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March 22, 2004 Attack on the Madrid Commuter Rail System

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

MARCH 11, 2004 ATTACK ON THE MADRID COMMUTER RAIL
SYSTEM

By

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ABSTRACT

On March 11, 2004 thirteen terrorists attacked the Madrid commuter rail system, killing 191 people and wounding 1,741 just three days before Spanish elections. The ruling Popular Party led by Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar blamed the attack on ETA, the Basque separatist group responsible for more than 800 deaths since its founding in 1959. The police investigation quickly concluded that Islamic extremists had perpetrated the terror attack. This conclusion was cemented a day before the election when a video containing a claim of responsibility from al Qaeda was released to the press. The speaker on the videotape stated that the attack was in response to Spanish participation in the Iraq war, a decision that was overwhelmingly unpopular among Spanish voters who turned out the next day at the polls and voted Aznar's Popular Party out of office. The Spanish Socialist Workers Party won and its candidate for Prime Minister, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero immediately announced his intention to pull Spanish troops out of Iraq. Many analysts and observers concluded that al Qaeda was behind the attack and that it had been timed to coincide with the Spanish election with the intention of unseating the Popular Party and forcing Spanish troops out of Iraq. Although the terrorists clearly aimed to bring about a Spanish troops withdraw from Iraq, to date no evidence has surfaced to suggest that al Qaeda's leadership was in anyway involved in the attack or that it was purposely timed to influence Spain's election.

INTRODUCTION

On March 11, 2004 thirteen terrorists attacked the Madrid commuter rail system by detonating ten backpack bombs, killing 191 people and wounding 1,741.¹ The attack was the largest in European history since WWII, with the exception of the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, and took place a mere three days before general elections in Spain. The ruling Popular Party led by Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar initially blamed the attack on ETA, the Basque separatist group responsible for more than 800 deaths since its founding in 1959. However, the investigation quickly led police to conclude that the bombings were the work of Islamic extremists.²

This conclusion was cemented a day before the election when a video was released, in which a man calling himself Abu Dujana al Afghani, the spokesman for al Qaeda in Europe claimed responsibility for the bombings and stated that they were retaliation against Spanish military participation in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The decision to commit troops to the Iraq war had been hugely unpopular with the Spanish public and the next day Spanish voters turned out in record numbers to vote Aznar's Popular Party out of office. The Spanish Socialist Workers Party won and its candidate for Prime Minister, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero immediately announced his intention to pull Spanish troops out of Iraq.³ Many analysts and observers concluded that al Qaeda was behind the attack and that it had been timed to coincide with the Spanish election with the intention of unseating the Popular Party and forcing Spanish troops out of Iraq. In this thesis I will examine the evidence related to the attack and assess the veracity of this conclusion.

¹ Al Goodman, "Madrid bombings: Indictments soon," *CNN*, 5 March 2006, accessed March 5, 2006 from <http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/europe/03/05/madrid.bombings/index.html>

² Lawrence Wright, "The Terror Web," *The New Yorker*, 26 July 2004, 1- 4, accessed August 21, 2005, from http://www.newyorker.com/printables/fact/040802fa_fact

³ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 1

THE ATTACK

Attack Timeline

On March 10, 2004 more than a dozen men gathered at a farmhouse in Chinchon, a town situated 45 kilometers southeast of Madrid. The men, all of whom were Arab and most of whom were Moroccan spent the afternoon assembling thirteen bombs. Each of the bombs contained 10.1 kilograms of Goma 2 Eco, a plastic explosive manufactured in Spain, a copper detonator and was surrounded by nails and screws, which would serve as shrapnel. The detonator of each bomb was connected to the explosive and also to a cell phone, whose alarm feature would be used to trigger the explosion. Each of the bombs was then placed in a blue, cloth duffel bag. That night, the men did not sleep. They stayed up praying and discussing their mission, which they had rehearsed several times. The next day, thirteen of them would carry out what they hoped would be the first of several attacks that would continue until they ran out of explosives.⁴ The thirteen men were: Anwar Asrih Rifaat, Daoud Ouhnane, Abdennabi Kounjaa, Allekema Lamari, Mohammed Haddad, Fouad El Morabit, Mohamed Oulad, Rashid Oulad, Said Berraj, and Jamal Zougman.

At 5:30 the next morning, Thursday, March 11, 2004, the men climbed into three cars and drove towards Alaca de Henares, a village just outside of the Spanish capital of Madrid. In the lead vehicle, a white Renault van, the men listened to the third Sura of the Quran, which contains “God’s instructions for upbraiding those who do not accept the prophecy of Muhammad.”⁵ “Say to the disbelievers, ‘You will be defeated and driven together into Hell, a foul resting place.’”⁶ The men arrived at Alaca de Henares about an hour later and walked toward the town’s train station. Once there, they made their way towards the platforms and waited with other commuters for the trains that would take

⁴ Jose Maria Irujo, *El Agujero: Espana Invadida por la Yihad* (Madrid:Aguilar, 2005), 291.

⁵ Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Next Attack: The Failure of the War on Terror and a Strategy for Getting It Right* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005), 3.

⁶ The Qur’an. Sura 3:12

them into Madrid. Each of the men carried a duffel bag containing one of the thirteen bombs that they had prepared the day before.

At 7:01 AM, train 21431 left the Alaca de Henares train station with four of the thirteen men on board and headed towards Atocha station, one of Madrid's two main rail hubs. Each of the four men sat on different cars, near the door and placed their bomb-laden duffel bags under the seat.⁷ The alarm feature of the cell phones, which would trigger the explosions, had been set to go off at the scheduled arrival time at the Atocha train station. The placement of the bombs near the doors was done with the intention of killing the passengers on the train as well as the commuters waiting on the platforms at Atocha, thereby maximizing the death toll.⁸ At 7:04 AM, train 17305 left Alaca de Henares with four more men headed towards Atocha.⁹ At 7:10 AM, train 21435 departed with another four-man team.¹⁰ The four man teams on trains 17305 and 21435 were seated just like the team on train 21431, near the door, duffel bags under the seats, on different cars.¹¹ Train 21713 left at 7:14 AM with the last of the thirteen men on board.¹²

The men on the four trains got off at various stops during the next twenty minutes. The first of the four trains arrived at Atocha station at 7:39 AM. As passengers began to file out of the train, bombs detonated on the fourth, fifth and sixth cars of train 21431, killing dozens of people and wounding scores more.¹³ Almost simultaneously, bombs went off in cars one, four, five and six of train 17305, just 500 meters outside of Atocha station.¹⁴ The train was running two minutes late, explaining why it detonated before it reached the train station. Investigators believe that the bombers intended to have the bombs on both trains detonate inside Atocha station.¹⁵ “According to Spanish authorities, detonation of

⁷ Benjamin and Simon, *The Next Attack*, 4.

⁸ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 296.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ “11 March 2004 Madrid train bombings,” *Wikipedia*, accessed September 26, 2005, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/March_11,_2004_Madrid_attacks

¹¹ Benjamin and Simon, *The Next Attack*, 4.

¹² Irujo, *El Agujero*, 296.

¹³ “Madrid attacks timeline,” *BBC News*, 12 March 2004, accessed September 7, 2005, from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3504912.stm>

¹⁴ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 298.

¹⁵ “Madrid attacks timeline,” *BBC News*

the bombs inside Atocha would probably have caused part of the old station to collapse, perhaps killing ... thousands of commuters".¹⁶ At 7:41 AM, two bombs exploded on cars four and five aboard train 21435 as it passed through El Pozo del Tio Raimundo station, killing 70 people. One minute later the last bomb blew up on train 21713 inside of the Santa Eugenia rail station.¹⁷

191 people were killed in the four blast zones and 1,741 wounded. The attack "was the most devastating act of terrorism in European history, except for the 1988 bombing of Pam Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland".¹⁸ The scale, complexity and synchronization of the attack suggested that it had been carried out by al Qaeda. Although the targets of the attack were confined to an area of less than ten square miles, the terrorists had managed to set off ten bombs within a span of three minutes; an unprecedented terrorist feat.¹⁹ The attack also had symbolic importance due to its date and number of targets. The bombings occurred on March 11, 2004; 911 days after the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington DC. The 9-11 hijackers flew four planes into their targets, the Madrid terrorists bombed four trains. The attacks also occurred just three days before national elections in Spain, scheduled for Sunday, March 14.

Political Aftermath and Preliminary Investigation

After they received news of the attacks, the Spanish Prime Minister and leader of the Popular Party, Jose Maria Aznar and the Popular Party's candidate to succeed him, Mariano Rajoy ceased all campaigning activities. Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, the opposition candidate for Prime Minister from the Socialist Workers Party followed suit. At the time, Aznar's Popular Party led in the polls by four and a half points.²⁰ As emergency relief workers and investigators flooded the bombing sites, politicians scrambled to explain what had happened.

¹⁶ Lorenzo Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2006), 293.

¹⁷ "Madrid attacks timeline," *BBC News*

¹⁸ Wright, "The Terror Web" 1.

¹⁹ Benjamin and Simon, *The Next Attack*, 5.

²⁰ Wright, "The Terror Web," 1.

