “a significant number of these persons [who] entered in our country are from some West European countries and they have the citizenships and passports from those countries... After the arrival in our country, these persons are hiding their identity and as members of the unit ‘El Mudzahedin’ they submit the requests to enter the BiH citizenship... because they are the persons from the Interpol wanted circulars.”<sup>9</sup>

One of the European mujahideen cited in particular by the Bosnian Muslims for his thuggish behavior was “Abu Walid”, a medic “originally from France” who reportedly seized control of a local hospital in Zenica in July 1994 with weapons drawn and “harassed the medical staff there. Simultaneously, outside the... Center, there were ten armed members of ‘El-Mujahidin’ Unit.”<sup>10</sup> Within months of being discharged of his duties with the foreign mujahideen in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Abu Walid—better known as French Muslim convert Christophe Caze—went on to lead an infamous Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA) terrorist network based in northern France known as the “Roubaix

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<sup>5</sup> “Review of the Information on Activities of the Persons from Afro-Asian Countries Directly Before the War and During the War in the Territory of BiH Republic.” Report written by the BiH Administration of the Military Security Service– Department for Analytical and Informative Affairs.” Sarajevo; May 6, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> “Shema Hijerarnijskim Odnosa OpO ‘VAZAL.’” Report written by the ARBiH Military Intelligence Service. November 28, 1995. See sections marked: “Lica Sa Kojima Kontaktira Abu Maali Hasan” and “Donatori Jedinice ‘El Mudzahidin.’”

<sup>7</sup> “Review of the Information on Activities of the Persons from Afro-Asian Countries Directly Before the War and During the War in the Territory of BiH Republic.” Report written by the BiH Administration of the Military Security Service– Department for Analytical and Informative Affairs.” Sarajevo; May 6, 1995.

<sup>8</sup> “Disruption of the enemy’s activities.” Memorandum dispatched from Zenica by Colonel Ramiz Dugalic, commander of the Ministry of Defense Security Administration – Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH) Security Service Department. Classified No. 258-33. September 14, 1994.

<sup>9</sup> “Review of the Information on Activities of the Persons from Afro-Asian Countries Directly Before the War and During the War in the Territory of BiH Republic.” Report written by the BiH Administration of the Military Security Service– Department for Analytical and Informative Affairs.” Sarajevo; May 6, 1995.

<sup>10</sup> “Disruption of the enemy’s activities.” Memorandum dispatched from Zenica by Colonel Ramiz Dugalic, commander of the Ministry of Defense Security Administration – Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH) Security Service Department. Classified No. 258-33. September 14, 1994.

Gang.”<sup>11</sup> Caze was eventually killed during a suicidal highway battle with local police near the Belgian border as he fled French counter-terrorism investigators in mid-1996.

Even the mujahideen themselves were critical of some of the hotheaded European volunteers recruited by Syrian Imad Eddin Barakat Yarkas (a.k.a. Abu Dahdah) in Madrid, Spain for the purpose of waging jihad in Bosnia. When Barakaat telephoned a mujahideen training camp in Zenica in November 1995 to check on his new crop of students, the personnel director at the camp picked up the line and “complain[ed] about the young men who had been sent by Barakat to the camp.”<sup>12</sup> Yarkas was finally arrested by Spanish authorities in 2001 and sentenced to a 27-year jail term for providing substantial logistical support to, among others, the 9/11 suicide hijackers dispatched by Al-Qaida.<sup>13</sup>

However, while the new European faces among the mujahideen may have caused consternation in some Bosnian government circles, generally speaking, the foreign terrorist organizations active in the region (primarily Al-Qaida, Al-Gama`at al-Islamiyya, and the GIA) were pleased to benefit from the situation and use the Bosnian war as a massive engine for recruitment and financing. In December 1995, these terrorist commanders further profited from NATO’s interest in expelling the foreign mujahideen from Bosnia. Hundreds of veteran fighters, accused of brutal wartime atrocities and expertly trained in urban warfare, were readily granted political asylum in a collection of European countries, Australia, and Canada. It was a devious tactic that allowed nefarious groups like the GIA to infiltrate several Western European nations with highly skilled and motivated terrorist sleeper cells. A French report written by French counterterrorism magistrate Jean-Louis Bruguière later concluded that the “exfiltration” of significant numbers of veteran fighters from Bosnia was beneficial in the sense that it enabled the mujahideen “to be useful again in spreading the Jihad across other lands.” In fact, as Bruguière noted in his report, “among the veterans of the ‘Moudjahiddin Battalion’ of Zenica, many would go on to carry out terrorist acts following the end of the Bosnian conflict.”<sup>14</sup>

## THE UNITED KINGDOM

Despite its relatively high standard of living and social equality, the United Kingdom has been and remains one of the most active bases of radical Islam across Western Europe. Certainly, it can be said that the Iranian revolution and the war in Afghanistan together started the ball rolling for the Sunni British fundamentalist movement. However, their ideas did not begin to have a wide appeal among local

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<sup>11</sup> Jean-Louis Bruguiere and Jean-Francois Ricard. “*Requisitoire Definitif aux Fins de Non-Lieu. De Non-Lieu partiel. De Requalification. De Renvoi devant le Tribunal Correctionnel, de maintien sous Controle Judiciaire et de maintien en Detention.*” Cour D’Appel de Paris; Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris. No. Parquet: P96 253 3901.2. Page 157.

<sup>12</sup> “Jucio a la Célula Espanola de Al Qaeda.” *El Mundo* (Spain). June 6, 2005.  
<http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2005/06/06/espana/1118066833.html>.

<sup>13</sup> “Spanish court jails 18 in al-Qaida trial.” *Al-Jazeera*. September 26, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Jean-Louis Bruguiere and Jean-Francois Ricard. “*Requisitoire Definitif aux Fins de Non-Lieu. De Non-Lieu partiel. De Requalification. De Renvoi devant le Tribunal Correctionnel, de maintien sous Controle Judiciaire et de maintien en Detention.*” Cour D’Appel de Paris; Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris. No. Parquet: P96 253 3901.2. Page 169.

Muslim youths until the era of Bosnia-Herzegovina. When scenes of devastation and war crimes began to air on BBC television broadcasts, many British Muslims were shocked that such horrific events could take place in the context modern Europe without any Western intervention. It gave sudden and unexpected credence to the calls of violent radicals who suggested it was time for Muslims to start taking their personal security into their own hands. Dr. Zaki Badawi, the principal (at that time) of the Muslim College in London, acknowledged in early 1992, "Bosnia has shaken public opinion throughout the Muslim world more deeply than anything since the creation of Israel in 1948."<sup>15</sup>

The Bosnian war caused a particularly strong backlash in the outspoken circles of indignant British Muslim college students. These educated and idealistic youths angrily protested against the persecution of fellow Muslims in Bosnia. One student, a classmate of several men who had left to seek training in Afghanistan and Bosnia, saw nothing wrong with taking up arms against the "enemies of Islam": "You cannot turn a blind eye when Muslims are being massacred, because what will you do when it is happening on your doorstep?"<sup>16</sup> Inside Bosnia, the 21-year old Londoner "Abu Ibrahim" criticized the "hypocrites" among his peers back in Britain who swore revenge on the Serbs and Croats, yet were too afraid to join the jihad in Bosnia: "...what we lack here is Muslims that are prepared to suffer and sacrifice. There in Britain, I see Muslims, every medical student is saying that my third year is for Islam, my third year is for the Muslims. They get their job, they get their surgery. 50, 60, £70,000 a year they're earning. And then, no struggle, no sacrifice." Abu Ibrahim spoke of the intense sense of satisfaction he felt fighting in the Bosnian war, as compared to the apathy of the secular Muslims who remained in London. In Britain, "I watch the TV and tears roll down my face when I see the Muslims in Bosnia, Muslims in Palestine, Muslims in Kashmir. And then I come [to Bosnia] and you feel a sense of satisfaction. You feel that you are fulfilling your duty. You feel that you are doing what the Prophet and his companions done[sic] 1400 years ago."<sup>17</sup> Another British recruit from south London featured on the same Bosnia jihad video sneered, "this is what they like to do in England, they like to talk, they like to talk, they like to organize... big conferences... in the London Arena... and they make a nice conference... Then, after the talk, they go back home and they sleep. They carry on watching 'Neighbors'... They carry on watching 'Coronation Street'... What life is this? These people talk too much... You want to see true Muslims, with unity, come to this place, and then you'll see."<sup>18</sup>

Even those who remained behind in the United Kingdom did their part to help the cause of the mujahideen. Young activists in the fundamentalist Muslim Parliament established a charity to support jihad in Bosnia that later became known as the "Global Jihad Fund" (GJF).<sup>19</sup> According to its later website, the GJF was established to aid "the

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<sup>15</sup> Philps, Alan. "New 'arc of crisis' fuels fears over Muslim aggression." *The Daily Telegraph* (London). October 8, 1992. *Page 15*.

<sup>16</sup> Aydintasbas, Asla. "Why they can't turn their backs on the veil." *The Independent* (London). April 28, 1994. *Page 22*.

<sup>17</sup> Unidentified video interview of "Abu Ibrahim." Originally obtained from the Finsbury Park Mosque, London.

<sup>18</sup> Unidentified video interview of "Abu Ibrahim." Originally obtained from the Finsbury Park Mosque, London.

<sup>19</sup> Sohail A Osman ([sohail@muslimsonline.com](mailto:sohail@muslimsonline.com)). "Subject: Global Jihad Fund." Newsgroup: soc.religion.islam. August 30, 1998.

