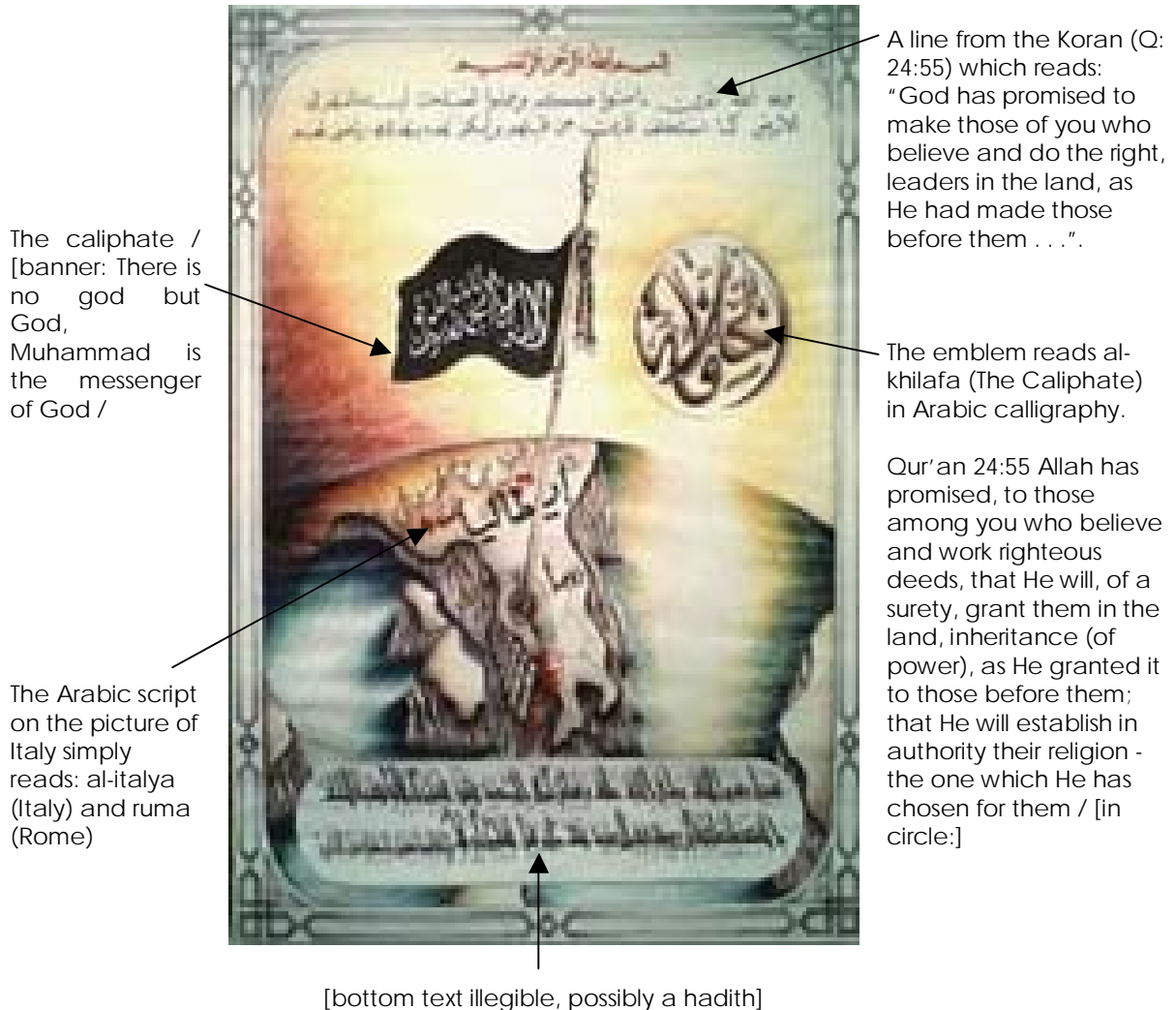


Salafi-Jihadi Terrorism in Italy

Carl Björkman

A black flag “stabbed” into the centre of Italy



Combined, the internal symbology of this image suggests three things: 1) That Italy is specifically identified as a place against (or within) which waging jihad is not only legitimate, but necessary. 2) The Koranic passage suggests that this jihad will be a victorious one and that those involved (i.e. righteous Muslims) will ultimately take (figurative or literal) power. 3) These first two points are clarified in the third, namely the re-establishment of the Caliphate.

Image and image analysis courtesy of the Combating Terrorism Center at the United States Military Academy

Contents

Abstract	4
Muslims in Italy.....	5
<i>Mosques and cultural centres</i>	5
<i>Discrimination and anti-Muslim attitudes in Italy</i>	6
<i>Italian immigration law and the effects of 9/11</i>	8
The Salafi-Jihadi presence in Italy: establishing a foothold	10
Salafi-Jihadi cells in Italy: composure, structure, recruitment and financing.....	11
The major Salafi-Jihadi networks in Italy	15
<i>Algeria's Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC)</i>	15
<i>Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group</i>	16
<i>Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigades</i>	17
<i>Ansar al-Islam</i>	17
<i>Salafi-Jihadists and organised criminal networks</i>	19
Italian Prisons: a ripe breeding ground.....	19
Italy's "virtual madrassas": The Salafi-Jihadi exploitation of internet resources.....	21
Salafi-Jihadi documents found in Italy	23
Italy's counter-terrorism tools	25
<i>Technology</i>	26
<i>Pre-emptive raids</i>	26
<i>Reforming the Mosque environment: a dual-pronged approach</i>	26
<i>Anti-terrorism drills</i>	28
<i>Document security</i>	28
<i>Data retention</i>	29
<i>Deportations</i>	29
<i>International cooperation and legislative instruments</i>	30
<i>Bi-Lateral cooperation</i>	31
<i>Conclusion: assessing Italian counter-terrorism tools and plotting the path ahead</i>	32

Abstract

In the last ten to fifteen years Italy has emerged as a hotbed of activity for militant Salafi-Jihadists. The paper charts the emergence of this phenomenon - from the early years associated with the “Milan cell” and its radical mosque environment in Via Quaranta and Viale Jenner to the present day activism of diffused Salafi-Jihadi terrorist networks that operate throughout the country. Italy's geographical position as a bridge between Europe and North Africa, the easiness with which Italian documents could be forged and the already existing market for weaponry were key factors in transforming the country from a logistics centre to an active base of operations. Today, Salfi-Jihadi networks in Italy engage in the full spectrum of terrorist activities, from raising funds, procuring weapons and explosives, to equipping operatives both mentally (indoctrination) and physically (high-quality identity and travel documents) and dispatching them to take part in military jihad. Italy has also emerged as an important platform for recruitment and radicalisation, and the paper will attempt to shed some light on the dynamic relationship of these processes in Italian prisons, Mosques and through cyberspace.