Jose Maria Aznar and his Interior Minister, Angel Acebes blamed the attack on ETA almost immediately. At 1:30 PM Acebes declared that with the train bombings, “ETA had achieved its objectives”.²¹ That same afternoon Aznar instructed the Spanish delegation at the U.N. to introduce a resolution condemning the attacks.²² U.N. Resolution 1530 passed unanimously and included language, which “condemns in the strongest terms the bomb attacks in Madrid, Spain, perpetrated by the terrorist group ETA on 11 March 2004”.²³ “Foreign Minister Ana Palacio ... sent out a dispatch to all Spanish ambassadors requesting that they ‘take advantage of any occasions that present themselves to confirm ETA’s responsibility for these brutal attacks.’”²⁴

Aznar’s reflexive inclination to blame ETA, the Basque separatist group responsible for more than 800 deaths in Spain since 1959, was historically well founded and also due to personal animosity.²⁵ Aznar narrowly escaped an ETA car bomb in 1995 and had made the elimination of ETA his biggest priority. Although he had been largely successful in this endeavor, it was feared that the remnants of ETA were planning a retaliatory strike against a target in Madrid. Spanish police had arrested two ETA operatives for planting backpack bombs on trains the previous Christmas Eve and in February 2004, the Civil Guard intercepted a van, driven by ETA members, headed for Madrid with eleven hundred pounds of explosives.²⁶

Although ETA appeared to be the logical suspect based on past history, the attack’s characteristics provided reasons to doubt ETA’s involvement. ETA had almost exclusively targeted politicians, security officials and journalists, eschewing mass casualty attacks and attacks against working class Spaniards.²⁷ ETA had also made a habit of preceding its attacks with telephoned warnings to the authorities. In addition,

²¹ Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe*, 294.

²² Ibid.

²³ United Nations, *Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts*, UN Security Council Resolution 1530, 11 March 2004, accessed January 9, 2006, from <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N04/267/18/PDF/N0426718.pdf?OpenElement>

²⁴ Aparism Ghosh and James Graff, “A Strike At Europe’s Heart,” *Time Europe*, 22 March 2004, 4, accessed January 9, 2006, from <http://www.time.com/time/europe/html/040322/story.html?cnn=yes>

²⁵ Wright, “The Terror Web,” 1.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

intercepted phone calls between known ETA members immediately following the attacks revealed their level of surprise and called their involvement into question.²⁸

Within hours of the attack police began to gather evidence that suggested the perpetrators were Islamic terrorists, not Basque separatists. At 10:50 AM, a resident of Alaca de Henares alerted Spanish security services to the presence of an abandoned white Renault Kangoo van parked across from the station, the origination point of all of the bombed trains. The van was impounded and a few hours later, investigators discovered a plastic bag containing seven detonators under the passenger seat and a tape of Quranic recitations of the third Sura in the van's cassette player.²⁹ That evening Aznar relayed news of the van and its contents to Zapatero, the opposition leader and the editors of Spain's main newspapers, while continuing to insist that, "ETA is behind the attacks".³⁰ Spanish political analysts believed that widespread anger towards ETA by the public would benefit Aznar's Popular Party, which was well known for taking a hard line against the Basque separatist group. Opponents charged that Aznar deliberately downplayed evidence pointing to Islamic terrorists while continuing to blame ETA for political gain.³¹

The case broke open the next morning when a police officer, searching the wreckage of the train at the El Pozo station, discovered a blue duffel bag containing an unexploded bomb, which contained 10.1 kilograms of plastic explosive and 640 grams of screws and nails. The copper detonator was connected to a Motorola mobile phone, whose alarm feature had been set to 7:40 AM. The detonators matched the ones that investigators had discovered in the Renault Kangoo van the previous day.³² Analysis of the explosive by a crime lab revealed that it was Goma 2 Eco, a Spanish brand of plastic explosive used by miners.³³ This information was kept secret as investigators attempted to track the owner

²⁸ Wright, "The Terror Web," 2.

²⁹ Vidno, *Al Qaeda in Europe*, 294.

³⁰ Wright, "The Terror Web," 2.

³¹ Aparism and Graff, "A Strike At Europe's Heart," 4.

³² Irujo, *El Agujero*, 327.

³³ Ibid.

of the phone, using its SIM card.³⁴ During this time, ETA spokesmen denied the group's involvement in the train bombings, while Aznar's government continued to blame it.³⁵ Spanish citizens held vigils and protested the bombings, while preparing for the general national elections, which were due to take place on Sunday, March 14.

On March 13, police traced the SIM card to a shop, owned by two Indian immigrants, located in the Madrid neighborhood of Alcoron. After questioning the two Indians, police determined that the SIM card they found was part of a batch of 30 SIM cards sold to Jamal Zougman, a Moroccan immigrant who ran a phone shop in the neighborhood of Lavapies.³⁶ Zougman was well known to police for his links to Islamic fundamentalists and was arrested along with two other Moroccans working with him at the shop: Mohammed Bakkali and Mohamed Chaoui.³⁷ Interior Minister Acebes announced the arrests of Zougman, Bakkali, Chaoui and the two Indians, while stating that police are "continuing to work on all fronts".³⁸ Zougman's links to Islamic fundamentalists were quickly spread by the media, prompting more than three thousand protestors to gather in front of government headquarters and demand "the truth before going to vote".³⁹

At 7:38 that evening an anonymous phone call was placed to Telemadrid, a local TV station, stating that there was a videotape related to the bombings in the trash bin outside of the M-30 mosque in Madrid. Police arrived an hour later, retrieved the tape and took it back to headquarters to analyze.⁴⁰ The man on the tape, believed to be Youssef Belhadj⁴¹, identified himself as Abu Dujana al Afghani, the military spokesman for al

³⁴ Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe*, 295.

³⁵ John Daly, "The Madrid Bombings: Spain as a 'Jihad' Highway to Western Europe," *The Jamestown Foundation*, 16 March 2004, accessed January 9, 2006, from http://www.jamestown.org/news_details.php?news_id=36

³⁶ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 327 – 338.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Aparism and Graff, "A Strike At Europe's Heart," 2.

³⁹ Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe*, 296.

⁴⁰ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 327 – 338.

⁴¹ Belhadj, a Moroccan and suspected member of the Moroccan Islamic Combat Group, was arrested on February 1, 2005 in Belgium at the request of Spanish Judge del Olmo and is believed to be Abu Dujana al Afghani. He allegedly traveled to Madrid from his residence in Belgium at the end of 2003 to meet with Fakhret and other members of the cell. "Spanish daily details role of Youssef Belhadj in Madrid bomb attack," *BBC Worldwide Monitoring*, 28 February 2005, accessed from Lexis Nexis Academic Universe on November 15, 2005

Qaeda in Europe. He was dressed in white burial robes, wearing glasses and holding a submachine gun in his right hand as he spoke in Arabic with a Moroccan accent. “We declare our responsibility for the attacks in Madrid, occurring two and a half years after the attacks in New York and Washington. It is a response to your alliance with the terrorist Bush and his allies. This is a response to the killing of women and children in Iraq and Afghanistan by Bush and his allies. If you do not cease your unjust murdering of Muslims, which you call the war on terror, we will destroy your homes and cause your blood to flow like rivers. We are prepared to fill your hearts with terror”.⁴²

The release of excerpts from the video by the Interior Ministry on Saturday evening had devastating consequences for Aznar’s Popular Party and the candidate slated to succeed him as Prime Minister, Mariano Rajoy. The tape made it clear to most Spaniards that Islamic terrorists had committed the attacks, which discredited the government’s earlier claims linking ETA to the bombings. Furthermore, the tape’s author stated that the attacks were in response to Spain’s participation in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. This point was especially crucial, given that 90% of Spaniards opposed Aznar’s decision to contribute 1,300 troops to the American led, Iraq war.⁴³ However, this decision had carried few costs to the Spanish people and as a result Aznar’s political standing had not suffered.⁴⁴ By the early hours of Sunday morning more than 5,000 demonstrators had gathered near Atocha station. Most were fueled by frustration at the government’s dubious handling of information, while some blamed it for provoking the attack.⁴⁵ “‘Yesterday, we were marching in mourning. Tonight it’s out of revulsion at the politics that produced this terrorism,’ said Francisco Rodriguez, a middle-aged insurance firm employee. ‘I hold the government responsible for the deaths on Thursday because we went out to support an unjust war.’”⁴⁶

⁴² Irujo, *El Agujero*, 339 – 342.

⁴³ Dominic Bailey, “Spain Votes under a shadow,” *BBC News*, 14 March 2004, accessed January 9, 2006, from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3509744.stm>

⁴⁴ Benjamin and Simon, *The Next Attack*, 5.

⁴⁵ Aparism and Graff, “A Strike At Europe’s Heart,” 4.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

The election of Sunday, March 14 took place under extremely tense conditions. Aznar's Popular Party had been expected to win a comfortable victory, but now it had become a target of anger and frustration for many Spanish voters.⁴⁷ The El Pozo train station, where two of the bombs had exploded was covered in graffiti that read "Aznar killer" and when Mariano Rajoy, Aznar's would be successor went to his Madrid polling station he was confronted by voters who called him a "liar" and demanded that he "Get our troops out of Iraq!"⁴⁸ A record seventy-seven percent of the electorate voted – eight percent more than had voted in the previous election.⁴⁹ The beneficiary was the Spanish Socialist Workers Party and its candidate for Prime Minister, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero. After declaring victory, Zapatero condemned the war in Iraq and reiterated his intention to withdraw Spanish troops.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Bailey, "Spain Votes under a shadow"

⁴⁸ Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe*, 296.