Growth of various Jihad Movements around the World by supplying them with sufficient Funds to purchase Weapons and train their Individuals.”<sup>20</sup> Two months after the signing of the Dayton Accords officially ending the Bosnian war, GJF administrators announced the distribution of a new brochure entitled, “Islam—The New Target”: “Contents include... a reprint of an acknowledgement certificate from the Commander of the Bosnian 7th Corps to Muslim Parliament (on behalf of the fund). Why don’t you get a copy or many copies of the brochure for local distribution or get a master to reprint. You and your friends could use it to increase genocide awareness and Jihad awareness in your locality.”<sup>21</sup> Two years later, following a twin Al-Qaida suicide bombing attack on U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, the administrators of the GJF indicated that the fund was being run by Saudi Al-Qaida spokesman Mohammed al-Massari and had found a new cause célèbre in “support[ing] Sheikh Mujahid Osama bin Laden.”<sup>22</sup> When confronted by British investigative reporters, the GJF webmaster in London admitted, “I work for two people, really... Mr. Massari and Osama Bin Laden.”<sup>23</sup>

On the battlefield in Bosnia, British-born mujahideen recruits had a noticeable and significant impact. On June 13, 1993, a British patrol of four APC’s was stopped at a roadblock near the central Bosnian town of Guca Gora.<sup>24</sup> A group of approximately 50 mujahideen fighters, who “looked north African or Middle Eastern,” had assembled there to intercept mobile enemy troops. The frightened British soldiers told journalists later that the foreigners had long, wispy beards, Afghan-style caps, and uniforms unlike anything worn by local Bosnian guerillas.<sup>25</sup> Though the jihadis instantly trained their rocket propelled grenade launchers and rifles at the UN vehicles, the mujahideen commander on scene—an unidentified British Muslim wearing an Afghan hat and a blue scarf over his face—addressed the British officer in charge of the patrol, Major Vaughan Kent-Payne, in perfect English and coldly reassured him, “be cool, these people won’t fire until I give them the order.”<sup>26</sup>

In the summer of 1993, the British mujahideen began to suffer their first series of combat casualties, including a Muslim convert named David Sinclair. Sinclair (a.k.a. Dawood al-Brittani) was a 29-year old employee of a computer company in the UK. After suddenly converting to Islam and adopting traditional Muslim dress, Sinclair ran into problems with senior management at his company. Within a week of wearing his new clothes to work, he was reportedly terminated. Mobilized into action, he thereupon decided to travel to Bosnia-Herzegovina and to join the Islamic military organization based there. In the midst of his training, he generously gave away his two British passports to Arab-Afghan “brothers in need.” Dawood refused to return to the UK

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<sup>20</sup> “Global Jihad Fund: Mission Statement.” <http://www.ummah.net/jihad/about.htm>. November 2000.

<sup>21</sup> Mohammed Sohail ([info@zakat.org.uk](mailto:info@zakat.org.uk)). “One Deen, One Ummah, One Struggle.” Newsgroups: alt.religion.islam. January 31, 1996.

<sup>22</sup> Sohail A Osman ([sohail@muslimsonline.com](mailto:sohail@muslimsonline.com)). “Subject: Global Jihad Fund.” Newsgroup: soc.religion.islam. August 30, 1998.

<sup>23</sup> Hastings, Chris and Jessica Berry. “Muslim militia training in Britain.” *The Ottawa Citizen*. November 07, 1999. Page A6.

<sup>24</sup> Frost, Bill. “British troops poised to quit Vitez base.” *The Times* (London). June 14, 1993.

<sup>25</sup> Bishop, Patrick. “Islamic warriors lead Balkan attack.” *The Daily Telegraph*. June 14, 1993. Page 10. See also: O’Kane, Maggie. “Mujahedeen fighting in Bosnia, British say.” *The Guardian* (London). June 14, 1993. Page A6.

<sup>26</sup> “Moslem fighters ‘led by Briton.’” *Daily Mail* (London). October 29, 1993. Page 2.

evidently out of a determination to avoid living the life of an infidel. During deadly clashes with Croatian HVO forces, he was shot and killed near an enemy bunker.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, British Muslims were present for some of the most important ARBiH victories of the Bosnian war, including the conquest of the Vozuca region in late summer 1995. That battle, popularly known among the Arab-Afghans as “Operation BADR”, cost the lives of dozens of foreign fighters—including “Abu Mujahid” from the United Kingdom, killed on September 10, 1995. Abu Mujahid was a recent British university graduate who had finished his studies in 1993, when the Islamic community in the UK was still in an uproar over the war crimes being committed by the Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina. He first came to the Balkans in 1993 as a humanitarian aid worker purportedly transporting food and medicine to the embattled Muslims in central Bosnia. Abu Mujahid was using his position as charity employee as a cover for other, more illicit activities: “Over the next two years Abu Mujahid hurried back and forth between Bosnia and Britain carrying valuable supplies to the brothers there. Between trips he traveled the length of Britain reaching its smaller parts in his efforts to raise money for the cause and increase the awareness among Muslims there.” Abu Mujahid returned to Bosnia-Herzegovina in August 1995 and enlisted in a jihad training camp soon after his arrival, receiving instruction from—among others—two elite Egyptian trainers imported to the region directly from Al-Qaida-run camps along the Afghan-Pakistani border. For all his anti-Western vigor, Abu Mujahid nonetheless proudly wore a G-Shock watch and U.S. Army boots. According to his teachers, he “excelled” at shooting and throwing grenades and he insisted that he would remain in Bosnia “‘until either we get victory or I am martyred’... One thing which was strange about him was that he always used to say, thinking back, I remember, maybe three, four, five times a day, he would say to me that ‘Inshallah [“God-willing”] I am going to be martyred. Inshallah, this time in Bosnia, I am going to be martyred.’”<sup>28</sup>

Following the initial assault during Operation BADR, Abu Mujahid disappeared in the fog of war. Over a week later, a mujahideen search party recovered his body from the battlefield. One of the men who found Abu Mujahid later recalled, “At that point, the thought that went through my mind was that the brother had been there, left behind when I was there in Bosnia and he intended to stay there longer than me. But only Allah knew what could he have done for him to die in such a beautiful way? And the thought that’s still in our minds, Inshaallah, may Allah accept it from him, and may the people who loved him in this life, Inshaallah join him in the next.” Abu Mujahid’s body was brought back down from the mountain and then taken in a van to the frontline base camp. The lead commander present, Abu Hammam al-Najdi from Saudi Arabia, would only allow fellow British mujahideen to go inside the van to see the remains of their departed compatriot.<sup>29</sup>

The foreign mujahideen who survived the end of the war in 1995 grew apprehensive when they discovered that the Bosnian Muslims were about to sign the

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<sup>27</sup> Azzam Publications. “In the Hearts of Green Birds.” Audiocassette transliterated by Salman Dhia Al Deen.

<sup>28</sup> Azzam Publications. “Under the Shades of Swords.” Audiocassette sequel to “In the Hearts of Green Birds.” November 1997. Azzam Recordings; London, UK.

<sup>29</sup> Azzam Publications. “Under the Shades of Swords.” Audiocassette sequel to “In the Hearts of Green Birds.” November 1997. Azzam Recordings; London, UK.

Dayton Accords—“the peace of the enemy”—with the United States and Europe. British jihadi recruits were among the voices urging their commanders to wage an apocalyptic all-out terror campaign in central Bosnia targeting Western peacekeepers, the Serbs and Croats, and even other Muslims. In a direct English-language message aimed at fellow British Muslims, one mujahid fighter appealed, “the amir [commander] of the jihad... is here. And the amir of the mujahideen here says he needs more people, and more equipment, and more everything. So for the people who are sitting at home and saying that, ‘well, they don’t need people anymore’, it’s not true, it’s not true... we need as many people and as much money and everything that people can send us to help us.”<sup>30</sup> One British Muslim guerilla recounted the discussions taking place at the El-Mudzahedin Unit headquarters in a propaganda audiotape:

“[W]hen the Americans came to Bosnia... the situation had developed in such a way that it seemed as if we were going to have to fight the Americans. And [commander] Abul-Harith [the Libyan], he turned to me and he said, ‘We will become an example for these Bosnians. We will fight for our belief and the lost land. Please Allah, will give us victory and we will defeat [the Americans] or they will kill us. But we will not flee, and we will be an example for the Bosnians.’”<sup>31</sup>

According to various accounts, on the day of December 12, 1995, several fighters had left a non-descript delivery van in the parking lot of the Zenica mujahideen base. A Bosnian police investigation later concluded that these radicals were in the final stages of “trying to rig a car bomb” when they ran into an unknown technical error, and it prematurely exploded.<sup>32</sup> The massive and unexpected detonation killed as many as four mujahideen bombmakers and injured several other foreigners in the area. One wounded mujahid recounted, “You could feel the explosion... like a shining light... as I was on the floor, I remember seeing the face of Abul-Harith [the Libyan] as he ran to me. And he took me and put me on the stretcher... And the building that he wanted to open, it was locked. And Abul-Harith he didn’t look for the key, he just knocked the door down and took me inside.”<sup>33</sup>

In this case, as reported by both Arab-Afghan and Bosnian authorities, the deceased would-be bomber was an 18-year-old British honors student from southwest London known as “Sayyad al-Falastini.” Sayyad was born in the United Kingdom but spent most of his early youth in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. When he returned to London at age 12, he soon became involved in the radical Islamic fundamentalist movement there that was recruiting young volunteers for jihad in Bosnia. At age 16, he first sought unsuccessfully to join the mujahideen battalion in the Balkans after hearing an inspiring Friday khutba (religious sermon) from an Arab veteran of Bosnia.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Unidentified video interview of “Abu Ibrahim.” Originally obtained from the Finsbury Park Mosque, London.

<sup>31</sup> Azzam Publications. “Under the Shades of Swords.” Audiocassette sequel to “In the Hearts of Green Birds.” November 1997. Azzam Recordings; London, UK.

<sup>32</sup> O’Connor, Mike. “5 Islamic Soldiers Die in Shootout With Croats.” *The New York Times*. December 16, 1995. *Page 6*.

<sup>33</sup> Azzam Publications. “Under the Shades of Swords.” Audiocassette sequel to “In the Hearts of Green Birds.” November 1997. Azzam Recordings; London, UK.

<sup>34</sup> Azzam Publications. “Under the Shades of Swords.” Audiocassette sequel to “In the Hearts of Green Birds.” November 1997. Azzam Recordings; London, UK.