Italy's involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq has also transformed Italian interests both abroad and at home to justifiable targets, and after the Madrid and London bombings there is a gloomy perception amongst experts, politicians and the Italian public that Italy is next in line. However, despite repeated attempts, Italy has, to date, avoided any major attacks by Salafi-Jihadi groups on home soil. This is not only due to luck but also to the efficiency and effectiveness of its counter-terrorism tools. The paper will attempt to provide a critical overview of these tools and show how Italian authorities are trying to balance the aggressive short-term pursuit of terrorists with the longer-term strategy of preventing radicalisation and long term recruitment.

Muslims in Italy

In the past ten to twenty years, Italy has been transformed from an emigrant country into an immigrant country. Foreign labour has proven indispensable for accelerating and sustaining the rate of economic development – resulting in the appearance of new minority groups, including a substantial number of Muslims. Muslims now constitute the second largest religious community in Italy.

Muslims in Italy come from different ethnic groups and different parts of the world, speak different languages, and have different social backgrounds and legal status. Indeed, Islam is frequently the sole common denominator among these diverse communities¹ who are spread out throughout Italy with pockets of concentration in the regions of Lazio, Lombardia, Campania, Sicilia, Veneto and Emilia-Romagna.

Presently, the total Muslim population numbers approximately 700,000. About 40,000-50,000² (among them, about 10,000 Christians who converted to Islam) are Italian citizens whose rights and obligations are protected and regulated by the same legal provisions that apply to other Italian citizens. However, the majority of Muslims are immigrants who arrived within the past ten to twenty years, and have not obtained Italian citizenship.

Of these, approximately 600,000 persons have obtained “regular status,” and have the legal right to reside and work in Italy. In addition, 80,000-85,000 persons are “illegal migrants” without residency or work permits. According to current estimates, persons coming from traditionally Muslim countries are the fastest growing immigrant group.

Mosques and cultural centres

There are some 300 mosques, spread throughout Italy but predominantly in the main cities and urban areas. Financing for these mosques and cultural and

¹ Just above one percent of the total population and about 36 percent of the total immigrant community.

² The network on comparative research on Islam & Muslims in Europe, at <http://euro-islam.info/pages/italy.html>

religious centres have come primarily from Saudi Arabia³. This has resulted in a determined and expensive effort to spread a community that adheres to a Wahhabi/Salafi⁴ interpretation of Islam. Within this large community, several groups have formed -- the majority meant to strengthen the sense of community and social support among the immigrants. A very small minority of these groups, however, espouse a Salafi-Jihadi agenda, and others are full-blown militant cells.

Mosques, particularly those with militant imams, were until recently the nexus of the recruiting operation for Salafi-Jihadi terrorism networks and were particularly seen as an important first step in the personal process of radicalisation. The Salafi-Jihadi mosque movement throughout Italy attracted a growing crowd of followers by playing on their feelings, sending clear and simple messages, and making extensive use of conspiracy theories.

In recent years Italian authorities have increased the surveillance and monitoring of the Mosque environment and the associated cultural areas traditionally associated with recruitment and radicalisation. This has shifted these activities towards other areas and as Guido Olimpio argues, extremists now visit mosques less frequently, preferring instead to establish small communities in provincial towns that do not have as strong a police presence as the larger cities such as Milan, Turin and Naples.⁵

Discrimination and anti-Muslim attitudes in Italy

³ This is of course not unique to Italy. Saudi Arabia has supported and contributed to the establishment of hundreds of mosques and Islamic centers throughout Europe. The overall cost of King Fahd's efforts in this field has been astronomical, amounting to many billions of Saudi Riyals. In terms of Islamic institutions, the result is some 210 Islamic centers wholly or partly financed by Saudi Arabia, more than 1,500 mosques and 202 colleges and almost 2,000 schools for educating Muslim children in non-Islamic countries in Europe, North and South America, Australia and Asia. See:

<http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP36002>

⁴ This is not to say that Wahhabism leads to radical salafism although many point to the fact that Saudi-funded madras's in Pakistan gave rise to the radicalism of the Taliban in Afghanistan. It is only a minority among their ranks who've embraced violence as a means of winning their way, the so-called "revolutionary" salafists, of whom al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups are made up. For an illuminating discussion on Wahhabism and Salfism, see Maha Azzam, "Al-Qaeda: the misunderstood Wahhabi connection and the ideology of violence" The Royal Institute of International Affairs, Middle East Programme, Briefing Paper No. 1. February 2003. Available at: www.riia.org/pdf/briefing_papers/Azzam1.pdf

⁵ Guido Olimpio, "Italy and Islamic Militancy: From Logistics base to Potential Target" *Terrorism Monitor*, Volume III, Issue 18, September 22, 2005, p. 4.

Although the Italian Constitution stipulates equality under the law⁶ and Italian courts have proven willing to apply anti-discrimination provisions, there is significant evidence that such discrimination is being directed at Muslims throughout Italy. For instance, research has shown that those of Moroccan heritage face substantial discrimination in employment. Muslims are typically clustered in low-skilled positions and reportedly experience difficulties in obtaining skilled positions despite sufficient professional and linguistic qualifications⁷. In Italy, a number of small-scale surveys were conducted in the late 1990's. These tend to show that Muslims often live in overcrowded conditions in substandard housing (ECRI Report on Italy, 2001). Research also indicates that people of immigrant origin are charged higher average rents than native Italians.

Studies have also shown that there are substantial anti-Muslim attitudes in Italy, with half of Italians believing Muslims are fanatic fundamentalists who support terrorism. 56 percent of Italians believe that Muslims have “cruel and barbaric laws”, 47 percent consider them “religious fundamentalist and fanatics”, and 33 percent are convinced that they are invading⁸.

These beliefs are fuelled by a number of notable anti-Muslim intellectuals, including Oriana Fallaci, a respected writer and famous political interviewer. After 9/11, she made a series of criticisms of Islam, culminating in a book *La Rabbia e l'Orgoglio*⁹ (The Rage and the Pride). In this book she claimed that the West was superior to Islam, used phrases such as “multiplied like rats” to describe Muslims immigrants, and called Muslims “vile creatures, who urinate in baptisteries.” Although she was tried for incitement to hatred in Italy, her book sold a staggering 1.5 million copies¹⁰.