⁴⁹ Wright, "The Terror Web," 5.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

THE INVESTIGATION

Police received a break in the case on March 16, when an informant named Rafa Zouhier called his contact, Victor, at the Central Operations Unit and told him that he recognized the photos of Jamal Zougman that had been in the news. In fact, Rafa, a Moroccan immigrant, was a member of the cell that carried out the attack. The next day, he met with Victor and explained that he had put Jamal Ahmidan, another Moroccan member of the cell in contact with a former employee of Mina Conchita, Emilio Suarez Trashorras, who provided the explosives used in the railway bombings.⁵¹ The next day police arrested Rafa Zouhier and Emilio Suarez Trashorras and began interrogating them. From there the investigation picked up and by the end of March almost twenty people connected to the bombings had been arrested, including two of the thirteen bombers.⁵² After hearing of the arrests of their comrades, the remaining members of the cell decided to abandon the farm at Chinchon and move their base of operations to a flat at 40 Martin Gaité in Leganes, a suburb about 30 minutes south of Madrid. They had decided to continue their jihad until they were captured or killed.⁵³

At 11 AM on April 2 a security guard for the AVE, Spain's high-speed train line, noticed a blue plastic bag sitting next to the train tracks forty miles south of Madrid. The bag contained twenty-six pounds of Goma 2 Eco, the same type of explosives used in the March 11 bombings.⁵⁴ The explosives were connected to a detonator by 450 feet of cable, but lacked a triggering mechanism, suggesting that those responsible had been scared off before they could finish planting the bomb.⁵⁵ Just three days earlier, workers had surprised a group of men digging a hole on a length of AVE train track, connecting Madrid to Lerida. The men fled immediately and Spanish authorities believe that the

⁵¹ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 343 – 348.

⁵² Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe*, 302.

⁵³ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 349 – 351.

⁵⁴ Wright, "The Terror Web," 5.

⁵⁵ "Rail line bomb 'matches Madrid'," *BBC News*, 3 April 2004, accessed September 7, 2005 from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3596455.stm>

March 11 bombers were behind both incidents.⁵⁶ This suspicion was confirmed when the conservative Madrid newspaper, ABC, received a handwritten fax from Abu Dujana at 6:05 PM on April 3. The faxed statement asserted that the bomb found on the railway was meant to demonstrate “our ... power and capability, with the permission of Allah, to attack you when and how we want”. The fax went on to demand that Spain withdraw all of its troops from Iraq and Afghanistan by the following Sunday.⁵⁷ This threat seems to be a response to Zapatero’s post election decision to double the number of Spanish troops in Afghanistan and keep troops in Iraq if they were placed under UN command by June 30, 2004. Zapatero announced these decisions after coming under fire for appeasing the terrorists.⁵⁸

That same day, Spanish police were tipped off to the location of the terrorists in the Leganes flat.⁵⁹ Police arrived at the flat on 40 Martin Gaité at 5 PM and as they approached, cell member Abdelmajid Bouchar, who was taking out the trash, spotted them. As he fled, he yelled out in Arabic to warn his comrades, who began raking the courtyard with machinegun fire. The police called for backup and thirty minutes later police helicopters and an additional 300 policemen had arrived at the scene. Using megaphones, the police instructed the residents to leave the apartment building.⁶⁰

There were seven terrorists in the apartment: Jamal Ahmidan, Sarhane Abdelmajid Fakhet, Mohamed and Rashid Oulad, Abdennabi Kounjaa, Arish Rifaat, and Allekema Lamari. By 7 PM, they had decided that they would die fighting. Sarhane called his mother at 7:15 PM and told her, “I’m going to die, mother. Goodbye”.⁶¹ Jamal Ahmidan called his mother, with whom he had not spoken in months and said, “Mom, forgive me if I have done wrong. Today is my last day. I am going to die ... It is the will of God.”⁶² Three of the other terrorists placed similar calls, all of which were intercepted by Spanish

⁵⁶ Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe*, 303.

⁵⁷ Wright, “The Terror Web,” 8.

⁵⁸ “Europe politics: The hunt for terrorists,” *Economist Information Unit ViewsWire*, 9 April 2004, accessed February 3, 2006 from ABI/INFORM Global Database

⁵⁹ Benjamin and Simon, *The Next Attack*, 13.

⁶⁰ Irujo, El Agujero, 356 – 359.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 360.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 361.

intelligence agents on the scene. They warned the police on the ground to be prepared for the worst. After clearing the apartment building of its residents, police began the assault at 9:03 PM. As police entered, the terrorists, who were huddled together and wearing explosive belts set off an explosion that killed all seven of them and one police officer.⁶³ Police recovered and reconstructed fragments of a videotape from the apartment rubble, which contained Fakhet's final statement in which he pledged to continue the jihad in Spain unless Spanish troops withdrew from Iraq within a week.⁶⁴

Police detained Fouad Morabit Amghar on April 6 and during a search of his apartment they discovered an electronic notebook containing an Italian cell phone number, which matched a phone number that was found in the belongings of two of the terrorists who had blown themselves up on April 3.⁶⁵ The number belonged to Rabei Osman Sayed Ahmed, an alleged member of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, who had recently moved to Milan after residing in Madrid since 2001. He had earned a degree in electronics and served for five years in the Egyptian army as an explosives expert.⁶⁶ Judge Juan Del Olmo wrote a warrant for Ahmed's arrest, but the Italian anti-terrorist unit, DIGOS, held off on arresting him and put Ahmed under surveillance instead.

Ahmed was living on 16 Chiasseiri Street in Milan and often prayed at the Via Quaranta mosque or the Islamic Cultural Institute. One Friday when he went to pray, Italian agents entered Ahmed's apartment and planted listening devices.⁶⁷ Italian police were also tracing his calls and on May 24, 2004 they intercepted a phone call between Ahmed and an unidentified Moroccan living in Belgium, named Murad that implicated Ahmed's involvement in the Madrid bombings:

Ahmed: You know what happened there, I don't want to mention the country.

Murad: Yes, yes.

Ahmed: And you know the whole group.

Murad: Yes.

Ahmed: The group, you saw it?

Murad: What happened to the boys there? What happened to them?

⁶³ Ibid., 360 - 363

⁶⁴ Wright, "The Terror Web," 9.

⁶⁵ Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe*, 302.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 315.

⁶⁷ Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe*, 311.

Ahmed: You know Murad, you know the news ... The boys, our friends, they were behind the problems there.
Murad: They were behind?
Ahmed: They were behind the whole time, Sarhane and the brothers, and everybody! My brother!
Murad: Oh God!
Ahmed: Fouad [Amghar] and everybody ...
Murad: What happened to them?
Ahmed: They went to God!
Murad: Oh God!⁶⁸

On May 26, police overheard a conversation Ahmed was having with his 23 year old Palestinian roommate, Yahia, who he was preparing to become a suicide bomber in Iraq. Ahmed was telling Yahia about the necessity of jihad when he lowered his voice and said, "There is one thing that I am not going to hide from you: the attack in Madrid was my project and those who were martyred were my most beloved friends ... I am the thread of Madrid. When the deed happened I wasn't there, but I'll tell you the truth, before the operation, on the 4th, I had contacts with them ... I go around alone, they worked in a group".⁶⁹ The Italian police had heard enough and on June 5 they arrested Ahmed. As he was being arrested he declared his pleasure that "the government of the dog Aznar had fallen. Thank God we have eliminated Aznar. Madrid is a lesson for Europe, that it has to understand that it should move away from the Americans."⁷⁰

Spanish authorities believe the evidence against Ahmed is substantial, but are convinced that he was not the sole mastermind of the attack. Amer Azizi, the suspected leader of the Moroccan Islamic Combat Group, is thought to have played a role in planning the attack.⁷¹ His fingerprints were found at the farmhouse in Chincon and according to a Spanish official, "Azizi was the brains, he was the link between the Moroccans and the rest of al Qaeda."⁷² A senior Spanish investigator told the *LA Times* "There are people who have seen Azizi in Spain after the attacks. It looks like he came back and may have directed the others. If he was here, his background would make it likely that he was the

⁶⁸ Ibid., 311 – 312.

⁶⁹ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 369 – 372.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 373

⁷¹ Paul Haven and Chris Tomlinson, "Al Qaeda's new guard," *Washington Times*, 15 June 2004, accessed January 20, 2006 from <http://www.washingtontimes.com/world/20040615-100822-2072r.htm>

⁷² Vidino, "Al Qaeda in Europe," 320 – 321.

top guy. We have reliable witness accounts that he was here in significant places connected to the plot. The idea of Azizi as a leader has become more solid.”⁷³ Since the bombings took place, a total of 116 suspects, most of them Moroccan, have been charged in connection with the bombings. Only 25 of these suspects remain in prison, although Judge Juan del Olmo, who has presided over the investigation, is expected to announce the indictment of 30 to 40 suspects by the end of March 2006.⁷⁴ The full extent of the network behind the attacks has yet to be determined in part because seven of the key suspects killed themselves.⁷⁵ However, it is hoped that the upcoming indictments will reveal more details, including the identity of the mastermind behind the attack.