However, after being elected president of the Islamic society at his college, Sayyad started to methodically plan and save his money in a fund that would finance his dreamed jihad adventure. According to the mujahideen, Sayyad possessed this instinct because he was of Palestinian descent, and therefore, there was “a background of realizing the importance of Jihad in his family.” During the summer of 1995, he left London and traveled to a Bosnian mujahideen training camp, fighting alongside his fellow comrades during Operation BADR. When combat hostilities gradually came to a halt after “BADR,” many foreign volunteers began filtering out of Bosnia and returning home, including a number of British recruits. But Sayyad was not ready to leave; his first taste of battle had exhilarated him and changed his life. Among the mujahideen, despite his young age, he was well liked and highly esteemed for his proficiency in English, Arabic, and Bosnian. Sayyad did not want the war to end, grumbling (like many of the Arabs) that the peace accords had been negotiated only “in order to halt the victories of the Mujahideen in Bosnia... For three years the world had sat back and allowed the slaughter of the Muslims to continue. But now as soon as the Muslims began to fight back and win, they ended the war.” Even in light of the Dayton agreement, Sayyad stubbornly refused to leave, and he recommitted himself to keeping the Islamic jihad alive in Bosnia. In the first few days of December, as the terms of Dayton were about to become a reality, Sayyad was torn by despair as he saw his beloved combat tour coming to an inexorable end. He angrily demanded of his fellow mujahideen, “Why are we all lost? Look at the [infidels]. Are they thinking of us and then they are laughing because they have their own state. But look at us, the Muslims, we do not even have a state yet but we continue to laugh!”<sup>35</sup>

At this point, Sayyad started to act peculiarly, as if he was readying himself for a “martyrdom” operation. He would pray all night long and continuously recite verses from the Qu`ran. Previously, he had telephoned his mother to ask her to send some money for him to visit home. Suddenly, two days before the explosion in Zenica, he called her and told her not to wire the cash as “he would not be needing it.” There is good reason to believe that Sayyad may have been preparing for an imminent role as a suicide bomber. Regardless of his intentions, on December 12, something in his plan went terribly wrong. While Sayyad stood beside the van, it prematurely detonated, shaking the entire neighborhood and thoroughly frightening nearby Croatian civilians.<sup>36</sup> By the “official” count of Al-Qaida, Sayyad became the sixth British Islamic volunteer soldier killed in Bosnia only two days shy of his nineteenth birthday. He was buried in a ceremony attended “by over three hundred of the cream of the foreign Mujahideen fighters in Bosnia.”<sup>37</sup> The Arab battalion later eulogized him:

“Sayyad was a brother who made Jihad his wealth and his life giving every penny of his wealth for the pleasure of Allah and eventually giving every drop of his blood for him. We ask Allah (SWT) to accept Sayyad as a martyr, to make him an example for the

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<sup>35</sup> Azzam Publications. “Under the Shades of Swords.” Audiocassette sequel to “In the Hearts of Green Birds.” November 1997. Azzam Recordings; London, UK.

<sup>36</sup> Azzam Publications. “Under the Shades of Swords.” Audiocassette sequel to “In the Hearts of Green Birds.” November 1997. Azzam Recordings; London, UK.

<sup>37</sup> Azzam Publications. “Under the Shades of Swords.” Audiocassette sequel to “In the Hearts of Green Birds.” November 1997. Azzam Recordings; London, UK.

millions of youth in the West who have chosen this life in preference with the hereafter.”<sup>38</sup>

The shadow cast by British mujahideen volunteers in Bosnia-Herzegovina continues to plague law enforcement and intelligence agencies even to this day. On September 23, 2005, 34-year old British Muslim convert Andrew Rowe was convicted and ordered jailed for 15 years by a court in the U.K. for possessing details on how to fire mortar bombs and using secret codes to facilitate terror attacks. Back during the early 1990s, Rowe dramatically changed his loose lifestyle after converting at a mosque in Regent’s Park, London—an event which Rowe said “put meaning into my life.”<sup>39</sup> Rowe admits to traveling to Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1995 on a “humanitarian” mission—in reality, acting as an envoy for the foreign mujahideen. When he returned to the U.K., he even claimed government invalidity benefits for wounds suffered during an alleged mortar attack in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 2003, Rowe was arrested on the French side of the Channel tunnel while carrying a bound pair of socks bearing traces of TNT, plastic explosives, RDX, and nitroglycerine. According to Crown Prosecutors, the socks were likely used “to clean the barrel of a mortar or as a muzzle protector.”<sup>40</sup> Raids on Rowe’s various residences revealed coded documents with phrases such as “airline crew,” “explosives,” and “army base.” Investigators also found video recordings of jihad in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the September 11 terrorist attacks, and Al-Qaida leader Usama Bin Laden.<sup>41</sup>

## ITALY

Perhaps more than any other nation in Europe, Italy played an overly dominant role in hosting the transnational infrastructure of the Bosnian El-Mudzhahedin Unit during the mid-1990s. Italy was one of the very few Western European nations to provide a direct land route through Croatia into Muslim Bosnia, and—even prior to the conflict in the Balkans—was serving as an important hub for activity by various North African Islamic extremist groups, including: the GIA, Al-Gama`at al-Islamiyya, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, and the Tunisian An-Nahdah movement. By the time of the war in 1992-1993, forces within the influential Al-Gama`at al-Islamiyya had already designated Italy as one of three primary “support places” in Europe for its regional activities.<sup>42</sup>

No individual from Italy had a greater impact on the Bosnian mujahideen than former top Al-Gama`at al-Islamiyya commander in southern Europe, Shaykh Anwar Shaaban (a.k.a. Abu Abdelrahman al-Masri), the late Imam at Milan’s Islamic Cultural Institute and the one-time overarching leader of Arab mujahideen forces fighting

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<sup>38</sup> Azzam Publications. “Under the Shades of Swords.” Audiocassette sequel to “In the Hearts of Green Birds.” November 1997. Azzam Recordings; London, UK.

<sup>39</sup> Muir, Hugh. “British Muslim convert jailed for terrorism offences.” *The Guardian* (London). September 24, 2005.

<sup>40</sup> Muir, Hugh. “British Muslim convert jailed for terrorism offences.” *The Guardian* (London). September 24, 2005.

<sup>41</sup> Muir, Hugh. “British Muslim convert jailed for terrorism offences.” *The Guardian* (London). September 24, 2005.

<sup>42</sup> Italian Division of General Investigations and Special Operations (DIGOS) Anti-Terrorism Report. “Searches at the Islamic Cultural Center, Viale Jenner 50, Milano, 6/26/1995.” Dated September 15, 1997.

alongside the ARBiH.<sup>43</sup> Shaaban was a well-known veteran of the Afghan jihad who (like many other Arab-Afghans) in 1991 decided he no longer felt safe in Afghanistan as it collapsed into civil turmoil.<sup>44</sup> He sought and obtained political asylum in Italy, and was disappointed by what he found: “the Muslim community in Italy was just the same as elsewhere in Europe: asleep and busy in the worldly affairs.” Aided by a collection of Afghan war veterans and Italian Islamists, Anwar Shaaban opened a major new headquarters in a converted garage in Milan. Knowledgeable mujahideen sources have praised Shaaban’s efforts in Milan, and noted that Islamic Cultural Institute was “the center of much activity and it gained much popularity amongst the local Muslims.”<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, L’Houssaine Kherchtou, a former Moroccan member of the Al-Qaida terrorist organization, testified during the federal trial of four Al-Qaida operatives in the U.S. that Shaaban used the Islamic Cultural Institute as a critical Arab-Afghan recruiting center for young Muslim extremists living in Europe. According to Kherchtou, Shaaban had personally helped arrange Pakistani visas for him and three other mujahideen recruits who then went on to an Al-Qaida military training camp in eastern Afghanistan.<sup>46</sup> French counterterrorism officials concluded that the ICI in Milan, under the lead of Shaaban, served an “essential role” as a command center for a variety of North African armed militant groups including Al-Gama`at al-Islamiyya, the Tunisian An-Nahdah, and the Algerian GIA.<sup>47</sup> After searching Anwar Shaaban’s office at the ICI, Italian counterterrorism police concurred that the Institute was “characterized by... a constant closeness to the activities of Egyptian terrorist organizations, especially those of [Al-Gama`at al-Islamiyya], in the area of strategic and operational choices... the recruiting of mujaheddin for the Yugoslavian territories.... the establishment of a European network for the connection among fundamentalist cells... [and] logistic and operational support to the armed cells active on Egyptian soil.”<sup>48</sup>

In the summer of 1992, Shaykh Anwar Shaaban helped lead the first quasi-official Arab-Afghan delegation to arrive in Bosnia, accompanied by a number of his Italian colleagues. As the fighters themselves have testified, “Sheik Anwar was not a textbook scholar: he was a scholar who practiced what he preached and fought oppression at every level, just like the companions and the early generations of Muslims... with books in his hands and military uniform on his body. Not only did he teach but he fought as well.” In one audiotape, mujahideen representatives attempt to unravel the mysterious life of Shaaban and note that “in the footsteps of Sheik Abdullah Azzam, Sheik Anwar Shaaban carried the responsibilities of the Mujahideen regiment in Bosnia... teaching,

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<sup>43</sup> Azzam Publications. “The Martyrs of Bosnia: Part I.” PAL/NTSC Format. Length: 150 minutes approximately. ©2000.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Azzam Publications. “Under the Shades of Swords.” Audiocassette sequel to “In the Hearts of Green Birds.” November 1997. Azzam Recordings; London, UK.

<sup>46</sup> *United States v. Usama bin Laden, et al.* S(7) 98 Cr. 1023 (LBS). United States District Court, Southern District of New York. Trial Transcript, February 21, 2001. Pages 1106-1107.

<sup>47</sup> Jean-Louis Bruguiere and Jean-Francois Ricard. “Requisitoire Definitif aux Fins de Non-Lieu. De Non-Lieu partiel. De Requalification. De Renvoi devant le Tribunal Correctionnel, de maintien sous Controle Judiciaire et de maintien en Detention.” Cour D’Appel de Paris; Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris. No. Parquet: P96 253 3901.2. Page 99.