In Italy, a ban on the building of new mosques was proposed in 2005 by a member of the right-leaning governing coalition. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has expressed concern especially about the rhetoric of Umberto Bossi and the Northern League, which was until recently a

⁶ Equal social status without distinction as to sex, race, language, religion, political opinions, and personal or social conditions for all citizens. Italian laws also ban the dissemination of ideas of racial superiority or ideas that are based on hatred on the basis of race or ethnic origin and instigation to discriminatory or violent acts on the basis of race, ethnicity, nationality and religion (Decree No.205/1993, Art.1).

⁷ The network on comparative research on Islam & Muslims in Europe, at <http://euro-islam.info/pages/italy.html>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Oriana Fallaci, *La Rabbia E L'Orgoglio*, Distribooks, February 2002.

¹⁰ www.euro-islam.info/pages/italy.html

member of the governing coalition. Issues such as the building of mosques and the wearing of the burka have been publicly associated with concerns about terrorism.

Italian immigration law and the effects of 9/11

9/11, the Madrid and London train bombings had a profound impact on Italian legislation by forcing the enactment of a number of new laws intended to make it easier to confront the threat of terrorism (see section on counter-measures). These laws¹¹ were criticized by various Muslim organizations for their focus on after-the-fact remedies rather than action oriented towards preventing the problems from arising. There are reports that the discrimination and intolerance against Muslims is on the increase throughout Italy. This growing distrust and hostility with a concern over polarisation and the growth of the far-right is a worrying aspect particularly as this dynamic is merely fuelling a problem that might potentially lead to the radicalisation of a new generation¹². More studies are needed to understand how the dual process of recruitment and radicalisation occurs although some interesting insights can certainly be gleaned from Social Movement Theory and the excellent work by Quintan Wiktorowicz¹³ who poses interesting questions such as “why individuals would engage in radical Islamic activism”¹⁴ even if the risks and costs are high, and more specifically “what explains their initial interests? How are they persuaded that a radical group (...) is a credible source of Islamic interpretation? How are they convinced to engage in risky activism?”¹⁵

It should be pointed out that it is still unclear that these failures by the Italian state to integrate Muslims actually lead to the emergence of Islamist terrorism. Indeed there is very little evidence to suggest that this is the case. It does however, seem plausible that the social pre-conditions in Italy – such as an

¹¹ Italian immigration is mostly governed by the 2002 Bossi-Fini law. This law tightly controls entry and stay of immigrants. Italy also accepts a very small number of refugees due to the vague laws, inefficient administration, and the low likelihood of acceptance (IHF, 2005). An additional law in 2003 increased penalties for illegal immigration, created more temporary detention centres and limited family reunification.

¹² Gordon Corera, “Marginalised Muslims cause concern: A year on from the Madrid bombings, fears are growing that the ideological struggle to stop the next generation of militants in Europe is being lost”, 11th March 2005, BBC. At: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4340315.stm>

¹³ Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 6.

identity crisis, widespread racism and Muslim stigmatization within the Italian society coupled with pre-existing social ties¹⁶ and external triggers such as the perceived injustices in Bosnia, Chechnya, Afghanistan and Iraq - can provide at least a *partial* explanation of why some individuals are initially attracted by radical and distorted Islamic doctrines.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 85.

The Salafi-Jihadi presence in Italy: establishing a foothold

In 1996, soon after Algerians planted bombs in the Paris Metro¹⁷, Italian authorities began discovering that Salafi-Jihadi terrorist networks had a foothold in their country too. Particular focus was directed at Milan, which was found to be an important link in the broader terrorist matrix. At this early stage, the Milanese cell was made up primarily of Egyptians who had fled their home countries after the government crackdown of Salafists in the 1980s and early 1990s. The networks, which were in contact with prominent individuals such as Ayman al-Zawahiri, rapidly expanded and amalgamated Algerians and other North Africans and its presence proved that Italy - with its geographical position as a bridge between Europe and North Africa, lax immigration laws, the ability to work there without credentials and its proximity to places like Bosnia - was becoming an attractive place to operate. During this period Italy was established as a key node and Milan was frequently used to dispatch jihadists to fight in the conflict in Bosnia. Even at this early stage, the Milan cell, revolving around the Mosque and cultural centres of Viale Jenner and Via Quaranta, was important to Salafi-Jihadists for the procurement of false documents and as a logistics base¹⁸.

In 1999, the situation in Milan changed with the arrival of Abdelkader Mahmoud Es Sayed. According to intelligence sources the pace of recruitment and the quality of false documents that were being produced rose remarkably under Es Sayed. Es Sayed hired Ben Khemais ("Saber"), - as his main recruiter. Italian authorities recognised the threat early and began wiretapping both of these men, and in so doing discovered that the Milan cell was connected to other cells in Europe, and in particular to the Frankfurt cell¹⁹, the London cell and Abu Doha - the Algerian who oversaw the Millennium bombing attempt at Los Angeles Airport in 1999. The Milan cell was also connected to the UK-based radical imam Abu Qutada.

¹⁷ For an excellent overview of radical Islamic terrorism in France see Clara Beyler's "The Jihadist Threat in France" in Hillel Fradkin, Husain Haqqani, Eric Brown (eds.) *Current Trends in Islamic Ideology*, Volume III, Hudson Institute, 2006. Available at: www.hudson.org/files/publications/TRENDS3.pdf

¹⁸ For an interesting documentary on the rise of radical Islamic militancy in Italy and Europe see the joint CBC/Radio Canada production "The fifth estate: War Without Borders" First broadcast on the fifth estate December 1, 2004.

¹⁹ The same cell that tried to carry out the Strasbourg bombing in December 2000

In the spring of 2001, Italian police arrested Ben Khemais and a small number of his associates for planning a terrorist attack - he got a five-year sentence. Es Sayed disappeared from Milan in the summer of 2001 and was later killed by U.S. forces in Tora Bora.

After 9/11, the focus of the jihadists changed in Milan. With the disappearance of the camps in Afghanistan, organisations such as Ansar al-Islam began recruiting people for the terrorist camps in Northern Iraq to fight coalition forces. A series of arrests carried out by authorities in Milan and Madrid effectively dismantled the network. Then, in 2004, Rabei Osman el-Sayed Ahmed, “Mohammed the Egyptian”, surfaced in Milan. He was placed under surveillance for three months and arrested after having made incriminating remarks about his role in the Madrid bombings.

From the Salafi-Jihadist viewpoint, Italy remains an attractive target. An attack would not only spread fear but also force Italy to reconsider its foreign policy and help to drive a wedge between the U.S. and Europe. Italy has frequently been warned by Salafi-Jihadi networks due to their involvement in both Afghanistan and Iraq and due to the comments of its politicians during the recent “Mohammed Cartoon scandal”. This has prompted the Interior Ministry to appeal to members of the public all over the country to be vigilant. Counter-Terrorism officials are on high alert especially around sensitive US institutions, such as embassies, consulates, military bases and universities as well as historic and Christian landmarks. In total, some 13,000 potential targets are guarded permanently by 23,000 police and soldiers, between 5,000 and 6,000 of these in Rome.