⁷³ Sebastian Rotella, “Al Qaeda fugitive sought in bombings,” *Los Angeles Times*, 14 April 2004, accessed March 6, 2006 from <http://www.spokesmanreview.com/pf.asp?date=041404&ID=s1509366>

⁷⁴ Goodman, “Madrid bombings: Indictments soon”

⁷⁵ Ellinor Shields, “One year on, Madrid seeks answers,” *BBC News*, 11 March 2005, accessed September 7, 2005 from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4334487.stm>

CHAPTER 3

AL QAEDA LINKS

Many have asserted that al Qaeda was behind the March 11, 2004 Madrid attack and in this portion of my thesis I will examine this claim. In order to assess whether al Qaeda carried out the Madrid attack, we must first define and describe “al Qaeda”. I will use the description of al Qaeda given by Bruce Hoffman⁷⁶, a terrorism expert from Rand, during his testimony before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation on September 29, 2005. Then I will examine the origins and composition of the cell that carried out the Mach 2004 bombings in Madrid and compare these findings with the criteria used by Hoffman to define al Qaeda, as it exists today.

Description of al Qaeda

Hoffman asserts that before 9/11 al Qaeda was a unitary organization with a physical base, infrastructure and a bureaucracy. However, since 9/11 and the US invasion of Afghanistan al Qaeda has been transformed into an ideology that reflects its ‘name and original mission – the “base of operation” or “foundation” or ... more appropriately ... the “precept” or “method.”’⁷⁷ Hoffman describes al Qaeda as, “a networked transnational constituency rather than the monolithic, international terrorist organization with an identifiable command and control apparatus” and argues that several al Qaedas exist today.⁷⁸ Al Qaeda “exists more as an ideology that has become a vast ... international franchise with like-minded local representatives, loosely connected to a central

⁷⁶ Hoffman’s description of al Qaeda is consistent with the description given by Gustavo Aristegui, a member of Spain’s Parliament and frequent lecturer on the Middle East and terrorism, to Lawrence Wright of the New Yorker in “The Terror Web,” 26 July 2004. Jason Burke, the author of *Al Qaeda: Casting a shadow of terror* and chief reporter for the Observer, where he writes about al Qaeda, terrorism and the Middle East, provides a similar description of al Qaeda, which is cited in Irujo’s book, *El Agujero*.

⁷⁷ Bruce Hoffman, *Does Our Counter-Terrorism Strategy Match the Threat? Testimony presented before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation on September 29, 2005*, Rand Corporation Testimony Series, 2005, 3, accessed on January 25, 2006, from http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/2005/RAND_CT250-1.pdf

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

ideological or motivational base, but advancing the remaining center's goals at once simultaneously and independently of each other. ”⁷⁹

Hoffman describes what he says are the four distinct, but not mutually exclusive dimensions of al Qaeda: “al Qaeda Central, al Qaeda Affiliates and Associates, al Qaeda Locals, and al Qaeda Network.”⁸⁰ Al Qaeda Central comprises the remnants of the pre 9/11 al Qaeda organization. These are the “most dedicated, committed and absolutely reliable element of the movement.”⁸¹ These professional terrorists are the ones entrusted to carry out spectacular attacks such as the 1998 East Africa embassy bombings and the 9/11 attacks. Previous patterns suggest that these professional terrorists are “deployed in pre-determined and carefully selected teams” that have been provided with “very specific targeting instructions.”⁸²

The group Hoffman calls al Qaeda Affiliates and Associates includes formally established insurgent groups who have received money and training from bin Laden and al Qaeda. These groups would include Zarqawi's al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, Salafist Group for Call and Combat, and the various Kashmiri groups based in Pakistan such as Jaish-e-Mohammed. Bin Laden hoped to unite these local groups to his cause of global jihad and sought to use them to carry out attacks at his behest and to provide logistical support for attacks by the professional terrorists of al Qaeda Central.⁸³

The category Hoffman terms “Al Qaeda Locals” is an amorphous collection of al Qaeda loyalists who have prior terrorism experience that includes battlefield experience in jihadists campaigns such as Algeria, the Balkans, and Chechnya and training in a pre 9/11 al Qaeda training camp that would have resulted in “some direct connection with al Qaeda.”⁸⁴ Although their current relationship with al Qaeda Central may be tenuous, if

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 5.

⁸³ Bruce Hoffman, *Does Our Counter-Terrorism Strategy Match the Threat*, 5.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 6

not dormant, the distinguishing characteristic of al Qaeda Locals “is that there is some previous connection ... [with] some kind of al Qaeda.”⁸⁵

The al Qaeda Network consists of “home-grown Islamic radicals ... who have no direct connection with al Qaeda (or any other identifiable terrorist group), but nonetheless are prepared to carry out attacks in solidarity with, or support of, al Qaeda’s radical jihadist agenda.”⁸⁶ This group is motivated by animosity towards their host nations and the West and by profound rage over the US invasion and occupation of Iraq and by the oppression of Muslims in places such as Palestine and Chechnya. This group includes members of the Muslim Diaspora living in Europe. Some are marginalized members of society, working in menial jobs, with long criminal records while others may be educated and from middle class background. “What they will have in common is a combination of a deep commitment to their faith – often recently re-discovered; admiration of bin Laden for the cathartic blow struck against America on 9/11; hatred of the US and the West; and a profoundly shared sense of alienation from their host countries.”⁸⁷

Composition of Abu Dahdah Cell

Having used Hoffman’s description of “al Qaeda” I will now describe the origins and composition of the cell that carried out the March 11 bombings. I will trace the creation of a Spanish terrorist cell during the mid 1990’s that consisted of experienced jihadists and then describe how the members of that cell who survived the post 9/11 crackdown by Spanish police recruited and mobilized a group that consisted primarily of homegrown radicals who carried out the train bombings in March 2004. My primary source for this task will be, *El Agujero: Espana Invadida por la Yihad* (The Black Hole: Spain Invaded by Jihad), by Jose Maria Irujo, a writer for the Spanish newspaper, El Pais.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 6 – 8.

Mustafa Setmariyan Nasar, a.k.a. Abu Musab al-Suri, and Anwar Adnan Muhammad Saleh, a.k.a. Chej Salah, started the first Spanish terror cell. Nasar was a member of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and fled Syria in the early 1980's, after the regime's crackdown on the fundamentalist group, and traveled to Afghanistan, where he participated in the jihad against the Soviets.⁸⁸ Nasar described his affiliation with al Qaeda in a statement issued in December 2004:

I was honored to participate in the Afghan jihad against the Russians and the communists until we exterminated their forces and lowered their flanks and made an example out of them – as we will also do with America, with the help of Allah ... I was honored to become acquainted with Shaykh Abdullah Azzam⁸⁹, and I worked with him during the days of the Afghan jihad in 1987. Then in 1988, I was honored by coming to know Shaykh Usama [Bin Laden] ... I was honored to become a member of Al-Qaida, and I worked with the group until 1992. During that time, I trained its first elite fighters and I was an instructor at its camps.⁹⁰

Nasar moved to Madrid in the mid 1990's and acquired Spanish citizenship through marriage. He moved to London in 1995 and then to Afghanistan in 1998.⁹¹ Nasar fled Afghanistan as U.S. forces invaded in late 2001 and his current whereabouts are unknown. In November 2004, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell announced the posting of a \$5 million reward for information leading to Nasar's capture.⁹²

During his stay in Spain, Nasar befriended a fellow Syrian and member of the Muslim Brotherhood, Imad Eddin Yarkas, a.k.a. Abu Dahdah who had settled in Spain in 1987. Nasar tapped Dahdah to recruit and head an al Qaeda sleeper cell in Madrid. In 1994 Dahdah and Chej Salah began proselytizing young Muslim men outside of the Abu Bakr mosque in Madrid, distributing propaganda pamphlets from groups such as Hamas, GIA, and Islamic Jihad. Dahdah and Salah recruited a group of mostly Syrians and Moroccans that would eventually number approximately twenty members. Dahdah and Salah began

⁸⁸ Lorenzo Vidino, "Suri State of Affairs," *National Review Online*, 21 May 2004, accessed September 11, 2005 from <http://www.nationalreview.com/script/printpage.p?ref=/comment/vidino200405210939.asp>

⁸⁹ Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian was a professor and mentor of Usama bin Laden in Saudi Arabia and the founder of the Bureau of Services, which provided logistical support to the mujahideen in Afghanistan. Bin Laden traveled to Afghanistan in 1980 to assist Azzam with his work in the Bureau of Services.

⁹⁰ Evan Kohlmann, "Abu Musab al-Suri and his Plan for the Destruction of America: 'Dirty Bombs for a Dirty Nation'," *Global Terror Alert*, accessed September 10, 2005 from <http://www.globalterroralert.com/pdf/0705/abumusabalsuri.pdf>

⁹¹ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 23 – 25.