<sup>48</sup> Italian Division of General Investigations and Special Operations (DIGOS) Anti-Terrorism Report. “Searches at the Islamic Cultural Center, Viale Jenner 50, Milano, 6/26/1995.” Dated September 15, 1997.

encouraging, and inspiring the fighters, laying the same foundation in Bosnia that Shaykh Abdullah Azzam laid in Afghanistan.”<sup>49</sup>

Shaaban shuttled back and forth to his headquarters in Milan, bringing with him to Bosnia a host of veteran fighters and new recruits. In a September 1994 fax sent to a wealthy jihad donor in Qatar, Shaaban explained that he required additional funds “to finance the purchase of camp equipment for the Bosnian mujaheddin in view of another winter spent in war in former Yugoslavia.” Shaaban continued in his letter, “I’m convinced that based on today’s facts, the Islamic projects in the European countries are a priority over all general Islamic projects, especially when based on what we have seen with regard to the possibility of establishing bases in these places in order to aid Muslims all over the world.”<sup>50</sup> Undoubtedly, Shaaban hoped to use the Bosnian war to as a means to create an unassailable garrison for North African militants in Europe. One document later confiscated in Italy seemed to endorse this strategy, explaining that “Hot Islamic questions such as Bosnia... raise the ardor of young Muslims and their desire to face the inevitable.”<sup>51</sup> Not surprisingly, many of those that Shaaban introduced to the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina became “the commanders and trainers, the cream of the Mujahideen.”<sup>52</sup>

During their subsequent investigation of Shaaban and the ICI, Italian counter-terrorism police turned up numerous pieces of evidence showing how involved Shaaban was in supporting jihad activity in nearby Bosnia. This included documents indicating that “paramilitary training activities” were “organized by the I.C.I. for those individuals who would fight on the Yugoslav territory.”<sup>53</sup> A second undated letter from Anwar Shaaban recovered by Italian investigators details a meeting the former had in Sarajevo “with an unidentified Islamic individual who was willing to host trained Muslim guys capable of training others to use Russian and eastern firearms in order to open the door of the Jihad against Orthodox Serbs in Yugoslavia.”<sup>54</sup> The Italians also found another handwritten sheet of paper in Arabic:

“I am sending you this film from the center of Bosnia-Herzegovina, from the land of war and the Jihad. In it there is what I succeeded in sending you, and I am very happy... In the little remembrance book there are a few pages glued together, which you must open because there are inside sections of small films that you will develop and watch... I placed the small films inside the remembrance book, between the pages, but only between some pages, not all of them... so that the Croats may not find them and cause

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<sup>49</sup> Azzam Publications. “Under the Shades of Swords.” Audiocassette sequel to “In the Hearts of Green Birds.” November 1997. Azzam Recordings; London, UK.

<sup>50</sup> Italian Division of General Investigations and Special Operations (DIGOS) Anti-Terrorism Report. “Searches at the Islamic Cultural Center, Viale Jenner 50, Milano, 6/26/1995.”

<sup>51</sup> Italian Division of General Investigations and Special Operations (DIGOS) Anti-Terrorism Report.

“Searches at the Islamic Cultural Center, Viale Jenner 50, Milano, 6/26/1995.” Dated September 15, 1997. See: Shaaban, Anwar. “Conversations Among Friends: Where is the Damage?” Sawt al-Haqq Magazine. No. 66; June 1995.

<sup>52</sup> Azzam Publications. “Under the Shades of Swords.” Audiocassette sequel to “In the Hearts of Green Birds.” November 1997. Azzam Recordings; London, UK.

<sup>53</sup> Italian Division of General Investigations and Special Operations (DIGOS) Anti-Terrorism Report.

“Searches at the Islamic Cultural Center, Viale Jenner 50, Milano, 6/26/1995.” Dated September 15, 1997.

<sup>54</sup> Italian Division of General Investigations and Special Operations (DIGOS) Anti-Terrorism Report.

“Searches at the Islamic Cultural Center, Viale Jenner 50, Milano, 6/26/1995.” Dated September 15, 1997.

problems for us, because they can even decapitate; when the letter arrives, develop and number them.”<sup>55</sup>

A subsequent fax received in April 1995 confirmed that the ICI in Milan had been officially assigned the task of distributing news bulletins and conducting other “propaganda activity” on behalf of the Bosnian El-Mudzahidin Unit.<sup>56</sup>

Yet, almost immediately, Shaaban’s mission in the Balkans strayed from its purported goal of defending innocent Bosnian Muslims. In 1993, U.S. diplomats and intelligence officials began to privately express concerns that Egyptian Islamic extremists were targeting the U.S. embassy in Albania for a potential terrorist attack. According to the CIA, “Al-Gama’at members, including... Anwar Shaban... were involved in the 1993 surveillance of the U.S. embassy in Tirana.”<sup>57</sup> The surveillance was confirmed when a suspected militant was observed driving “repeatedly around the embassy.”<sup>58</sup> Separately, the CIA gathered telephone intercepts that included an “apparent order from overseas instructing a Muslim-charity worker to case the embassy.”<sup>59</sup> No successful attack was ever carried out, likely as a result of close cooperation between the CIA and Albanian security officials.

Shaaban’s influence also extended to a number of other Italian fundamentalist clerics, such as Mohamed Ben Brahim Saidani, a volunteer fighter in Bosnia and Imam of a mosque on Massarenti Street in Bologna, Italy. Saidani had been one of a number of participants in a guerilla training course held in Afghanistan in 1993. Upon his return to Italy, he quickly convinced 30 of his local followers to enlist in the foreign mujahideen brigade active in Bosnia. He founded a front company in Italy known as Piccola Societa’ Cooperativa Eurocoop that provided seemingly legitimate work authorization permits to jihadi volunteers and veterans, allowing them to travel without hindrance to different parts of the world, including Bosnia.<sup>60</sup> In witness testimony in the trial of conspirators convicted of involvement in the 1998 East Africa embassy bombings, Al-Qaida lieutenant Jamal al-Fadl discussed his trip to Zagreb in mid-1992, specifically how he had been instructed to meet with Mohamed Saidani so he could get “information about what’s going on in Bosnia” and bring this intelligence back directly to Usama Bin Laden.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Italian Division of General Investigations and Special Operations (DIGOS) Anti-Terrorism Report. “Searches at the Islamic Cultural Center, Viale Jenner 50, Milano, 6/26/1995.” Dated September 15, 1997.

<sup>56</sup> Italian Division of General Investigations and Special Operations (DIGOS) Anti-Terrorism Report. “Searches at the Islamic Cultural Center, Viale Jenner 50, Milano, 6/26/1995.” Dated September 15, 1997.

<sup>57</sup> January 1996 CIA Report on “International Islamic NGOs” and links to terrorism. Page 2. *See also:* Affidavit by Senior Special Agent David Kane (Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Department of Homeland Security). *United States of America v. Soliman S. Biheiri*. United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, Alexandria Division. Case #: 03-365-A. August 14, 2003. Page 2.

<sup>58</sup> Higgins, Andrew and Christopher Cooper. “CIA-backed team used brutal means to break up terrorist cell in Albania.” *The Wall Street Journal*. November 20, 2001.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Jean-Louis Bruguiere and Jean-Francois Ricard. “*Requisitoire Definitif aux Fins de Non-Lieu. De Non-Lieu partiel. De Requalification. De Renvoi devant le Tribunal Correctionnel, de maintien sous Controle Judiciaire et de maintien en Detention.*” Cour D’Appel de Paris; Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris. No. Parquet: P96 253 3901.2. Page 97.

<sup>61</sup> *United States v. Usama bin Laden, et al.* S(7) 98 Cr. 1023 (LBS). United States District Court, Southern District of New York. Trial Transcript, February 20, 2001. Page 997.

Italian law enforcement and intelligence officials grew concerned after intercepting a letter from a fundamentalist militant imprisoned in southern Italy in July 1993 discussing potential terror attacks on U.S. and French targets in the region. The seized letter appears to be one penned by Mondher Ben Mohsen Baazaoui (a.k.a. “Hamza the Tunisian”), an activist in the An-Nahdah movement and, according to an Italian police statement, “a fighter for a mujahideen unit during the ethnic conflict in Bosnia... believed to be in the front row of fundamentalist, Islamic terrorist networks.”<sup>62</sup> Baazaoui wrote to Mohamed Saidani (the Imam in Bologna who was on close terms with both Anwar Shaaban and Usama Bin Laden) to tell him that if his prison hunger strike did not secure his immediate release, Baazaoui would commit a “homicide operation... [to] die gloriously.”<sup>63</sup> He then pleaded with Saidani to avenge his death with a spectacular eulogy of terror: “All I can suggest to you is the French: leave not a child nor an adult [alive]. Work for them, they are very numerous in Italy, especially in the Tourist areas. Do what you will to them using armed robbery and murder. The important thing is that you succeed at sparking the flames that burn inside me against them, and this is to be a promise between you and me.”<sup>64</sup>

In November 1994, Italian authorities were even more alarmed when they learned of a new assassination plot organized by elements of the Egyptian terrorist groups Al-Jihad and Al-Gama`at Al-Islamiyya targeting Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak during a three-day diplomatic trip to Rome.<sup>65</sup> As a result, the Italian police stepped up their efforts—particularly, their focus on Shaaban’s Islamic Cultural Institute. On June 26, 1995, in a mission codenamed “Operation Sphinx,” Italian police arrested 11 suspected members of Al-Gama`at Al-Islamiyya (including 10 Egyptians and 1 Palestinian) and carried out formal searches of 72 addresses across northern Italy, including Milan. The detained terrorists were charged with criminal conspiracy, robbery, extortion, falsifying documents, and illegal possession of firearms.<sup>66</sup>

One of those that Italian counterterrorism authorities were particularly seeking to arrest, Shaykh Anwar Shaaban himself, was nowhere to be found. Evidently, having been tipped off to the intentions of the Italian government, Shaaban had escaped and found asylum at his mujahideen military stronghold in central Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>67</sup> Shaaban’s Bosnian exodus marked a critical period of development for the Arab-Afghan mujahideen in southern Europe. Despite all the Arab-Afghan propaganda decrying the

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<sup>62</sup> Jean-Louis Bruguiere and Jean-Francois Ricard. “*Requisitoire Definitif aux Fins de Non-Lieu. De Non-Lieu partiel. De Requalification. De Renvoi devant le Tribunal Correctionnel, de maintien sous Controle Judiciaire et de maintien en Detention.*” Cour D’Appel de Paris; Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris. No. Parquet: P96 253 3901.2. Page 94. See also: “Italian police arrest alleged Tunisian militant.” Reuters. September 29, 2002.

<sup>63</sup> Jean-Louis Bruguiere and Jean-Francois Ricard. “*Requisitoire Definitif aux Fins de Non-Lieu. De Non-Lieu partiel. De Requalification. De Renvoi devant le Tribunal Correctionnel, de maintien sous Controle Judiciaire et de maintien en Detention.*” Cour D’Appel de Paris; Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris. No. Parquet: P96 253 3901.2. Page 96.