Salafi-Jihadi cells in Italy: composure, structure, recruitment and financing

The arrest of Abdelkader Mahmoud Es Sayed, and other operatives which led to the dismantlement of the first “Milan cell” did not eliminate the Salafi-Jihadi terrorist threat in Italy. New networks had already started to emerge, and a number of different organisations had firmly dug their roots into the peninsula.

Although there is no typical “terrorist cell” in Italy, there are some interesting similarities and generalisations that can be made that help shed some light on the

phenomenon. One recurring characteristic is that the cells appear to be loosely organised and is perhaps better described as a network²⁰ with a core of 3-10 friends who in turn are linked to other individuals in Italy and abroad. Typically, they are associated to larger terrorist organisations and unlike many other European countries, are made up of immigrants²¹ from the MENA region and are predominantly Tunisian or Moroccan and occasionally Egyptian, Algerian or Iraqi Kurds. They are exclusively male, entering Italy as legal and illegal immigrants or political refugees, are usually without families and in their mid twenties to mid thirties - although some of the more high-ranking operatives appear to be somewhat older. The majority appear to have entered Italy from the 1990's due to Italy's strategic location in Europe, traditionally more laissez-faire policies (compared to the UK, for instance) and the tightening of immigration laws in France. Other aspects seem to conform to the threat picture in other European countries and conform to the excellent research carried out by Petter Nasser²², Michael Taarnby²³, and others. There is however one notable difference compared to other countries such as France in that there have been very few reported cases²⁴ involving second or third-generation operatives of ethnic Italians. This is likely to change in the coming years as more deliberate efforts are made to attract younger members, and specifically those with authentic Italian passports²⁵. Transcripts of Italian wiretaps indicate that a determined effort has already been made to "(...) recruit individuals with Italian papers (...) that are intelligent and highly educated and firm believers of the cause".²⁶

The lives of operatives in Italy have always been governed by Spartan principles, putting security before all else. In some districts where they have safe houses, they

²⁰ See Marc Sageman's groundbreaking work, *Understanding Terror Networks*, University of Pennsylvania Press, April, 2004.

²¹ There have not been any reported instances of home-grown Salafi-Jihadi terrorist groups.

²² Petter Nasser, "Profiles of Jihadist Terrorists in Europe" in Cheryl Benards "A Future for the Young: Options for helping Middle Eastern Youth Escape the Trap of Radicalization", September 2005, RAND's Initiative on Middle Eastern Youth.

²³ Michael Taarnby, "Recruitment of Islamist Terrorist in Europe: Trends and Perspectives" Research Report funded by the Danish Ministry of Justice, 14 May 2005. Available at:

<http://www.jm.dk/image.asp?page=image&objno=73027>

²⁴ This has been supported by studies of the GSPC, which have shown that cell members appear to be almost exclusively first generation Algerian immigrants who immigrated to Italy for the specific purpose of setting up cells in support of the ongoing Islamist insurgency in Algeria.

²⁵ This has been recognized and encouraged by Osama bin Laden in his speeches as an especially potent weapon and wiretaps have indicated that operatives in Italy have also sought out such individuals.

²⁶ Procura della Repubblica presso il Tribunale ordinario di Milano. Procedimento penale N. 5236/02.21

have created “fortress” zones with a trusted network of look-outs²⁷. One of these was in the Porta Venezia district of Milan; “a member of the cell spending hours in a little Arabic restaurant posing as a customer, the Tunisian barber keeping an eye on a junction, the Algerian seller watching over a possible escape route; they were like sentries with eyes and ears everywhere. They noted the faces of all “suspect” persons: Italian law enforcement agents, as well as “spies” from Arabic intelligence agencies”.²⁸

There have been important changes in the funding methods of radical islamists networks in Italy before and after 9/11. Before 9/11 money came largely from *zakat* (alms) and donations from Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.²⁹ This was usually routed through charities or Middle Eastern Banks but since 9/11 these donations have been coming in the form of small amounts of cash brought by couriers. Cells in Italy have also increasingly started to become fund-raisers and are now seen as the ones funnelling cash to other countries. Although many cell members have regular jobs, working as waiters, painters, in fruit stands or in hotels, it is apparent that crime and illegal activities plays a pivotal role. Investigations have shown that Salfi-Jihadists operating in Italy have resorted to all kinds of crimes to finance their operations, including robberies, petty crime, drug dealing³⁰, fraud and the sale of counterfeit goods. According to the testimony of Lorenzo Vidino before the House Committee on International Relations Subcommittee³¹, Islamic terrorists and in particular the GSPC have also been actively involved in the extremely profitable business of smuggling large groups of Sub-Saharan migrants across the desert and then into Italy (and other European countries), where the group can count on an extensive network of cells that provides the illegal immigrants with false documents and safe houses.

It is widely believed that Italian recruits have been involved in a host of terrorist attacks around the world. For instance, Islamists recruited and dispatched from Italy were involved in the suicide bombing of the United Nations' headquarters in

²⁷ Guido Olimpio, Opcit, p.5.

²⁸ Ibid, p.5.

²⁹ Guido Olimpio, Opcit, p.5.

³⁰ For instance, Zouaoui Chokri, who was arrested for drug dealing was later found to have been associated with the terrorists network revolving around the Milan mosque in Viale Jenner. Information gleaned from his interrogations was later used to build a cases against Abu Omar, Mullah Fouad and Mullah Krekar.

³¹ Lorenzo Vidino, Testimony Before the House Committee on International Relations Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats: “Islamic Extremism in Europe” April 27, 2005.

Baghdad in August 2003 and intelligence sources also cite evidence that an Italian recruit was involved in the October 2003 rocket attack on the Al-Rashid Hotel in Baghdad while Paul Wolfowitz, the US Deputy Secretary of Defence at the time, was staying there.

Another important source of financing, and even the *raison d'être* of some Italian-based cells, has been the production and distribution of high-quality documents such as I.D. cards, passports³² and visa forging which has been supplied to operatives throughout Europe and beyond. Indeed, it is in large part due to its state-of-the-art document-forging industry, that Italy in general and Milan in particular, has become known as one of the main launch-pads for dispatching Salfi-Jihadi volunteers to places such as Bosnia, Chechnya, Afghanistan and most recently, Iraq. Most of the recruits, stocked with fake documents, go through Syria, where many claim they are going to study Arabic and Islam. Others are said to have gone through Turkey and Iran, with another route reputedly operating from Britain - a major way station in the 1990s - and Saudi Arabia. One particular airline transported so many Islamist fighters that it became known to Italian intelligence officers as "Jihad Air"³³.