⁹² Kohlmann, "Abu Musab al-Suri and his Plan for the Destruction of America"

sending the recruits, who referred to themselves as the Soldiers of Allah, to fight on the jihadist battlefields of that time: Bosnia and Chechnya.⁹³ In June 1995, Nasar left Madrid to live in London, where he worked with Abu Qatada⁹⁴ as the editor of the GIA newsletter, Al Ansar. In October 1995, Chej Salah left Madrid and moved to Peshawar, Pakistan, where he served as a key talent scout for al Qaeda, sending the most promising recruits to a training camp near Jalalabad, Afghanistan.⁹⁵

Spanish police obtained warrants to conduct wiretaps and surveillance of the Abu Dahdah cell and discovered that they were engaged in a variety of criminal activities that included credit card theft, selling stolen cars, and stealing bank account numbers to support their lifestyles and their travels to jihadist battlegrounds.⁹⁶ After the “Soldiers” returned from the war in Bosnia, which ended in December 1995, Dahdah began sending them to training camps in Afghanistan, which he coordinated through Chej Salah. On May 22, 1997 Spanish police intercepted a phone call during which Salah assured Dahdah that his youths were being taken care of by Abu Zubaydah, al Qaeda’s chief recruiter, in Afghanistan.⁹⁷ According to police surveillance, Dahdah had a large network of contacts throughout Europe and the Middle East, whom he visited frequently to coordinate the travel and training of his cell members and other jihadists.⁹⁸ Dahdah also coordinated fundraising efforts within the Muslim community in Madrid for the jihad in Chechnya. He and Said Chedadi, a shop owner and member of the Soldiers of Allah solicited funds from Arab business owners in Madrid and then delivered them to Abu Qatada, a radical imam, who coordinated fundraising efforts for the Chechen jihad from London.⁹⁹

⁹³ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 23 – 30.

⁹⁴ Abu Qatada, accused of being “Osama Bin Laden’s right-hand man in Europe” by Spanish judge Baltasar Garzon is a radical imam of Palestinian origins who was granted asylum by Britain in 1994. Tapes of Qatada’s fiery sermons, calling for jihad, were found in Mohammed Atta’s Hamburg flat and he is alleged to have inspired Richard Reid, the shoe bomber and Zacarias Mousouai among others. Simon Jeffrey, “Profile: Abu Qatada,” *Guardian Unlimited*, 11 August 2005, accessed on August 30, 2005 from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/alqaida/story/0,,1547225,00.html>

⁹⁵ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 23 – 30.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 31 – 33.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 38 - 40

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 64 – 65.

Amer Azizi was the most veteran member of the Soldiers of Allah and emerged as Dahdah's right hand man. Azizi was a Moroccan immigrant who had obtained Spanish citizenship through marriage as had Yarkas and many other cell members.¹⁰⁰ He was a jihadist globetrotter who had fought in Bosnia, trained in Afghanistan and maintained contacts with jihadists on three different continents via the Internet. Azizi trained at the Afghan camp of Abu Yahya, where hundreds of other Moroccan fundamentalists received training. Some of the graduates of the camp would later form the nucleus of the Moroccan Islamic Combat Group¹⁰¹, which Spanish police say is led by Azizi and responsible for the 2003 Casablanca bombings.¹⁰² Azizi was also well known for his zealotry, which he displayed on June 10, 2000 when local Arab diplomats showed up at the M-30 mosque for a memorial service for Hafez al Assad, the recently deceased Syrian leader. Azizi attacked them for mourning the death of an "apostate ruler" and yelled, "Why do you come to pray for an infidel?"¹⁰³

Links between Dahdah Cell and Madrid Cell

In 2000, two new associates of the cell began attracting the attention of Spanish police: Jamal Zougman and Sarhane Abdelmajid Fakhel. Zougman was born in Tangier, Morocco and had lived in Spain since 1983. He was handsome, likable and one of the more popular youths among the Moroccan community living in Madrid. He enjoyed alcohol, women, disco techs and seemed to be perfectly integrated into Spanish society.¹⁰⁴ Although there is no evidence that Zougman traveled abroad to fight or train, he appears to have been active in fundraising for various jihadist causes. He accompanied Dahdah to London on at least one of his seventeen trips to deliver funds to support the Muslim fighters in Chechnya and was introduced to Abu Qatada as "a gifted young recruit."¹⁰⁵ Zougman also made frequent trips to Morocco to visit his father and on some of these trips he is said to have met with and offered to raise funds for

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 61 – 63.

¹⁰¹ Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe*, 321.

¹⁰² Wright "The Terror Web," 8.

¹⁰³ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 77 – 79.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 64 – 65.

¹⁰⁵ David Williams and Nick Craven, "Madrid chief suspect visited," *London Daily Mail*, March 17, 2004, accessed on September 11, 2005 from Lexis Nexis Academic Universe

Muhammad al-Fazazi, a Moroccan imam and spiritual leader of Salafia Jihadia who was later imprisoned in Morocco for his alleged role in the 2003 Casablanca bombings. According to a Spanish wiretap from August 2001, Zougman told Yarkas, “I went to see Fizazi and I told him that if he needed money we could help him with our brothers.”¹⁰⁶ Zougman was also a close associate of the Benyaich brothers: Abdullah, Abdelaziz, and Salahuddin, who were fellow natives of Tangier, veterans of Chechnya and Bosnia, and members of Dahdah’s cell. Abdullah died fighting against the Americans in Tora Bora in December 2001¹⁰⁷ and Abdulaziz, who shared a flat with Zougman, was arrested in Spain in connection with the 2003 Casablanca bombings.¹⁰⁸ Police considered Zougman a marginal figure and never had enough evidence to charge him with a crime although it was clear that he had dangerous ties with a number of well-known jihadists.¹⁰⁹

Sarhane Abdelmajid Fakhel was another newcomer who caught the attention of Spanish police in 2000. Fakhel began frequenting the M-30 mosque and associating with the Soldiers of Allah. Fakhel, a Tunisian, was working on a PhD in economics at the Autonomous University of Madrid, where he had been studying since 1994. He earned good grades and was cleaner cut than most of the members of Dahdah’s cell. Fakhel was frequently seen at the M-30 mosque for the dawn prayers after making the Hajj in 1998 and began showing signs of extremism according to imam Moneir Mahmoud el-Messery. He asked Messery a number of telling questions, including whether Islam sanctioned the use of force against non-believers.¹¹⁰ Miguel Perez Martin, a fellow student at the Autonomous University of Madrid also noticed a disturbing change in Fakhel’s behavior. “At first he was gracious and engaging,” says Martin. “He grew incommunicative, and he told me, sometime in 1999 or 2000, that he was having a personal crisis. He spent more and more time in the mosques, and soon he wasn’t able to listen anymore, only to talk about Islam and the misery of the world.”¹¹¹ Police believe that Fakhel’s extremism

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe*, 300 – 301.

¹⁰⁸ Mark Townsend and John Hooper, “The secret war,” *Observer*, 21 March 2004, accessed September 11, 2005 from <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,4884830-108959,00.html>

¹⁰⁹ Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe*, 301.

¹¹⁰ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 182 – 186.

¹¹¹ James Graff, “Terror’s Tracks,” *Time Europe*, 19 April 2004, accessed March 6, 2006 from <http://www.time.com/time/europe/magazine/article/0,13005,901040419-610023,00.html>

was also a byproduct of his friendship with members of Dahdah's cell, including Amer Azizi, who befriended Fakhret after meeting him at the weekly Qur'anic recitation classes held at the M-30 mosque's Islamic Cultural Center.¹¹²

In January 2001 Rabei Osman Sayed Ahmed arrived in Madrid from Leibach, Germany. French authorities detained Ahmed in 1999, as he tried to enter the country from Germany without proper documents. The French handed Ahmed over to German authorities, who held him at a camp in Leibach to await the outcome of his application for asylum.¹¹³ Ahmed was granted temporary asylum and left Germany in January 2001. According to Spanish police he was a member of Egyptian Islamic Jihad and a former member of the Egyptian army, where he served as an explosives expert. He began attending Friday prayers at the M-30 mosque, where he made contact with and joined Dahdah's cell.¹¹⁴

Dahdah's Cell Destroyed

In June 2001, Mohammed Belfatmi, an Algerian living in Vilaseca, Spain, called Dahdah and said, "I am a brother of religion ... You should obtain the things soon ... The brothers are in a hurry".¹¹⁵ The next month, Mohammed Atta and Ramzi Binalshibh were in Tarragona, Spain planning the final details of the September 11 attack. American and Spanish intelligence officials believe that Atta and Binalshibh were the "brothers" referred to in Belfatmi's conversation with Dahdah¹¹⁶ and that he and Azizi may have coordinated and been present at the meeting with Atta and Binalshibh.¹¹⁷ On September 5, 2001 Dahdah received a phone call from a frightened Jamal Zougman, who had just returned from a trip to Morocco to find that the police had searched his apartment. The

¹¹² Irujo, *El Agujero*, 60.

¹¹³ Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe*, 315 – 317.