<sup>64</sup> Jean-Louis Bruguiere and Jean-Francois Ricard. “*Requisitoire Definitif aux Fins de Non-Lieu. De Non-Lieu partiel. De Requalification. De Renvoi devant le Tribunal Correctionnel, de maintien sous Controle Judiciaire et de maintien en Detention.*” Cour D’Appel de Paris; Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris. No. Parquet: P96 253 3901.2. Page 96.

<sup>65</sup> Rodan, Steve. “Mubarak on a powder keg.” The Jerusalem Post. June 30, 1995. Page 11.

<sup>66</sup> Willan, Philip. “Italians arrest suspected Islamic militants.” United Press International. June 26, 1995.

<sup>67</sup> Willan, Philip. “Italians arrest suspected Islamic militants.” United Press International. June 26, 1995.

suffering of the Bosnian Muslims—just as in Afghanistan—their participation in the war was ultimately being channeled toward an alternate purpose. By 1995, central Bosnia was more than a mere mujahideen frontline. Instead, thanks to the work of Shaaban and others, it had become a strategic foothold for Usama Bin Laden and his fanatical North African allies to help infiltrate Western Europe.

With Bosnian war hostilities drawing to a close in September 1995, Anwar Shaaban and his Italian-based Al-Gama`at al-Islamiyya cohorts were free to turn their attention and resources to issues of “more critical” importance. In late September, one of the most important Al-Gama`at al-Islamiyya leaders hiding in Europe—Abu Talal al-Qasimy (a.k.a. Talaat Fouad Qassem)—was captured by Croat HVO forces as he attempted to cross through Croatian territory into Bosnia-Herzegovina. Within days, the Croats quietly rendered al-Qasimy through U.S. custody into the hands of Egyptian authorities. At the time, a government official in Cairo noted, “[Al-Qasimy’s] arrest proves what we have always said, which is that these terror groups are operating on a worldwide scale, using places like Afghanistan and Bosnia to form their fighters who come back to the Middle East... European countries like Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, England and others, which give sanctuary to these terrorists, should now understand it will come back to haunt them where they live.”<sup>68</sup>

The first real Arab-Afghan response to Abu Talal al-Qasimy’s arrest came on October 20, 1995, when a massive explosion shook the quiet Croatian port town of Rijeka.<sup>69</sup> At 11:22am, a suicide bomber detonated 70 kilograms of TNT hidden in a FIAT Mirafiori parked outside the Primorje-Gorani county police headquarters.<sup>70</sup> The mysterious suicide-bomber was killed, two bystanders were seriously wounded, and 27 other people received lighter injuries. The bomb was powerful enough to destroy the police headquarters and damage several nearby buildings, including a Zagreb Bank branch and a primary school.<sup>71</sup> In the blast debris, Croatian police found fragments a Canadian passport belonging to the suicide bomber—who had previously been investigated by Italian counterterrorism officials for his connections to the Islamic Cultural Institute in Milan controlled by Anwar Shaaban.<sup>72</sup> The CIA later confirmed that the bomber was “a member of Al-Gama`at [al-Islamiyya].”<sup>73</sup>

A day later, Western news agencies in Cairo received an anonymous faxed communiqué allegedly from Al-Gama`at representatives, claiming responsibility for the Rijeka bombing in order “to prove that the case of Sheik Talaat Fouad Qassem... will not pass but will bring cascades of blood bleeding from Croatian interests inside and

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<sup>68</sup> Ibrahim, Youssef, M. “Muslim militant leader arrested on way to Bosnia, Egypt reports.” The Houston Chronicle. September 24, 1995. Sec. A; Page 31.

<sup>69</sup> Croatian Radio. Broadcast in Serbo-Croat language in Zagreb. October 20, 1995; 1600 GMT.

<sup>70</sup> Gatti, Fabrizio. “1995: From Milan a car bomb leaves for Fiume.” Corriere della Sera (Italy). November 11, 2001.

<sup>71</sup> Croatian Radio. Broadcast in Serbo-Croat language in Zagreb. October 20, 1995; 1600 GMT.

<sup>72</sup> Gatti, Fabrizio. “1995: From Milan a car bomb leaves for Fiume.” Corriere della Sera (Italy). November 11, 2001.

<sup>73</sup> January 1996 CIA Report on “International Islamic NGOs” and links to terrorism. *Page 13*. See also: Affidavit by Senior Special Agent David Kane (Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Department of Homeland Security). United States of America v. Soliman S. Biheiri. United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, Alexandria Division. Case #: 03-365-A. August 14, 2003. *Page 2*.

outside... You Croats will be mistaken if you think that this matter will go peacefully.”<sup>74</sup> In their statement, Al-Gama`at representatives firmly demanded that the Croatian government “release Sheikh Qassimi and apologize formally through the media... Close the gates of hell which you have opened upon yourselves ... otherwise you will be starting a war the end of which only Allah (God) knows.”<sup>75</sup> U.S. intelligence indicated that Anwar Shaaban was personally responsible for overseeing the suicide bombing operation in Rijeka. The terror attack was meant to be a mere prelude to a new strategy employed by the mujahideen. As the long Balkan war began winding down, Shaaban “and other mujahedin leaders had begun planning to attack NATO forces which would be sent to Bosnia.”<sup>76</sup> French investigators believed that the October terror attack confirmed that the military leadership of the El-Mudzahedin Unit in Bosnia-Herzegovina “was closely related to [Al-Gama`at al-Islamiyya], both ideologically and in practice.”<sup>77</sup>

For several years afterwards, Croatian authorities sought other suspects believed responsible for arranging the Rijeka bombing. Witnesses, including a police guard in the headquarters parking lot, described a suspicious Mercedes driven by an Arab man that sped away from the scene just before the blast. After looking at mugshots, those witnesses were able to positively identify a wanted 36-year old Egyptian militant loyal to Al-Gama`at Al-Islamiyya named Hassan al-Sharif Mahmud Saad. Saad, who had lived in Cologno Monzese (a suburb of Milan), was a prominent figure at the Islamic Cultural Institute. He even sat on the board of trustees of Anwar Shaaban’s own Italian charitable organization “Il Paradiso.” In Italy, Saad was known to own a FIAT 131 Mirafiori with Bergamo plates, the very same vehicle later used in the Rijeka attack. As early as 1993, he was traveling back and forth between Bosnia and Italy. But everyone at the ICI mosque was aware that something was different in June 1995, when Hassan Saad packed his family and belongings in the FIAT and left permanently for Bosnia-Herzegovina. His friends at the ICI said he had gone away to join the El-Mudzahedin Unit in Zenica led by Anwar Shaaban.<sup>78</sup>

Immediately following the premature truck bomb explosion outside foreign mujahideen headquarters in Zenica in December 1995, Shaaban finally met his own violent end in Bosnia-Herzegovina. During a suspicious clash with Croat HVO forces, Shaaban and four of his closest mujahideen advisors were ritually gunned down, seemingly harkening the end of a major era in for the Arab-Afghans in Europe. But the influential network Shaaban was responsible for establishing in Italy and Bosnia-Herzegovina continued to survive and prosper long after his death. The credit for this

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<sup>74</sup> “Egyptian Radical Group Claims Bombing in Croatia.” The Associated Press. October 21, 1995.

<sup>75</sup> “Jamaa claims Croatia bombing, Mubarak cancels New York trip.” Deutsche Presse-Agentur. October 21, 1995.

<sup>76</sup> January 1996 CIA Report on “International Islamic NGOs” and links to terrorism. *Page 13*. See also: Affidavit by Senior Special Agent David Kane (Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Department of Homeland Security). United States of America v. Soliman S. Biheiri. United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, Alexandria Division. Case #: 03-365-A. August 14, 2003. *Page 2*.

<sup>77</sup> Jean-Louis Bruguiere and Jean-Francois Ricard. “*Requisitoire Definitif aux Fins de Non-Lieu. De Non-Lieu partiel. De Requalification. De Renvoi devant le Tribunal Correctionnel, de maintien sous Controle Judiciaire et de maintien en Detention.*” Cour D’Appel de Paris; Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris. No. Parquet: P96 253 3901.2. *Page 160*.

<sup>78</sup> Gatti, Fabrizio. “1995: From Milan a car bomb leaves for Fiume.” Corriere della Sera (Italy). November 11, 2001.

unexpected resurgence largely goes to top Algerian mujahideen commander Abu el-Ma`ali (a.k.a. Abdelkader Mokhtari) and his reputed lieutenant Fateh Kamel (a.k.a. “Mustapha the Terrorist”). Kamel, who had lived in Canada since 1988, was originally from Algeria and spent a good part of his life in a quarter of the capital Algiers.<sup>79</sup> His slick, polished exterior boasted a professionalism that was matched only by his pure ruthlessness. First trained in Afghanistan in 1991, Kamel came to the attention of Italian authorities while encouraging attendees at Anwar Shaaban’s Islamic Cultural Institute in Milan to join the mujahideen in Bosnia. By 1995, according to French intelligence, the El-Mudzahedin Unit in Bosnia was headed politically by Anwar Shaaban, seconded militarily by Abu el-Ma`ali, and in the third position was Fateh Kamel, in charge of the brigade’s “logistical matters” (a role that consisted mostly of coordinating the transfer of weapons, new recruits, and false documents to and from the Arab headquarters in Zenica).<sup>80</sup> Investigators reviewing the phone records of lines serving the ICI between 1994 and 1995 found evidence of regular contacts between the triumvirate of Abu el-Ma`ali, Anwar Shaaban, and Fateh Kamel.<sup>81</sup>

French intelligence determined that Kamel and his associates had “multiple links” with “diverse Islamic terrorist organizations around the world, and particularly in Bosnia, in Pakistan, in Germany, and in London.”<sup>82</sup> Between 1994 and 1997, Fateh Kamel moved constantly between (at least) Milan, Montreal, Paris, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Zagreb, Bosnia, Copenhagen, Austria, Slovenia, Freiburg (Germany), Morocco, Ancone (Italy), Istanbul, Belgium, and Amsterdam.<sup>83</sup> Kamel was recorded on one occasion by Italian intelligence, discussing potential terror attacks and bragging to his henchmen, “I do not fear death... because the jihad is the jihad, and to kill is easy for me.”<sup>84</sup> He hated the very society he lived in and cynically mocked Western attitudes towards Muslims: “And you know, the people [here] imagine a Muslim on the back of a camel, four wives behind

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<sup>79</sup> Jean-Louis Bruguiere and Jean-Francois Ricard. *“Requisitoire Definitif aux Fins de Non-Lieu. De Non-Lieu partiel. De Requalification. De Renvoi devant le Tribunal Correctionnel, de maintien sous Controle Judiciare et de maintien en Detention.”* Cour D’Appel de Paris; Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris. No. Parquet: P96 253 3901.2. Page 7.