It is hardly surprising therefore that a number of fake "made in Italy" documents have been recovered in Iraq and Afghanistan suggesting that recruits from Italy have been killed there. For instance, in 2003, fake Italian-made passports were recovered in Iraq from killed or captured terrorists suggesting that operatives were recruited and supplied with documents and fake identity cards in Italy. Forged "Italian" documents have also ended up in the possession of the network involved in the killing of Afghan Northern Alliance leader, Ahmad Shah Massoud. Others have found their way to an organisation in Morocco and some were found to have been sent to Al-Qaeda leaders arrested in Malaysia in 2002³⁴.

³² These stolen blank passports or otherwise forged documents, including national ID cards present a large problem as the sheer quantity makes it difficult to forward all details to the appropriate units in a timely fashion. A number of passports, either Italian or North African (Moroccan in particular) that are believed to have been forged in Italy, have surfaced during raids and arrests across Europe and the Middle East.

³³ D.I.G.O.S. Milano, *Procedimento Penale n.5236/02 r.g.n.r. mod. 21*. p. 42. Investigations into Adineh Travel Agency.

³⁴ Guido Olimpio, *Opcit*, p.5.

The major Salafi-Jihadi networks in Italy

A number of radical Islamic groups have a foothold in Italy, and are actively recruiting and radicalising operatives in many of the major urban areas. Amongst these are the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group, Ansar al-Islam, the Armed Islamic Group, al Qaeda in the Maghreb, the Egyptian Gamaa, the Egyptian Jihad, Hizb ut-Tahir³⁵, Algeria's Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat and the Algerian Islamic Liberation Front. These loosely organised networks, connected to cells in other countries, have proved remarkably resilient and frequent arrests, raids and deportations have not proved effective in eliminating the threat.

Algeria's Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC)

Algeria's Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat has a deep and wide network of cells operating throughout Italy. It is engaged primarily in supporting terrorist operations in Algeria by providing recruits and funds in Italy. However the group also places emphasis on "out-of-Algeria" terrorist operations, and is arguably the most cohesive and dangerous Salafi-Jihadi organization in Italy³⁶.

There have been a number of investigations showing the inter-connected nature of terrorist cells within Italy³⁷, and according to press reports,³⁸ there have been a number of arrests of Algerian GSPC operatives on suspicion of planning terrorist operations in Italy, and of providing financial, weapons, and logistical assistance to other salafi-jihadi cells in Europe. Like many other investigations, the fulcrum of the activities leads back to Milan and its Mosques.

GSPC cells in Italy employ a dual-track approach to planning terrorist attacks and provide support infrastructure—safe houses, communications, weapons procurement and documentation—to GSPC networks in other countries³⁹.

³⁵ Hizb-ut-Tahrir, although considered as non-violent, "aims to achieve the unification of Muslims worldwide under a single caliphate and believes that western democracy is unacceptable to Muslims. Countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Israel are considered to be the work of the devil."

³⁶ Kathryn Haahr-Escolano, "GSPC in Italy The Forward Base of Jihad in Europe" Jamestown Foundation, *Terrorism Monitor*, Volume 4, Issue 3, February 9, 2006.

³⁷ SISMI (the Italian military intelligence service) have identified and monitored GSPC members in Salerno, Brescia, Napoli, Milan and Venice.

³⁸ La Repubblica, November 17, 2005 and La Repubblica, December 23, 2005.

³⁹ Kathryn Haahr-Escolano, op cit.

An interesting discovery arising out of recent arrests is the connections between the GSPC cells in Italy and other Salafi-Jihadi operatives in Europe. The relationship is based on logistical support, weapons procurement, communications venues, and propaganda mechanisms that enable GSPC and Salafi-Jihadi cells in Europe to plan terrorist activities in the countries in which they reside⁴⁰. Although the GSPC cells in Italy appear to be composed exclusively of Algerian nationals, their interaction with mixed Moroccan and Algerian cells in other countries such as Spain and Norway illustrates that the desire for global military jihad has overcome the historical animosity between these two national groups⁴¹.

Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group

The Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM) is a loosely-connected network that is an active member of the international Salafi-Jihadi movement, with a strong presence in Italy. Investigations have revealed that GICM had transferred money from Italy to individuals involved in the Casablanca bombings. After the Casablanca bombings, Moroccan authorities passed information to their Italian counterparts about a number of GICM operatives living in Italy. Since then DIGOS, the Italian special police has been monitoring suspected cells in the northern Italian cities and in particular Turin, Varese, Vercelli, Udine and Vicenza⁴².

GICM appears to have a particular interest in Cremona, where the draft of a document about the formation of the group was found in 1998. Several GICM-orchestrated attacks against the Cremona Cathedral have also been foiled. In another case, the U.S. Treasury Department in August 1 2005, also designated three Italian residents of North African origin as terrorists due to their involvement with a GICM cell in the city. According to reports, the organization has contacts with al-Qaida and Ansar Al-Islam cells operating in Italy and abroad and the three arrested men -- Ahmed El Bouhali, Faycal Boughanemi and Abdelkader Laagoub -- recruited volunteers for paramilitary training, collected funds and planned terrorist

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Corriere della Sera, July 15, 2005

attacks in Morocco, Tunisia and Italy – including one involving Milan's underground in response to "Italy's foreign policy."⁴³

During raids of suspected GICM members, instruction manuals on paramilitary activities information on constructing weapons, bombs and instruments for detecting government communications have been found as well as leaflets on clandestine Islamic organizations and videotapes containing Usama Bin Laden's and other terrorist leaders' messages inciting violence. This material was likely used as an integral part of GICM's recruitment and radicalization drive.

Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigades

Although the precise nature of the Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigades remains unknown, the group seems to have taken a particular interest in Italy. The group has often posted warnings to the Italian state on websites urging Italian troops to leave Iraq otherwise Italy would be attacked. These include an August 2004 threat pointing out that the deadline for withdrawing troops from Iraq had expired and Berlusconi would pay the price, and another threat later that month promising to spare the Vatican but turn Italy into an inferno. However, it is unclear how credible these threats really are given previous claims by the same group which were then discredited. The al-Masri Brigades claimed responsibility for the March 2004 Madrid bombings, the November 2004 Istanbul bombings, and the US blackout although they took no part in any of these incidents.