¹¹⁴ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 84 – 86.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 113 - 115

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Katherine Shrader, "Moroccan may link Sept. 11, Madrid attacks," *The Orange County Register*, 23 January 2005, accessed September 10, 2005 from http://www.ocregister.com/ocr/2005/01/23/sections/news/focus_government/print_386221.php

police found Azizi's phone number and writings in Zougman's apartment and videos of jihad in Chechnya and Dagestan.¹¹⁸

After the September 11 attacks in Washington and New York, the intelligence agencies of Europe and the U.S. met to share intelligence related to the attacks. During these meetings Spanish intelligence discovered that Dahdah's cell had contacts with members of Atta's Hamburg cell. German police found Dahdah's phone number in the apartment of Said Bahaji, one of the cell members in Hamburg¹¹⁹ and according to the FBI, Azizi's phone number was found in the address book of Zacarias Moussaoui.¹²⁰ During the six years that Spanish police had been observing Dahdah's cell, they had decided to hold off on making arrests unless an attack seemed imminent, but in the wake of the September 11 attacks and the evidence, linking it to some of the 9/11 plotters, the police decided that it was time to destroy Dahdah's cell.¹²¹

On November 13, 2001 Spanish police arrested Dahdah and ten other members of his cell. Amer Azizi was a step ahead of the police and had escaped to Iran via Milan two weeks earlier. Police filled more than a dozen bags with radical Islamic books and videos of jihad found in Azizi's apartment. Based on his phone records and his computer hard drive, Azizi spent hours on the Internet poring over radical Islamic tracts, downloading pamphlets from terrorist groups and videos of Osama bin Laden.¹²² The escape of Azizi aside, Spanish police were confident that they had smashed the al Qaeda presence in their country. However, a number of lesser-known figures such as Zougman and Fakhret, who had been influenced by Dahdah and the hardcore members of his cell, were left at large. The arrests of Dahdah and his cell had left them in shock and leaderless, but in time they and others would coalesce around a new set of leaders.

¹¹⁸ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 146 – 149.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 150 – 153.

¹²⁰ K. Johnson and David Crawford, "Madrid Bombing Suspect Is Key al Qaeda Liason; Azizi's Links to Attacks Over 3 Years Suggest Blasts Were Centrally Organized," *The Wall Street Journal*, 7 April 2004, sec. A, p. 17., accessed on January 22, 2006 from ABI/INFORM Global Database

¹²¹ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 162 – 164.

¹²² *Ibid.*

Genesis of Madrid Cell and Plot

Amer Azizi's wife and two children fled to Morocco, where they received the assistance of Mustafa Maymouni, the head of Salafia Jihadia in Madrid and a close associate of Dahdah and Azizi.¹²³ Maymouni fled to his native Morocco in the wake of the Spanish crackdown, but returned to Madrid in 2002 and rallied the members of Dahdah's cell who had not been arrested, including Zougman, Ahmed, and Maymouni's brother in law, Fakhet. According to a 2005 indictment by Spanish judge Baltazar Garzon, Maymouni was instructed by Azizi to create a cell in Morocco and a cell in Madrid in 2002.¹²⁴ In order to provide the group with a base of operations Maymouni began renting a farmhouse in Chinchon from the wife of Mohammed Needl Acaid, a member of Dahdah's cell who had been arrested in November 2001. The farm was set off from the road and surrounded by a six-foot tall privacy fence and several trees.¹²⁵

Fakhet, who had become a great deal more radicalized following Dahdah's arrest, stepped up as a leader and recruiter. Among those he recruited was Jamal Ahmidan, a native of Teutan, Morocco who went by the alias Yusef Ben Salah. After arriving in Europe in the early 1990's, Ahmidan, who drank alcohol and used drugs, made a living by trafficking hashish. On a return trip to Teutan in 2000, Ahmidan was arrested and jailed for a murder he was accused of committing in 1993.¹²⁶ During his three-year prison sentence, Ahmidan met several veterans of the Afghan jihad, who were recruiting young, disaffected men. Ahmidan was fascinated by them and embraced their radical views.¹²⁷ By the time Ahmidan was released, he was a changed man. He prayed the required five times a day and spoke incessantly about jihad and his desire to travel to Iraq and fight the Americans. Although Ahmidan stopped drinking and using drugs after his release from prison, he continued to sell drugs to non-Muslims.¹²⁸ Ahmidan, like many of the other cell members was an adherent of Takfir wa'l Hijra, whose ideology states

¹²³ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 165 – 174.

¹²⁴ "13 indicted in Spain on al-Qaida charges," *MSNBC*, 18 May 2005, accessed February 4, 2006 from <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7899093>

¹²⁵ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 218.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 268 – 270.

¹²⁷ Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe*, 307.

¹²⁸ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 268 – 270.

“necessity permits the forbidden.” Thus, selling drugs and other criminal activities are justified if they support jihad.¹²⁹ Ahmidan and Fakhet also recruited Rasheed and Mohammed Oulad, two natives of Teutan, Morocco into the group. The two brothers sold drugs and worked odd jobs.

Ahmed recruited his own sub group, which included Fouad Morabit Amghar, a Moroccan and three Syrians: Basel Ghalyoun, Moutaz Almallah, and Mohammed Almallah.¹³⁰ According to Spanish police, Moutaz Almallah had contacts with Abu Dahdah as far back as 1995 and served as the “political chief” of Dahdah’s cell. In 2002, Moutaz moved to London where he preached at a local mosque. He traveled back to Madrid seven times in 2003 and maintained close ties with Fakhet and other members of the group, including Amghar and Ghayloun who lived at a residence he owned in Madrid. It was at this residence where the Almallah brothers conducted indoctrination sessions that included watching violent videos of jihad and fiery sermons that preached the necessity of jihad.¹³¹ A police report handed over to judge Juan del Olmo concluded that, “the Almallah brothers made up the doctrinal base” of the group and that without them, the March 11 bombings “possibly would not have taken place”.¹³²

By the spring of 2003, Fakhet had quit school and taken a job as a real estate agent. American troops had invaded Iraq on March 20 and would topple Saddam’s regime in less than a month.¹³³ On May 16, 2003 twelve suicide car bombers attacked multiple sites in Casablanca, Morocco, killing forty-five people. Mustafa Maymouni who had arrived in Morocco from Spain a short time before was arrested for authoring the attacks.¹³⁴ Around the time of Maymouni’s arrest, Alleka Lamari, a mid-level member of GIA turned up in Madrid and made contact with Fakhet and Zougman, who accorded him

¹²⁹ Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe*, 325.

¹³⁰ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 243.

¹³¹ “London-held Madrid bombing suspect said to be Spanish Al-Qa’idah chief,” *BBC Worldwide Monitoring*, 24 March 2005, accessed from Lexis Nexis Academic Universe on February 4, 2006

¹³² “Syrian-born brothers tied to Madrid bombing,” *Seattle Times*, 3 August 2005, accessed September 11, 2005 from http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/cgi-bin/PrintStory.pl?document_id=2002417643&zsection_id=2002107549&slug=terrordig03&date=20050803

¹³³ Benjamin and Simon, *The Next Attack*, 9.

¹³⁴ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 241 – 242.

a great deal of respect. Lamari and his boss, Nouredine Abdumalou, an associate of Dahdah, were arrested in Valencia in 1997 for their membership in GIA. Lamari was sentenced to fourteen years in prison, but was released in June 2002 due to a bureaucratic technicality.¹³⁵ He soon established himself as a leader in the group. After Maymouni's arrest, Fakhret had the lease of the farm in Chinchon transferred into the name of Yusef Ben Salah, Jamal Ahmidan's alias.

On October 19, 2003 Osama bin Laden released an audiotape that threatened to attack the nations supporting the American led occupation of Iraq. Bin Laden stated that, "We reserve the right to respond at the opportune moment and place against all of the countries participating in this unjust war, in particular: Great Britain, Spain, Australia, Poland, Japan and Italy".¹³⁶ Threats against Spain had not appeared in previous statements by bin Laden and this fact was not lost on the Madrid group. They began planning the March 11 attack the next day, according to a senior Spanish official.¹³⁷ On November 6, 2003 agents from Spain's Center of National Intelligence warned the Commissary General of Information that Alleka Lamari and Fakhret had reorganized the remnants of Dahdah's cell and that they were planning an attack on a significant target within Spain based on comments Lamari had made to people in his inner circle. By this time Ahmed, who would soon leave Madrid for Milan, had taught Fakhret and other members of the cell how to assemble bombs at the farm in Chinchon.¹³⁸ Now, the only thing the cell lacked to carry out an attack was explosive material.

Rafa Zouhier was born on June 15, 1979 in Casablanca. He drank, used drugs, hung out with prostitutes and was a close friend of Jamal Ahmidan. Zouhier had been arrested in September 2001 for armed robbery of a jewelry store in Asturias. He volunteered to become an informant for the Central Operations Unit in exchange for a lighter jail sentence. He was released in February 2002 and maintained contact with two agents from the Central Operations Unit, whom he would inform of drug and arms smuggling

¹³⁵ Ibid., 211 – 215.

¹³⁶ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 257.

¹³⁷ Benjamin and Simon, *The Next Attack*, 10.

¹³⁸ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 243.

that he knew of.¹³⁹ While he was in prison, Zouhier met Antonio Toro Castro, a small time delinquent. Castro's brother in law was Suarez Trashorras, who had worked as a miner at the Mina Conchita from 1998 – 2002. Police detained Castro and Trashorras for drug trafficking in July 2001. When police searched a garage the two were renting, they found 80 kilograms of hash, 16 cartridges of Goma 2 Eco and 94 detonators. Trashorras allayed the police's suspicions regarding the explosive by explaining that he planned to use them to remove a large tree stump in his field.