<sup>80</sup> Jean-Louis Bruguiere and Jean-Francois Ricard. *“Requisitoire Definitif aux Fins de Non-Lieu. De Non-Lieu partiel. De Requalification. De Renvoi devant le Tribunal Correctionnel, de maintien sous Controle Judiciare et de maintien en Detention.”* Cour D’Appel de Paris; Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris. No. Parquet: P96 253 3901.2. Page 99.

<sup>81</sup> Jean-Louis Bruguiere and Jean-Francois Ricard. *“Requisitoire Definitif aux Fins de Non-Lieu. De Non-Lieu partiel. De Requalification. De Renvoi devant le Tribunal Correctionnel, de maintien sous Controle Judiciare et de maintien en Detention.”* Cour D’Appel de Paris; Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris. No. Parquet: P96 253 3901.2. Page 100.

<sup>82</sup> Jean-Louis Bruguiere and Jean-Francois Ricard. *“Requisitoire Definitif aux Fins de Non-Lieu. De Non-Lieu partiel. De Requalification. De Renvoi devant le Tribunal Correctionnel, de maintien sous Controle Judiciare et de maintien en Detention.”* Cour D’Appel de Paris; Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris. No. Parquet: P96 253 3901.2. Page 126.

<sup>83</sup> Jean-Louis Bruguiere and Jean-Francois Ricard. *“Requisitoire Definitif aux Fins de Non-Lieu. De Non-Lieu partiel. De Requalification. De Renvoi devant le Tribunal Correctionnel, de maintien sous Controle Judiciare et de maintien en Detention.”* Cour D’Appel de Paris; Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris. No. Parquet: P96 253 3901.2. Page 148.

<sup>84</sup> Pyes, Craig and Josh Meyer et al. “Bosnia Seen as Hospitable Base and Sanctuary for Terrorists.” *The Los Angeles Times*. October 7, 2001. Page A1.

him and the bombs that explode... terrorists, terrorists, terrorists.”<sup>85</sup> In another communications intercept in 1996, just after the end of the Bosnian war, Kamel confided in his terrorist partners, “I prefer to die than go to jail. I almost lost my wife. I am 36 years old with a son four and a half months old. My wife is playing with him and me, I am here. I am almost a soldier.”<sup>86</sup>

The evidence in Kamel’s addressbook alone seems to confirm his role as a key liaison and coordinator between assorted European sleeper cell terrorist networks and senior Al-Qaida commanders based in Bosnia and Afghanistan. Among other numbers, Fateh Kamel had several contacts for Akacha Laidi (a.k.a. Abderrahmane Laidi, Abou Amina), a senior GIA member in the UK. One of the numbers with Akacha’s name actually reached Djamel Guesmia, a terrorist widely known to be working with both the GIA and its successor group, the Algerian Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat (GSPC).<sup>87</sup> Fateh Kamel drew particularly close to loose network of units of North African immigrants and European converts to Islam who had come to aid the mujahideen during the early stages of the Bosnian war. For all intensive purposes, he became their handler, giving assistance and issuing orders on behalf of Anwar Shaaban and Abu el-Ma`ali.

In 1996, following the sudden death of Shaaban in central Bosnia, Kamel suddenly began activating “Bosniak” terror units implanted in Europe, instructing them to prepare for new jihad operations to take place inside France and Italy. Between August 6-10, 1996, Kamel stayed at the Milan apartment of two GIA supporters, including Rachid Fettar, who had close ties to the masterminds of the 1995 Paris metro bombing spree. Fettar was well-placed in the GIA leadership hierarchy, considered the “heir” to the European extremist network established by Safé Bourada, the deputy-in-command of the Algerian terror cell deemed responsible for the metro bombings.<sup>88</sup> Thus, Kamel’s visit to Fettar and his companion Youcef Tanout came with a definite purpose: to direct a terror cell in the construction and deployment of more crude gas-canister bombs like those used during the Paris metro campaign.

Kamel respected Rachid Fettar as an equal and complained to him that Tanout and the others were too reluctant to produce the explosives without elaborate and time-consuming covert procedures. “I insisted as much as I could, but there was nothing I could do. In France, we can make [the bombs], even if their destination is France. You know very well that in France, I have no problems; I return and I leave when I want,

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<sup>85</sup> Jean-Louis Bruguiere and Jean-Francois Ricard. “*Requisitoire Definitif aux Fins de Non-Lieu. De Non-Lieu partiel. De Requalification. De Renvoi devant le Tribunal Correctionnel, de maintien sous Controle Judiciare et de maintien en Detention.*” Cour D’Appel de Paris; Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris. No. Parquet: P96 253 3901.2. Page 104.

<sup>86</sup> “Mustapha the Terrorist.” *National Post* (Canada). February 24, 2001.

<sup>87</sup> Jean-Louis Bruguiere and Jean-Francois Ricard. “*Requisitoire Definitif aux Fins de Non-Lieu. De Non-Lieu partiel. De Requalification. De Renvoi devant le Tribunal Correctionnel, de maintien sous Controle Judiciare et de maintien en Detention.*” Cour D’Appel de Paris; Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris. No. Parquet: P96 253 3901.2. Page 146.

<sup>88</sup> “Bombing trial opens in Paris.” *CNN Online*. November 24, 1997. *See also:* Jean-Louis Bruguiere and Jean-Francois Ricard. “*Requisitoire Definitif aux Fins de Non-Lieu. De Non-Lieu partiel. De Requalification. De Renvoi devant le Tribunal Correctionnel, de maintien sous Controle Judiciare et de maintien en Detention.*” Cour D’Appel de Paris; Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris. No. Parquet: P96 253 3901.2. Page 105.

clandestinely.”<sup>89</sup> In a discussion with the more amateurish Youcef Tanout, Kamel coldly asked, “What are you afraid of? That everything will explode in your house? Tell me at least if Mahmoud has gotten the gas canister.” Tanout meekly related to Kamel how one of his fellow cell members had sought the shelter and anonymity of a nearby deep forest in order to fabricate the required bombs. He admitted to Kamel, “I feel no shame in telling you that I am extremely afraid.”<sup>90</sup> Evidently, Tanout’s hesitant concerns were well founded; on November 7, 1996, both himself and Fettar were arrested and their Milan apartment was searched by experienced Italian counterterrorism investigators. They discovered two 400-gram gas canisters, five remote-control transmitters, 38 metallic cylinders, and other bomb-making materials.<sup>91</sup>

Though Fateh Kamel’s gas canister terror plot in Milan never reached fruition, it provided ominous clues as to what was to develop across Western Europe in the following decade. In many ways, the early Italian-based mujahideen sleeper cells under the lead of Kamel, Anwar Shaaban, and Abu el-Ma`ali were the direct prototype for contemporary European-based North African militant networks responsible for carrying out such operations as the March 2004 commuter train bombings in Madrid, Spain. Members of Fateh Kamel’s brotherhood of fighters continue to enter and leave the Balkans even today. When Kamel’s “right-hand-man” in Bosnia—Moroccan Karim Said Atmani—was released from a French prison cell in the spring of 2005, he immediately left on a flight to Sarajevo where he was greeted at the airport by a “known commander of the Bosnian mujahideen... tied to the international Islamic terrorist movement.”<sup>92</sup> After substantial pressure was brought to bear on local law enforcement authorities in BiH, Atmani was finally deported from the region in early 2006 and sent back home to North Africa.

## SCANDINAVIA AND NORTHERN EUROPE

Even as early as the Bosnian war, the unlikely region of Scandinavia had become an important tactical base for Islamic militant groups from the Middle East. Countries like Norway, Sweden, and Denmark were perceived as tolerant and willing to grant political asylum even to militant leaders on the run from law enforcement and intelligence agencies. In Scandinavia, these wanted men knew they could expect “the

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<sup>89</sup> Jean-Louis Bruguiere and Jean-Francois Ricard. *“Requisitoire Definitif aux Fins de Non-Lieu. De Non-Lieu partiel. De Requalification. De Renvoi devant le Tribunal Correctionnel, de maintien sous Controle Judiciare et de maintien en Detention.”* Cour D’Appel de Paris; Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris. No. Parquet: P96 253 3901.2. Page 103.

<sup>90</sup> Jean-Louis Bruguiere and Jean-Francois Ricard. *“Requisitoire Definitif aux Fins de Non-Lieu. De Non-Lieu partiel. De Requalification. De Renvoi devant le Tribunal Correctionnel, de maintien sous Controle Judiciare et de maintien en Detention.”* Cour D’Appel de Paris; Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris. No. Parquet: P96 253 3901.2. Page 105.

<sup>91</sup> Jean-Louis Bruguiere and Jean-Francois Ricard. *“Requisitoire Definitif aux Fins de Non-Lieu. De Non-Lieu partiel. De Requalification. De Renvoi devant le Tribunal Correctionnel, de maintien sous Controle Judiciare et de maintien en Detention.”* Cour D’Appel de Paris; Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris. No. Parquet: P96 253 3901.2. Page 105.