Ansar al-Islam

Ansar al-Islam (Supporters of Islam), the Kurdish separatist and Islamic fundamentalists group seeking to transform Iraq into an Islamic state has been shown to have a long history of activities in Italy. Ansar al-Islams founder⁴⁴ Mullah

⁴³ U.S. Department of the Treasury, *Treasury Designates Three Individuals Linked to Al-Qaida Terror Cell in Italy*, August 1, 2005, Press release JS-2668.

⁴⁴ Reportedly founded in December 2001, with funding and logistical support from al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. The group continues to target secular Iraqi Kurds—particularly members of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)—and, since the war in Iraq, U.S. officials have accused Ansar al-Islam of training and deploying suicide bombers against U.S.-led coalition troops in Iraq. Ansar was officially designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) by the U.S. Department of State on March 22, 2004. Human Rights Watch has accused Ansar of kidnapping and torture. Ansar al-Islam is currently led by Abu Abdallah al-Shafii (a.k.a. Warba Holiri al-Kurdi) who reportedly took over leadership of Ansar from Mullah Krekar, who, as of August 2004 has been in exile in Norway. The

Krekar (Faraj Ahmad Najmuddin), has been active in Italy and court documents have shown that the organisation has recruited members in Italy, and assisted in providing a route for foreign fighters to enter Iraq. On 23 October 2003, the Pentagon declared that Ansar al-Islam had become the principal "terrorist adversary" of US forces in Iraq.

Investigations of Mullah Fouad (Mohammed Majid), the Iraqi Kurd who was Ansar al-Islam's organiser in Italy has revealed interesting insights in how the organisation operates. Fouad fled from his base in Parma to Syria in 2003 when Italian authorities began closing in. Phone interceptions show how he continued to maintain active contacts with Italian-based counterparts and took over the reception of European volunteers to Syria - through Damascus and the northern city of Aleppo - playing a key role in infiltrating them across the porous border with Iraq. Chise Mohammed, a Somali and an important Al-Qaeda emissary in Europe, referred to Mullah Fouad as "the gatekeeper to Iraq" in bugged conversations he had in Italian police custody with another Islamic radical known as 'Merai'⁴⁵. In a telephone conversation recorded in March 2003, just after the US-led invasion of Iraq had begun, Fouad ordered one of his men in Milan to send suicide bombers to him, according to transcripts. He asked for "people who could strike the ground and bring up iron" and stressed he was looking for "people who were in Japan", which Stefano Dambruoso, the Milan-based prosecutor interpreted as a reference to kamikazes⁴⁶. In the spring of 2003, investigators say, Fouad met Mahdjoub in Italy to co-ordinate the recruitment programme and to set up a visit by Chise.

These investigations indicate the extent of Ansar al-Islam's recruitment drive and how they used clandestine routes running from Italy to Syria to smuggle operatives into northeastern Iraq for training at Ansar al-Islam camps. There they were allegedly readied for operations in the 'Sunni Triangle' north and west of Baghdad, the main battleground between US troops and insurgent forces. Italian authorities believe that a satellite phone used by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was used by Ansar operatives to contact recruiters in Italy⁴⁷. Italian authorities claim that Ansar

organisations name may have changed to Ansar al-Sunna (Supporters of Sunni) to broaden its appeal beyond its Kurdish origins (although this has not been confirmed). See the Council on Foreign Relations for more information on Ansar Al Islam, available at: http://www.cfr.org/publication/9237/ansar_alislam_iraq_islamistkurdish_separatists_.html#1

⁴⁵ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessments, Italy.

⁴⁶ See Chapter 1, I "ragazzi dal Giappone" in Stefano Dambruoso, *Milano-Bagdad: Diario di un magistrato in prima linea nella lotta al terrorism islamico in Italia*, Mondadori, Milan, 2004.

⁴⁷ Ed Blanche, op cit.

operatives frequently met Al-Qaeda representatives in Europe, such as the aforementioned Chise Mohammed, whose main mission was to provide operatives in Europe with funds sent from Arab countries through the UK. Mohammed was arrested in Milan in April 2003 a few days after he flew there from London, where he had fled months earlier to evade Italian investigators. The Italians suspect he financed the terrorist cell behind the November 2002 Mombasa bombings. According to Italian court documents, he allegedly transferred money from the UK to Somalia through Dubai⁴⁸.

Salafi-Jihadists and organised criminal networks

Unlike the well-documented links between the Camorra and secular terrorist organisations such as the Red Brigades in the 1960's and 1970's, there are few links between the Salafi-Jihadi movement in Italy and organised criminal networks. The notable exception is the indication that weapons from the mafia has ended up in the hands of known terrorists. However, as the Mafia is the *de facto* supplier of small arms and explosives in Italy, these links should be seen more as “links of convenience” than as indications of strategic operational cooperation.

Italian Prisons: a ripe breeding ground

The cases of Richard Reid, Jose Padilla and José Emilio Suárez Trashorras⁴⁹ have brought attention to the prospect of recruitment and radicalisation in Italian prisons. The Italian police have stated that it is closely monitoring the activities of Islamic fundamentalists, aware of the dangers associated with the radicalization of their jail population.

The need to counter Muslim radicalization in prisons is underscored by recent population statistics and incarceration rates. Combined with the well documented

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ A principal conspirator in the Madrid bombings, José Emilio Suárez Trashorras, a Spanish mineworker, was not religious or politically aware when he was jailed in 2001 for a drug offence. Incarcerated in the same prison was Jamal Ahmidan, a young Moroccan living in Spain, also convicted of a petty crime. Once in prison, however, both the nominally Christian Trashorras and the nonobservant Muslim Ahmidan enthusiastically embraced radical Islamic fundamentalist beliefs and were recruited into an al-Qaeda-linked Moroccan terrorist group, Takfir wa al-Hijra. See Ian M. Cuthbertson, “Prisons and the Education of Terrorists”, *World Policy Journal*, Volume XXI, No 3, Fall 2004.

studies that indicate the usefulness of prisons as universities for terrorists, this certainly constitutes an alarming prospect for Italian authorities. Official statistics show that foreigners account for 30 percent of the Italian prison population, far in excess of the foreign component of the general population. Although precise figures are hard to come by, anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that a large percentage of these foreign prisoners are Muslims. For instance, Tracey Wilkinson's study of the inmates in Bollate, the large prison just outside Milan, show that around 30 percent of the inmates are Muslim. She argues that their burgeoning numbers in prison are a reproach to Italy's efforts to integrate immigrants, and "(...) provide potential recruiting grounds for radical imams and hard-core militants who could use cellblocks to attract followers and spread radical interpretations of Islam"⁵⁰. Further, numerous press reports state that there are clear indications that al-Qaeda is looking for low-level operatives among the often disparate prison population.⁵¹ This needs to be monitored carefully as terrorist networks in other western countries have showed their sophistication in developing their operational methods, and especially in devising ways of recruiting and training those who spearhead their recruitment and radicalization drive in prisons. Indeed studies have shown that prisons offer ideal conditions for both the initial recruitment and radicalization of new members and for the further indoctrination and training of existing cadres.