Rafa Zouhier introduced Ahmidan to Trashorras and the two met for the first time on September 18, 2003. Trashorras agreed to provide Ahmidan with 200 kilograms of Goma 2 Eco and detonators in exchange for 25 kilograms of hash. Ahmidan and some of the other cell members drove to the Mina Conchita on February 28, 2004 to obtain the Goma 2 Eco and 400 detonators.¹⁴⁰ While driving back to the farm at Chinchon, Ahmidan was pulled over for speeding. The policeman did not notice that Ahmidan's papers were forged and did not check the car's trunk, which contained 55 kilograms of Goma 2 Eco.¹⁴¹

During the next week, Zougman purchased the cell phones and SIM cards that would be used for the operation. Lamari and Fakhret had been taught by Ahmed how to assemble explosives into a bomb and had since passed on this knowledge to the other cell members. The cell members met at the farm in Chinchon on March 10 to prepare for the attack. It was decided that Lamari would lead the attack, but that Fakhret and Ahmidan would stay behind to lead the next stage of attacks in case Lamari was captured or killed.¹⁴²

Al Qaeda Central was not behind the Madrid attack, based on what is known about the persons involved in the Madrid bombings and Hoffman's definition. Aside from Lamari, the individuals who carried out the attack were almost entirely marginal men, who lacked

¹³⁹ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 277 – 279.

¹⁴⁰ Irujo, *El Agujero*, 282 – 288.

¹⁴¹ Benjamin and Simon, *The Next Attack*, 11.

¹⁴² Irujo, *El Agujer.*, 289 – 292.

prior terrorism experience. Although Lamari was an alleged member of GIA and Zougman and Fakhret had ties to known jihadists, the operational cell in Madrid was not an al Qaeda A-Team of professional terrorists. There is also no evidence to indicate that the group received funding, training or direction from anyone with direct ties to al Qaeda Central. However, the cell benefited from its ties to members of al Qaeda Local and other individuals, who at the very least were members of known terror groups. This would include Azizi and Maymouni, who are credited with establishing the cell and the Almallah brothers, who were instrumental in the indoctrination of the cell members. Also crucial was the contribution of Lamari who stepped up as a leader, following Maymouni's arrest and the bomb making expertise of Ahmed, which may have proven decisive in the successful execution of the attack. In sum, the attack was carried out by members of the al Qaeda Network of homegrown radicals, who benefited from their association with individuals who lacked direct ties to al Qaeda Central, but who possessed prior terrorism experience and expertise and thus provided crucial support to the operation.

CHAPTER 4

LUCKY TIMING OR POLITICAL COUP?

The March 11, 2004 terror attack in Madrid played a significant role in ousting the ruling Popular Party from power in the Spanish elections that took place on March 14, 2004. The results of the Popular Party's defeat included the election of the Socialist Party's candidate for Prime Minister, Jose Zapatero and the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq. Since then, many have theorized that the terrorists chose the date of the attack with the intention of bringing about the events that ultimately transpired – namely the ouster of the Popular Party and the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq. In this portion of my thesis I will examine the two Internet documents, frequently cited as evidence to support this theory: “Jihadi Iraq, Hopes and Dangers” and “A Message to the Spanish People”.

Did the Internet Play a Role?

“Jihadi Iraq” and “A Message to the Spanish People” were prepared by the Media Committee for the Victory of the Iraqi People and posted on a website called *Global Islamic Media (GIM)*.¹⁴³ GIM, which serves as an information hub for jihadist propaganda including al Qaeda statements, jihadist tracts and videos, is one of several successors to Alneda.com, al Qaeda's main communications vehicle after September 11, 2001, which ceased to exist after the site's webmaster, Yusuf Ayiri, a Saudi cleric and one time al Qaeda instructor in Afghanistan was killed by Saudi security forces in May 2003.¹⁴⁴ Since the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, which deprived al Qaeda of its physical base, the organization has become more decentralized – a structure to which the Internet is perfectly suited as it allows the interactions of operatives and other like-minded

¹⁴³ Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer, “FFI Explains al-Qaida document,” *Forsvarets Forskningsintitutt*, 19 March 2004, 1, accessed on November 15, 2005 from <http://www.mil.no/felles/ffi/start/article.jhtml?articleID=71589>

¹⁴⁴ Steve Coll and Susan Glasser, “Terrorists Turn to the Web as Base of Operations,” *Washington Post*, 7 August 2005, 3, accessed January 20, 2006 from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/08/05/AR2005080501138.html>

individuals located in disparate physical locations.¹⁴⁵ GIM and related jihadist sites, which are used to disseminate propaganda, training manuals, and facilitate debate, have converted sections of the Internet into “an open university for jihad,” according to Reuven Paz, who heads the Project for the Research of Islamist Movements in Israel.¹⁴⁶ Analysts believe that in some cases messages are issued on jihadist websites in order to set broad strategic objectives and potential target lists in the hopes that independent cells will act on them in their own way.¹⁴⁷ “Jihadi Iraq” seems to fit this criterion.

“Jihadi Iraq, Hopes and Dangers” was posted on the GIM website on December 10, 2003, although the author mentions in the footnotes that a draft was completed in September 2003.¹⁴⁸ The intended audience of “Jihadi Iraq” is militant Islamists worldwide, particularly those with international combat experience. The introduction addresses “you who have carried weapons to combat the Red Cancer and for whom the mountains of Afghanistan can testify true combat and deep persistence ... to you who have known the land of jihad in Chechnya, Bosnia and Iraq ... as a mujahid in your mind, heart and spirit.”¹⁴⁹ The author’s thesis is that the outcome of the battle for Iraq will be decisive for the future of the jihadist movement and that although, the United States cannot be defeated militarily, it can be defeated in a war of attrition.¹⁵⁰ The document claims that U.S. polices are “characterized by ‘rush and desire for quick result’ and ‘an inability to wait,’ indicating ‘a weakness in will and shortsightedness.’”¹⁵¹ The main point of weakness for the United States’ Iraq endeavor is the rising cost of the occupation, which can be exacerbated by driving U.S. allies out of Iraq, thus preventing the U.S. from sharing the financial burden of the occupation with a broad coalition. The author of “Jihadi Iraq” notes that the United States is currently suffering from a record-high deficit,

¹⁴⁵ Gordon Corera, “A web wise terror network,” *BBC News*, 6 October 2004, accessed March 5 2006, from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/3716908.stm

¹⁴⁶ Coll and Glasser, “Terrorists Turn to the Web as Base of Operations,” 3.

¹⁴⁷ Corera, “A web wise terror network”

¹⁴⁸ Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer, “FFI Explains al-Qaida document,” *Forsvarets Forskningsintitutt*, 19 March 2004, 1, accessed on November 15, 2005 from <http://www.mil.no/felles/ffi/start/article.jhtml?articleID=71589>

¹⁴⁹ Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer, “Jihadi Strategic Studies: The Alleged Al Qaida Policy Study Preceding the Madrid Bombings,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 27 (2004): 360.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 361.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 363.

that the U.S. is not receiving the type of direct financial assistance it did in the first Gulf war, and that the rising costs of the war have already exceeded expectations because the U.S. administration did not anticipate the insurgency.¹⁵² The author identifies the European members of the coalition as the most crucial and therefore, declares that the near term goal must be to force out one of the European allies in the hope that doing so will have a domino effect on the remaining coalition members.¹⁵³ After determining this course of action, the author provides an analysis of the domestic political situations in Britain, Poland and Spain in order to identify the weakest link among the European members of the coalition.¹⁵⁴

The author concludes that Spain is the most vulnerable of the three countries and points out that there is almost universal opposition to Aznar's decision to participate in the war in Iraq and cites the massive demonstrations that took place before the war. However, Aznar's government has not fallen for a number of reasons including: the weakness of the Socialist Party and its inability to mount effective political opposition, the failure of Spanish voters to hold their leaders to account due to the relative immaturity of Spain's democracy, and "the lack of direct influence of the events in Iraq on life in Spain".¹⁵⁵ The analysis of the domestic political environment in Spain is followed by a conclusion, containing policy recommendations for the author's international jihadist audience:

Therefore we say that in order to force the Spanish government to withdraw from Iraq the resistance should deal painful blows to its forces. This should be accompanied by an information campaign clarifying the truth of the matter inside Iraq. It is necessary to make utmost use of the general election in Spain in March next year.

We think that the Spanish government could not tolerate more than two, maximum three blows, after which it will be forced to withdraw as a result of popular pressure. If its troops still remain in Iraq after these blows, then the victory of the Socialist Party is almost guaranteed, and the withdrawal of the Spanish forces will be on its electoral program.

¹⁵² Lia and Hegghammer, "Jihadi Strategic Studies," 363.

¹⁵³ Lia and Hegghammer, "FFI Explains al-Qaida document," 2.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 3.

Lastly, we are convinced that a withdrawal of the Spanish or Italian forces from Iraq will put huge pressure on the British presence [in Iraq], a pressure that Tony Blair might not be able to withstand.