<sup>92</sup> Jean-Louis Bruguiere and Jean-Francois Ricard. *“Requisitoire Definitif aux Fins de Non-Lieu. De Non-Lieu partiel. De Requalification. De Renvoi devant le Tribunal Correctionnel, de maintien sous Controle Judiciare et de maintien en Detention.”* Cour D’Appel de Paris; Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris. No. Parquet: P96 253 3901.2. Page 109.

same freedom as [in] the US.”<sup>93</sup> A March 1995 magazine printed by supporters of Al-Gama`at al-Islamiyya noted that “influential guides” within the Egyptian jihadi movement had nonetheless been able to secure “political asylum in Norway” despite the reluctance of the Norwegian Embassy in Cairo to become involved in such proceedings.<sup>94</sup> Even the undisputed top leader of Al-Gama`at al-Islamiyya—Shaykh Omar Abdel Rahman (currently serving a life sentence in a maximum security U.S. prison)—boasted in interviews with mujahideen newsletters of his numerous trips to Europe, “passing through Britain, Denmark, Sweden, and many other countries.”<sup>95</sup>

Unbeknownst to most Danes, by 1993, the city of Copenhagen was perhaps the most important safe haven for Al-Gama`at al-Islamiyya in all of Europe. At the head of Al-Gama`at’s weighty delegation in Copenhagen was the legendary Shaykh Abu Talal al-Qasimy, among the first Muslim clerics involved in supporting the Bosnian jihad. Al-Qasimy was imprisoned several times by the Egyptian government both previous to and following the assassination of the late President Anwar Sadat. Shortly thereafter, he was able to use fake travel documents to escape Egypt and join the growing number of militant Muslim exiles fighting Soviet forces in Afghanistan. While there, al-Qasimy “made an appointment with Jihad in the path of Allah, and... embraced the rifle.”<sup>96</sup> During time spent in nearby Pakistan, Abu Talal al-Qasimy established Al-Gama`at’s official magazine, Al-Murabeton, and wrote most of the early issues.

In January 1993, under pressure from the U.S., the Pakistani government suddenly reversed its position on supporting the jihad in Afghanistan and ordered the closure of remaining Arab mujahideen offices in Pakistan—threatening official deportation to any illegal foreign fighters who attempted to remain in Pakistan. These displaced men faced a serious problem, because return to their countries of origin meant certain arrest, torture, and likely death. At the time, a Saudi spokesman for the Arab-Afghans in Jeddah explained in the media, “the Algerians cannot go to Algeria, the Syrians cannot go to Syria or the Iraqis to Iraq. Some will opt to go to Bosnia, the others will have to go into Afghanistan permanently.”<sup>97</sup>

According to Dr. Abdullah Azzam’s son Hudhaifa, Abu Talal al-Qasimy was forced to flee across the border into Afghanistan because he was “ordered by name to be captured and sent to Egypt by the Pakistani government.” But, “before they caught [him], [he]... got a visa to foreign countries.”<sup>98</sup> In fact, Al-Qasimy had found political asylum in Denmark, where he continued to spread his radical message at the foreign office of Al-Murabeton in Copenhagen.<sup>99</sup> One of the other four editors working in Copenhagen was reportedly Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, the leader of the Egyptian Islamic

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<sup>93</sup> Interview of Ahmed Zaidan by Steven Emerson and Khalid Duran. October 25, 1993.

<sup>94</sup> Italian Division of General Investigations and Special Operations (DIGOS) Anti-Terrorism Report. “Searches at the Islamic Cultural Center, Viale Jenner 50, Milano, 6/26/1995.”

<sup>95</sup> “Dr. Omar Abdul Rahman to Nida`ul Islam: ‘Muslims Should Continue to Call to Allah and Struggle Relentlessly For His Sake.’” Nida`ul-Islam. Issue No. 16; December 1996/January 1997. <http://www.islam.org.au/articles/16/dromar.htm>.

<sup>96</sup> Sheikh Abu Ithar. “Sheikh Abu Talal Al-Qasimy, Infatuated With the Pen and the Spear.” Al-Nida`ul Islam. Issue 21; December-January 1997-1998. <http://www.islam.org.au>.

<sup>97</sup> Evans, Kathy. “Pakistan clamps down on Afghan Mojahedin and Orders Expulsion of Arab Jihad Supporters.” The Guardian (London). January 7, 1993. Page 7.

<sup>98</sup> Interview of Hudhaifa Azzam by Steven Emerson and Khalid Duran. October 21, 1993.

<sup>99</sup> Sheikh Abu Ithar. “Sheikh Abu Talal Al-Qasimy, Infatuated With the Pen and the Spear.” Al-Nida`ul Islam. Issue 21; December-January 1997-1998. <http://www.islam.org.au>.

Jihad movement and second-in-command of Usama Bin Laden's Al-Qaida.<sup>100</sup> Al-Qasimy was also a close friend of the Amir of the Bosnian mujahideen, Anwar Shaaban, and took an aggressive, committed, and hands-on role in the Bosnian jihad.

On April 24, 1993, Abu Talal al-Qasimy convened in Copenhagen arguably one of the most important meetings of pan-Islamic militant leaders ever to take place inside of Europe. The other participants included Shaykh Anwar Shaaban from Milan and Imam Shawki Mohammed (a.k.a. Mahmoud Abdel al-Mohamed), the firebrand cleric at the Al-Sahaba mosque in Vienna—considered by Italian intelligence at the time to be “a most important representative of Sunni radicalism in Europe” who was fixated on “the situation of the mujahiddin in the former Yugoslavia.”<sup>101</sup> Abu Talal hoped that this “meeting of minds” would serve as the impetus for the creation of a “Shura Council of the European Union”—a coalition of like-minded Middle Eastern extremist groups with a common presence and interest in Western Europe. The “Shura Council” was to be developed as an autonomous command organism capable of “coordinating and making decisions” without consulting Al-Gama`at al-Islamiyya or Al-Jihad leaders located far off in Egypt or Afghanistan. One of the main reasons for establishing a unified leadership nucleus was to fully mobilize shared resources in Europe to support nearby ongoing jihad operations in North Africa and Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>102</sup> A note from the diary of Anwar Shaaban written just days before meeting Abu Talal in Copenhagen cites the collective importance of providing assistance “to the Algerian, Tunisian, Senegalese, and Bosnian brothers.”<sup>103</sup>

Like Shaaban in Milan, Abu Talal al-Qasimy used his position of prominence while in Copenhagen to establish a circle of like-minded disciples, such as Palestinian Muslim cleric Ahmed Abu Laban (a.k.a. Abu Abdullah al-Lubnani) who arrived in Denmark in 1993. Though he speaks little Danish, Abu Laban has gradually established a persona for himself as the de-facto representative of the minority Muslim community in Denmark, appearing in local media reports and in meetings with government officials. An August 2005 article in the respected Washington Post even referred to Abu Laban as “one of Denmark’s most prominent imams.”<sup>104</sup>

Yet, despite his disarming exterior, Italian intelligence recorded visits by Abu Laban to Anwar Shaaban’s ICI in Milan “many times” for “conferences” and “community prayers.”<sup>105</sup> When news of the capture of Abu Talal al-Qasimy in Croatia filtered back to Denmark, Ahmed Abu Laban led an angry protest of 500 local Muslims in downtown Copenhagen outside the Croatian embassy. During the October 1995 protest (which included an appearance by al-Qasimy’s wife), demonstrators “raised their

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<sup>100</sup> “MSANEWS EGYPT UPDATE: June 27, 1995: Zawahiri, Kassim, Ben Laden and the gang .. and a brotherly gesture from Russia (fwd).” MSANews. June 27, 1995.

<sup>101</sup> Italian Division of General Investigations and Special Operations (DIGOS) Anti-Terrorism Report. “Searches at the Islamic Cultural Center, Viale Jenner 50, Milano, 6/26/1995.”

<sup>102</sup> Italian Division of General Investigations and Special Operations (DIGOS) Anti-Terrorism Report. “Searches at the Islamic Cultural Center, Viale Jenner 50, Milano, 6/26/1995.” Dated September 15, 1997.

<sup>103</sup> Italian Division of General Investigations and Special Operations (DIGOS) Anti-Terrorism Report. “Searches at the Islamic Cultural Center, Viale Jenner 50, Milano, 6/26/1995.”

<sup>104</sup> Sullivan, Kevin. “Denmark Tries to Act Against Terrorism as Mood in Europe Shifts.” Washington Post. August 29, 2005.

<sup>105</sup> Italian Division of General Investigations and Special Operations (DIGOS) Anti-Terrorism Report. “Searches at the Islamic Cultural Center, Viale Jenner 50, Milano, 6/26/1995.”

fists and shouted ‘Allahu Akhbar!’” In interviews with journalists, Abu Laban condemned Egypt, the United States, and Croatia as “the beneficiaries” of Abu Talal’s capture en route to Muslim forces in central Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>106</sup>

In early 2006, Ahmed Abu Laban re-appeared in international media after he helped provoke a new series of violent protests across the Muslim world in reaction to cartoons published in Scandinavian magazines that lampooned the Prophet Mohammed. The controversial cartoons failed to attract widespread interest among Muslims outside of Europe when they first printed in the Danish publication Jyllands-Posten during the fall of 2005. On November 18—in an interview with an Islamic press agency—Abu Laban announced that he would lead a delegation of Danish Muslims touring across the Middle East in a bid to draw pan-Islamic attention to the cartoons issue:

“A delegation will visit Cairo to meet with Arab League Secretary Amr Moussa and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Mohammad Sayyed Tantawi... The delegation will also visit Saudi Arabia and Qatar to meet with renowned Muslim scholar Sheikh Yussef Al-Qaradawi... We want to internationalize this issue so that the Danish government would realize that the cartoons were not only insulting to Muslims in Denmark but also to Muslims worldwide... It was decided to take such a step because it is wrong to turn a blind eye to the fact that some European countries discriminate against their Muslims on the grounds that they are not democratic and that they can not understand western culture.”<sup>107</sup>

During meetings with Muslim leaders, the delegation led by Abu Laban displayed the cartoons published by Jyllands-Posten—along with several other much more offensive items that had never actually been published in Scandinavia, including a cartoon depicting the Prophet having sexual intercourse with a dog. Other printed materials distributed in conjunction with Abu Laban’s campaign contained several other inflammatory and misleading rumors about the would-be “oppression” of Danish Muslims.<sup>108</sup> Within weeks, as a result of Abu Laban’s relentless incitement, the cartoon controversy spun out of control, resulting in angry mobs attacking Scandinavian diplomatic facilities in Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Pakistan, and the Palestinian territories.

Likewise, in neighboring Sweden, local cells of North African extremists who had initially organized themselves around the need to support to fellow jihadists in Afghanistan, North Africa, and the Balkans eventually developed into an elaborate regional network for terrorist recruitment, financing, and other illicit activities. According to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, the Stockholm office of a fraudulent Arab-Afghan charitable group known as “Human Concern International” (HCI) served as cover during the mid-1990s for a major covert Bosnian arms smuggling operation.<sup>109</sup> European Muslim newsletters advertised that due to a wealth of contributions from “the

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<sup>106</sup> Nasrawi, Salah. “Islamic Group Warns Americans Over Conviction of Sheik.” October 3, 1995.