Italian prison authorities have stated their intent to ensure that their institutions are not used to recruit and indoctrinate extremists - and there have been bans against imams from outside the prison - but in reality, enforcing this is difficult as language barriers hinder the authorities from understanding what the imams are preaching. These fears are expressed by Lucia Castellano, the warden at Bollate Prison who says "they don't speak Italian, we can't understand them, and in Milan that can be quite dangerous."⁵²

Worries have also been expressed over the fact that only a small percentage of those arrested for involvement in terrorist activities - a group made up almost entirely of Muslim men - have actually been charged and convicted of "terrorist offences". It is precisely Muslims such as these, men imprisoned then released for

⁵⁰ Tracy Wilkinson, "In a Prison's Halls, the Call to Islam" LA Times, October 4, 2005.

⁵¹ See for instance, Frances Kennedy "Analysis: Italy's terror connection" BBC, 25 February, 2002, 25, at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1840921.stm>.

⁵² Tracy Wilkinson, Opcit.

lack of evidence or detained on lesser charges, who according to Ian Cuthbertson, are ripe for radicalization⁵³.

Italy's "virtual madrassas": The Salafi-Jihadi exploitation of internet resources

Similar to other countries, Salafi-Jihadi terrorists in Italy make extensive use of internet sites and forums as a vehicle for indoctrination, proselytizing and the spreading of propaganda. The size and scope of web resources being developed by technically savvy salafi-jihadi sympathisers is enormous and there is ample evidence proving that operatives based in Italy are tapping into these resources. Investigations illustrating the habits of Rabei Osman Sayed Ahmed⁵⁴ (Mohammed the Egyptian), is a case in point.

According to police reports, Ahmed was "addicted to the internet". He used it extensively to download files, participate in forum discussions and communicate with other members of his network. He turned his living room into a "virtual madrassa", and invited prospective members such as Yahia Ragheh to his house. The reports show Mohammed downloaded hundreds of audio and video files - of sermons, communiqués, poetry, songs, martyrs' testimonies, Koranic readings and scenes of battle and suicide bombings from Chechnya, Afghanistan, the Israeli-occupied territories, Lebanon, Bosnia, Kashmir and Iraq. This material was then used for recruitment and radicalisation purposes.

Files downloaded include the "complete story" compiled by a Saudi opposition group of the 1996 terrorist attack on the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, to plaintive recitations by children to their fathers imprisoned in places like

⁵³ Ian M. Cuthbertson, "Prisons and the Education of Terrorists", *World Policy Journal*, Volume XXI, No 3, Fall 2004.

⁵⁴ Ahmed, a key figure in the European Salafi-Jihadi network, is a former Egyptian army explosives expert, who allegedly taught courses at Al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan. Spanish authorities identified him as one of the masterminds behind the 11 March train bombings in Madrid. Between 2001 and his arrest in 2004, investigators say that Ahmed recruited young Muslims for suicide bombings in Iraq and elsewhere. He was able to move around between Italy, Germany, France and Spain, and possibly other countries as well, without serious hindrance, exploiting gaps in the security defences because of rivalries and bureaucratic barriers between Europe's intelligence and law enforcement agencies and was only arrested when he resurfaced in Milan in June 2004.

Guantánamo, Cuba, and Pakistan, videos of battles in Chechnya and speeches by Osama bin Laden.⁵⁵ One audio file attacked Jews and Christians and all who collaborate with them, another invited followers to wage holy war against infidels who follow the "laws of the devil." A young girl on one audio file asked if she could have a kamikaze belt so that she could "blow up" her body; a man on another declared, "one day's resistance for the holy war is worth 1,000 years of life." Among the "poems for jihadists" was one that repeated over and over, "I am a terrorist; I am a terrorist", a song proudly proclaimed "(...)we are terrorists, we want to make it known to the world, from West to East that we are terrorists, because terrorism, as a verse of the Koran says, is a thing approved by God."⁵⁶

Sites that Ahmed visited were filled not only with calls for the destruction of Israel but also raw anti-Semitism. In one question-and-answer session with a Saudi sheik who is asked if suicide operations against Jews are allowed under Islamic law, the sheik responds that Jews are "vile and despicable beings, full of defects and wickedness." God, he added, "has ordered us to wage war against them."⁵⁷

Ahmed also created a vast library, writing posts on Jihadi forums, downloading and uploading files, watching movies, engaging in debates and constantly educating himself and radicalising others. Ahmed also installed and demonstrated a computer program that allowed the simultaneous setting of alarms on multiple cell phones, by using a system which masked the country of origin of the caller.⁵⁸

He erased potentially incriminating files, which were later recovered by Italian police, including photographs and precise diagrams of explosive suitcases that could be triggered by a cell phone and vests modified for suicide attacks.

The police report also shows how Ahmed also said he would use his computer to create an appropriate martyr's portrait of Ragheh, who he was recruiting for a suicide operation. I will create a portrait "with the light behind you, with your angelic face (...) I will put a green background behind you and the moon above you."⁵⁹ He promised to send the image by email to Ragheh's family and to other

⁵⁵ New York Times, 18 November 2005.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid. Then sent by email. Ahmed used a fictitious e-mail address in which he listed the month and the day of the Madrid attacks as his birthday.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

young martyrs. There would also be a martyrs' video that would be taped the night before the attack.

Ahmed used many difference personas across Europe and he was a focal point in recruiting for the ever-expanding Salafi-Jihadi cell networks across the continent. His extensive use of computer skills was a key element in the co-ordination of the activities of various units throughout Europe and the recruitment operations he organised can be seen to have a longer-term objective than simply providing cannon fodder for the Iraqi insurgency.

Salafi-Jihadi documents found in Italy

Versions of the military manual, from 'Military Studies in the Jihad Against Tyrants' and 'Muslim Rebels Stationed in America' along with strategic Salafi-Jihadi documents from prominent thinkers such as Al-Suri and Naji, have been spread throughout Italy, on CD-ROMs, videos and audio-cassettes. This material downloaded from the internet or brought in to Italy through couriers reveal information about the Salafi-Jihadi “playbook”; how they are to operate, structure their organisation, conceal their activities, avoid surveillance and detection and resist interrogation in the event of capture.