In this way, the domino tiles would fall quickly, but the basic problem of making the first tile fall still remains.¹⁵⁶

The interests of the terrorists in coercing Spain to withdraw its troops from Iraq and the date of the March 2004 attack are the most obvious points of intersection between it and “Jihadi Iraq.” The other connections are related to the videotape that was released by the terrorists after the attack. Attacks against Spanish forces, according to “Jihadi Iraq” “should be accompanied by an information campaign clarifying the truth of the matter inside Iraq” and the videotape released by the terrorists could be seen as a fulfillment of this recommendation. In addition to claiming responsibility, the spokesman on the videotape stated that the attack was in “response to your alliance with the terrorist Bush and his allies ... a response to the killing of women and children in Iraq.”⁽⁴²⁾ This could be viewed as an attempt by the jihadists to give their version of the “truth of the matter inside Iraq.”¹⁵⁷

Another connection has to do with Youssef Belhadj’s ⁽⁴¹⁾ decision to assume the alias Abu Dujana al Afghani on the videotape. Abu Dujana, a Companion of the Prophet and a brave warrior during the early conquests of Islam, is referenced on the second page of “Jihadi Iraq”: “Verily (the crusaders) do not and will not be turned away (from aggression against Islam) except by the youth who have sold their souls to God Almighty, and who have put on the headband of death ... the headband of Abu Dujana”.¹⁵⁸ Abu Dujana, because of his stature, is an alias that has been assumed by other jihadists, but it is also possible that Youssef had been inspired by the “Jihadi Iraq” document. Another interesting fact is that the person on the tape added al Afghani to his alias, perhaps in an effort to suggest his affinity with the veterans of the anti-Soviet, Afghan jihad, one of the constituencies directly addressed in the beginning of “Jihadi Iraq”. A number of those involved in the attack were associates and admirers of Abu

¹⁵⁶ Lia and Hegghammer, “Jihadi Strategic Studies,” 369.

¹⁵⁷ Lia and Hegghammer, “FFI Explains al-Qaida document,” 3.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 4.

Dahdah and his cell of experienced jihadists, some of whom fought and trained in Afghanistan. The adoption of al Afghani as part of the alias may have been an act of deference to this group and an attempt by the bombers to present themselves as the successors to Abu Dahdah et al.

After a draft of “Jihadi Iraq” was completed in September 2003 insurgent attacks against Spanish forces rose sharply, including the October 9, 2003 murder of Jose Antonio Bernal Gomez, a Spanish military attaché and the fatal ambush of seven Spanish intelligence officers on November 29, 2003.¹⁵⁹ Whether these attacks were motivated by “Jihadi Iraq,” they were consistent with the scope of “Jihadi Iraq,” whose policies deal specifically with attacking Spanish forces in Iraq. In contrast, the attacks in Spain were outside the scope of “Jihadi Iraq.” However, “A Message to the Spanish People,” which was posted by the same group responsible for “Jihadi Iraq,” references the above-mentioned attacks against Spanish forces and notes their failure to affect Spanish policy. “A Message to the Spanish People” suggests that more dramatic attacks are necessary to hasten a Spanish withdrawal from Iraq and hints at a threat against “Spanish national security in the future.”¹⁶⁰

Despite our recognition of the braveness of the Spanish people during the war and up until now, we have not sensed any serious effort to drop the government of the war criminals ... therefore, we declare that the responsibility for the occupation lies upon the participating armies and their people. ... If the scene of the seven spies was not enough to activate your feelings and initiate you to save your sons, you push us towards increasing our resistance. The battalions of the Iraqi resistance and its supporters outside of Iraq are able to increase the dosage and will eclipse your memory of the rotten spies.¹⁶¹

While “A Message to the Spanish People” does not advocate a particular strategy it suggests that the scope of the battlefield should be expanded beyond Iraq and advocates increasing the “dosage” of attacks in order to coerce Spain to withdraw. It also places equal blame for Spanish participation in the war on the military and the people, which suggests the possibility of attacks against Spanish civilians.

¹⁵⁹ Wright, “The Terror Web,” 4.

¹⁶⁰ Paz, “Message to the Spanish People,” 7.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 8.

In hindsight, when one looks at the similarities between the attack and the two documents it seems possible that they provided some sort of guidance to the terrorists to strike Spain just before its election. However, there are reasons to doubt that possibility, including the fact that neither document advocates the use of specific tactics or provides specific targeting instructions. Police reports confirm that Amer Azizi and Rabei Osman Sayed Ahmed were active patrons of jihadist websites and although “Jihadi Iraq” was posted on a number of different websites and message boards¹⁶², there is no evidence that the document was read by a member of the Madrid cell. For example, neither of the documents has been found downloaded onto any computer belonging to a cell member and none of the arrested members have made comments suggesting that they were aware of either document.¹⁶³ It is equally plausible that, as Spanish residents, the terrorists were aware of the upcoming elections and the public’s strong opposition to the war and acted when they did on the basis of their own political analysis. However, no solid evidence indicating that the terrorists intended to throw the elections has yet emerged. In sum, despite the striking coincidences, there is insufficient evidence to conclude that the terrorists were guided in any way by the two Internet documents or that they intended to influence the election’s outcome.

¹⁶² Lia and Hegghammer, “Jihadi Strategic Studies,” 357.

¹⁶³ Benjamin and Simon, “The Next Attack,” 15.

CONCLUSION

Members of Spain's Muslim Diaspora, most of whom lacked any prior affiliation with terrorism, carried out the March 2004 bombings, which killed 191 and wounded 1,741. Although it is believed that they were inspired to action after hearing an October 2003 tape from Osama bin Laden, calling for attacks against countries participating in the Iraq war, it appears that none of the attack's perpetrators received instructions or support of any kind from al Qaeda's leadership. That a group, which largely consisted of petty criminals and blue-collar workers could plan, fund, and carry out an attack of this complexity and size, independent of al Qaeda's leadership, illustrates the changing nature of the terror threat since 9/11.

In particular, these facts indicate that going after al Qaeda's leadership alone will not prevent attacks like Madrid that are carried out by independent cells of al Qaeda Network members and al Qaeda Locals. The primary challenge posed to authorities by al Qaeda Network is the difficulty in identifying or profiling individuals who have not attended foreign training camps or fought in foreign jihads, and who generally lack discernable ties to terrorism that would otherwise distinguish them as a threat and place them under the scrutiny of law enforcement. This makes them ideal recruiting targets and as the Madrid attack demonstrated, they are capable of carrying out large-scale attacks when led by even a couple of experienced terrorists.

In the future, the threat level posed by members of al Qaeda Network may no longer depend on associations with experienced terrorists. Terrorism expertise is now available on the Internet, which allows inexperienced radicals to benefit from an online library of training videos that show how to "conduct a roadside assassination, raid a house, shoot a rocket-propelled grenade, blow up a car, ... and fire an SA-7 surface-to-air missile."¹⁶⁴ While the Madrid cell benefited from the membership of a jihadist who possessed bomb-making expertise, the presence of detailed instructions for designing bombs on jihadist websites reduces the limitations that would otherwise be imposed on a cell of radicals

¹⁶⁴ Coll and Glasser, "Terrorists Turn to the Web as Base of Operations," 3.

who lacked connections to experienced operatives.¹⁶⁵ Similarly, the presence on the Internet of the type of strategic guidance offered in “Jihadi Iraq,” whether the Madrid cell used it, again suggests that the cognitive limitations of a group of aspiring jihadists could be transcended by the guidance of an experienced terrorist operating from cyberspace.

Despite the proliferation of web-based training materials, most terror attacks since 9/11, have involved the leadership or participation of individuals with some terror training, suggesting that online training materials have not yet provided a complete substitute for experience, which appears to be in plentiful supply.¹⁶⁶ The U.S. Congress has put the number of jihadists who have trained at al Qaeda camps or gained combat experience in Afghanistan, Bosnia or Chechnya at 70,000 - 120,000, providing a deep well of expertise that can be tapped for operations or transferred to members of al Qaeda Network.¹⁶⁷ The jihad in Iraq, in which at least 80 Spanish residents have participated so far¹⁶⁸, is adding to this terror talent pool by equipping a new generation of jihadists with first hand experience in urban warfare, and will have serious consequences when those who survive the conflict return to their countries of origin. These factors point to a long road ahead in the struggle against al Qaeda Central, its affiliates, and those inspired by its ideology.

¹⁶⁵ Corera, “A web wise terror network”

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Bruce Hoffman, “Redefining Counterterrorism,” *Rand Review*, Spring 2004, accessed February 3, 2006 from <http://www.rand.org/publications/randreview/issues/spring2004/ceo.html>

¹⁶⁸ Haven, “Madrid Bombings Show no al-Qaida ties”

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Robert S. Levings was born on July 27, 1975 in Tallahassee, Florida and raised in Jacksonville, Florida. After graduating from Florida State University in 1998 with a double major in Finance and International Business, he returned to Jacksonville and worked in corporate finance at Merrill Lynch. Robert developed a deep interest in the Middle East and U.S. foreign policy following the September 11 attacks and the Iraq war and returned to Florida State University in 2004 to pursue a Masters in International Affairs and study Arabic. He spent the summer of 2005 studying Arabic at Yarmouk University in Irbid, Jordan and plans to continue studying Arabic until he becomes fluent.