<sup>107</sup> Qenawi, Ayman. “Danish Muslims ‘Internationalize’ Anti-Prophet Cartoons.” Islam Online. November 18, 2005. <http://islamonline.net/English/News/2005-11/18/article02.shtml>.

<sup>108</sup> Vidino, Lorenzo. “Creating Outrage.” National Review Online. February 6, 2006.

<sup>109</sup> January 1996 CIA Report on “International Islamic NGOs” and links to terrorism. *Page 13*. See also: Affidavit by Senior Special Agent David Kane (Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Department of Homeland Security). United States of America v. Soliman S. Biheiri. United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, Alexandria Division. Case #: 03-365-A. August 14, 2003. *Page 2*.

increasing Muslim population in Sweden,” the HCI branch in Stockholm had already successfully “equipped the Mujahideen in Afghanistan... The organization has succeeded in gathering more than half million Kroner last year, and it has been sent to the Mujahideen in Afghanistan. We are still helping the Arab youths to go to Afghanistan thus to contribute in the Jihad.”<sup>110</sup> The newspaper Le Monde confirmed that French national police suspected that HCI’s offices in Croatia and Sweden had acted as possible “staging points” for the GIA terrorist cell responsible for a July 25, 1995 bomb attack on the Paris metro system.<sup>111</sup> In the wake of the Paris bombing, Swedish authorities arrested and held a suspected GIA member Abdelkerim Deneche who was living in Stockholm at the time. Deneche had previously been fingered in French news media as a former employee of the HCI office in Zagreb.

Not to be outdone by their British colleagues, groups of young Algerian radicals from Sweden were also traveling directly to Bosnia seeking to physically join in the jihad against the “Christian Crusaders.” On September 19, 1993, one of these Swedish mujahideen recruits—“Abu Musab al-Swedani”—was killed in a battle with Croatian HVO forces near the central Bosnian town of Kruscica (near Vitez). According to friends, Abu Musab was born in Sweden to a Swedish mother and an Algerian father. He grew up in Scandinavia, but at age 20, suddenly developed an intense interest in studying Islam. He traveled to Saudi Arabia on a personal pilgrimage to learn Arabic and study the Islamic Shariah (religious law). During the nearly two years he spent in the Arabian Peninsula, he became a devout, fundamentalist who, upon his return to Sweden, began actively proselytizing his religion to others around him, including his family and relatives.<sup>112</sup>

The jihad in Afghanistan was making major international headlines during this period of the late 1980s, catching the avid attention of the pro-Islamist community in the West. Abu Musab “began to follow the news of the Muslims around the world and in particular the killing of the Muslims and their expulsion from their homes. He then understood that there is no dignity for the Muslims except through Jihad.” Abu Musab traveled to Peshawar, the “gateway to jihad,” with another young, radical Muslim who was already a member of the mujahideen. After some hesitation, he soon ventured forth into Afghanistan to seek combat training and to fight on behalf of the Islamic revolution. When the Afghan jihad ended, Abu Musab returned home to Sweden and married a Muslim woman. But, in 1992, he once again decided to make a jihadi pilgrimage—this time in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Abu Musab al-Swedani arrived in the region and joined up with the extremists based in the camp on Mt. Igman, under the lead of “General” Abu Ayman al-Masri.<sup>113</sup> After surviving several months of combat, Abu Musab was finally killed by a sniper’s bullet while in the midst of a chaotic mujahideen military offensive aimed at driving Croatian forces out of Muslim central Bosnia.<sup>114</sup> Al-Swedani’s

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<sup>110</sup> Al-Ghuraba Magazine. The Islamic Student Association in the U.K. and Ireland. P.O. Box 82; Leeds, UK L53 1DZ. No. 7; July 1989. Page 22.

<sup>111</sup> “Paris bomb suspect says has alibi in Sweden-report.” Reuters. August 23, 1995.

<sup>112</sup> Azzam Publications. “The Martyrs of Bosnia: Part I.” PAL/NTSC Format. Length: 150 minutes approximately. ©2000.

<sup>113</sup> Azzam Publications. “The Martyrs of Bosnia: Part I.” PAL/NTSC Format. Length: 150 minutes approximately. ©2000.

<sup>114</sup> Azzam Publications. “The Martyrs of Bosnia: Part I.” PAL/NTSC Format. Length: 150 minutes approximately. ©2000.

biography and photo were later publicized in the pioneering English-language jihad propaganda film “The Martyrs of Bosnia,” produced by accused London-based Al-Qaida operative Babar Ahmad.<sup>115</sup>

As a testament to what had been achieved, when the mujahideen military campaign in Bosnia-Herzegovina came to a sudden halt in September 1995, the predominantly Algerian arms smuggling and recruitment network based in Stockholm continued their ongoing activities virtually unabated. Jihad became a hot topic of discussion and a host of individuals surfaced in Scandinavia claiming to represent various Islamic extremist movements—including “Abu Fatima al-Tunisi” (a spokesman for a Stockholm-based Islamic group), and “Abu Daoud al-Maghrebi” (a Swedish-based activist working on behalf of the GIA in Northern Europe).<sup>116</sup> Even the Nusraat al-Ansaar newsletter—the semi-official publication of the GIA’s foreign delegation in Europe—offered a correspondence address at Box 3027 in Haninge, Sweden.<sup>117</sup>

Indeed, Swedish-based militants who were initially mobilized by ongoing jihadi conflicts in Bosnia and Afghanistan were also the first to establish an official Arab-language Internet homepage for the notorious Algerian GIA, with an entire sub-section dedicated just to “terrorism.”<sup>118</sup> These same individuals began to distribute Arabic-language jihad training manuals on the Internet, many of which have become classic documents in the online world of the mujahideen—including a lengthy book titled “The Restoration of the Publication of the Believers,” written by Egyptian Islamic Jihad leader Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri. When it was published on the Internet from Sweden, Zawahiri’s book still carried a watermark on the cover from 1996 identifying it as the property of “Muslimska Forsamlingen i Brandbergen, Jungfrugaten 413 N.B.” in the town of Haninge.<sup>119</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

To some degree, all major conflicts in the Islamic world have a bearing on Muslim social and political attitudes in Europe. Yet, the proximity of Bosnia-Herzegovina to Europe and the underlying nature of the conflict in the Balkans (pitting an embattled and forgotten Muslim minority against two larger Christian “crusader” forces) caused an infusion of European youth that no such conflict had previously seen. Bosnia became a rallying cry and the impetus for disparate groups of Islamic extremists spread across Western Europe to come together in common cause. It was a mobilization drive that simply never stopped when the Dayton Accords were signed and the Bosnian war ended.

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<sup>115</sup> Azzam Publications. “The Martyrs of Bosnia: Part I.” PAL/NTSC Format. Length: 150 minutes approximately. ©2000.

<sup>116</sup> “Algeria’s GIA warns of impostors operating in its name in Europe.” *Mideast Mirror*. Vol. 9, No. 51. March 15, 1995.

<sup>117</sup> Mirak-Weissbach, Muriel. “The case of the GIA: Afghansi out of theater.” *Executive Intelligence Review*. October 13, 1995.

<sup>118</sup> <http://www.zyworld.com/gia/gia.htm>. July 2001. See also: Holmstrom, Mj. Conny.

“Terroristorganisationer pa Internet, en mojlighet eller realitet?” Forsvarshogskolan C-uppsats. June 19, 2001. Page 70.

[http://www.annalindhbiblioteket.se/publikationer/uppsatser/2001/chp9901/holmstrom\\_1064.pdf](http://www.annalindhbiblioteket.se/publikationer/uppsatser/2001/chp9901/holmstrom_1064.pdf).

<sup>119</sup> <http://www.geocities.com/doktorayman/ayman.zip>. December 2004.

The recent discovery of a transnational terrorist network anchored in Sarajevo—and with branches in Sweden, Denmark, and the United Kingdom—is further evidence of the extent to which the jihad in Bosnia still influences Western European mujahideen networks. Last fall, Bosnian authorities announced a series of arrests in connection with a security sweep known as Operation Mazhar. The men taken into custody had purchased explosives and allegedly planned to carry out suicide attacks against Western targets across Europe. The leader of the cell, Swedish national Mirsad Bektasevic (a.k.a. “Maximus”) was initially based in Sweden and then traveled on to Bosnia “to plan an attack aimed at forcing Bosnia or another government to withdraw forces from Iraq and Afghanistan.”<sup>120</sup>

In a videotape recovered by Bosnian police, masked militants were shown building explosives while another individual—allegedly Bektasevic himself—explained to the camera, “This weapon will be used against Europe, against those whose forces are in Iraq and Afghanistan... These two brothers ... have given their lives to God to help their brothers and sisters. We are here and we are planning and we have got everything ready.” Mobile phone records also showed that Bektasevic was communicating with other known extremists based in Denmark and the United Kingdom.<sup>121</sup> He was also believed to be running a recruitment operation sending young European jihadi recruits on to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, at least one of the suspects arrested in Bosnia-Herzegovina in connection with the Bektasevic network was the former accountant of a financial front company run by veterans of the El-Mudzahedin Unit in Sarajevo and Zenica.

Thus, the brotherhood of radical Muslims forged as a result of the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina continues to present a formidable challenge for European intelligence and law enforcement. In the future, it is crucial for Western security agencies to pool information on the identities of any foreign nationals known to have joined mujahideen forces in the Balkans—just as they have done for Afghanistan and Iraq. Moreover, European nations must provide further resources and investigative support to Bosnian Muslim authorities in their drive to uproot remaining pockets of foreign extremists. Without substantial international assistance, it is doubtful that the Bosnians can alone shoulder this weighty and complex security responsibility.

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<sup>120</sup> “Bosnia says trio planned suicide attacks in Europe.” [Reuters](#). April 18, 2006.

<sup>121</sup> “Bosnia says trio planned suicide attacks in Europe.” [Reuters](#). April 18, 2006.

<sup>122</sup> Hosenball, Mark. “Target Washington?” [Newsweek](#). November 4, 2005.