Raids on Abu Omar's (Nasr Osama Mostafa Hassan) house in Milan⁶⁰ revealed a treasure trove of bomb making manuals and radical Islamic⁶¹ propaganda and proselytizing material that lay out the justification for jihad, encouraged Muslims to seek out combat groups that were “actively fighting”, and to provide support and encouragement to “brothers” who are unjustly held in Italian prisons⁶². Amongst these documents was *Military Jihad* with three main subsections: *Mujahadeen Preparation*, *The Jihad – individuals and finance*, and *The creation of the Jihadist Fabric*. The document includes sections that urged operatives to “study all aspects

⁶⁰ Raids carried out on the 14th June 2004 in via Conte Verde n. 18 in Milan outlined in Procura della Repubblica presso il Tribunale ordinario di Milano. Procedimento penale N. 5236/02.21, p.80.

⁶¹ Ibid, p.80. Note that although all efforts have been taken to translate the documents precisely, quotes may contain errors as the documents have been translated first from Arabic to Italian by the Milan prosecutors' office and then to English by the author.

⁶² I DOCUMENTI SEQUESTRATI NELL'ABITAZIONE E NEL COMPUTER DI ABU OMAR, Ordinanza di Applicazione Della Misura Della Custodia Cautelare in Carcere, Tribunale Ordinario di Milano, Ufficio del Giudice per le indagini preliminari, N.5236/02 R.G.N.R, N.1511/02 R.G.GIP. p.88. Translated by Author.

of the foreign territory where you reside; learn how to hide and be discreet, be disciplined and obedient; learn everything about your enemy, its customs and culture, what it fears and how it operates, for *this will become the battlefield of the future*⁶³. It encourages the mujahideen to spread terror and, more specifically, to “train the Islamic army and dispatch suicide bombers to fight the near and far enemy wherever he may be”.⁶⁴

Another noteworthy document that was found was *Jihad in the name of Allah – Introduction and definition* that included long virulent passages written by the Ibn Taymiyya⁶⁵. The twelfth century Muslim scholar is traditionally one of the main textual sources read by Salafi-Jihadi terrorists because they find in his writings a response to what they see as closer parallels to the modern political situation in Muslim countries. Further, Ibn Taymiyya’s writings⁶⁶, unlike many of the theological works favoured by the mainstream, encourage direct action.

Arms, explosives and bomb-making material

Small arms, explosives and bomb-making material⁶⁷ is relatively easy and cheap to acquire in Italy. The “going price for a kilo of plastic explosives is about USD 1500, whereas civil-use explosives cost USD 1000 per kilo and a machine gun can be bought for just a few hundred dollars”⁶⁸. In 2005, S.I.S.Mi. (the Italian Military Security and Information Service) uncovered weapons and C4 explosives which were being smuggled from the Balkans into Italy to be used to attack the funeral of Pope John Paul II.⁶⁹ In another instance, a Tunisian detainee, who agreed to cooperate with Italian authorities spoke of a cell, active from 2000 to 2001, that had looked into ways of fabricating bombs from substances freely available on the

⁶³ Ibid, p. 80-82. Emphasis added by author.

⁶⁴ Procura della Repubblica presso il Tribunale ordinario di Milano. Procedimento penale N. 5236/02.21 Op. cit. p. 86-87.

⁶⁵ Ordinanza di Applicazione Della Misura Della Custodia Cautelare in Carcere, Tribunale Ordinario di Milano. Op. cit. p.81-82.

⁶⁶ Maha Azzam, opcit.

⁶⁷ For instance, ammonium nitrate, the common fertilizer ingredient is much easier to acquire in Italy than in other countries such as the UK or the United States, where there has been a deliberate effort to monitor the sale of these substances.

⁶⁸ Corriere della Sera, 12/07/2005, quoted in Guido Olimpio, opcit, p.5.

⁶⁹ Federico Bordonaro, “Italian Security and Potential Terrorist Targets”, *Terrorism Monitor*, Volume III, Issue 18, September 22, 2005, p. 10. See also S.I.S.Mi. report at: http://cca.analisidifesa.it/servlets/registration?COMMAND=login&lang_code=it&nextPage=http%3A%2F%2Fcca.analisidifesa.it%2Fit%2Fmagazine_8034243544%2Fnumero4%2Farticle_462748525367458880732502148243_4507362016_0.jsp

market: the ingredients, and formula were the same as those used in the London bombings.⁷⁰

Italy's counter-terrorism tools

Italy has a long history of combating domestic terrorism and organised crime that will be of great benefit as it seeks to counter the new threat posed by Salafi-Jihadi terrorism. It is working hard to counter terrorism within its borders, cooperate bilaterally and internationally and is participating in “coalition activities”. Its law enforcement authorities maintain an initiative against locally based terrorist networks through investigations, detentions, prosecutions, and deportations. It has sought to empower its police forces and prosecutors by adapting more effective anti-terrorism laws and is also amassing considerable intelligence on recruitment operations through the use of surveillance and innovative technology tools. Large scale pre-emptive raids, a tougher stance against radical mosques and imams as well as improved bi-lateral and international cooperation are other elements of Italy's counter-terrorism toolbox.

In addition to operational measures in specific sectors, increasing recognition is being given to the importance of wide-ranging prevention based on the “softer” approach – in particular increasing dialogue between cultures and religions in order to promote reciprocal knowledge and understanding and thereby also denying space for Salafi-Jihadi propaganda and the recruitment of terrorists.

The Italian government has however come under criticism from both national and international Human Rights groups who have labelled the Italian Authorities' methods as draconian and undemocratic. Further, there are also accusations that the Italian regime has taken a short-term approach, clamping down in a heavy-handed way, arresting thousands of suspects, but failing to address the underlying causes of discontent. Clearly, the Italian government faces a difficult balancing act in order to maintain security without infringing too heavily on civil liberties.

⁷⁰ In the attacks, they were to be packed in trucks specially reinforced to carry large quantities of explosives, rucksacks left in station luggage deposits and a police car that was to be stolen, filled with explosives and launched against the Cathedral in Milan. The possible targets considered were the U.S. Embassy in Rome, American Consulates, an international school in Milan and the Police Headquarters. Federico Bordonaro, Opcit, p.10.

Technology

Much of the intelligence about Salafi-Jihadi recruiting and dispatching operations has been assembled from lengthy surveillance operations which Italian authorities have been particularly adept at. Taps on mobiles and satellite phones, GSM tracking of suspect individuals, voice recognition to identify suspects as well as strategically placed cameras remain key counter-terrorism tools available to the Italian authorities. This continues to be a cornerstone of the Italian security, Interior minister Pisanu recently saying that "we will continue to prioritize action to monitor the length and breadth of the country, without ever underestimating reasonably reliable reports of specific threats," he also called for developing sophisticated technology to combat terror on Italian soil by stating "(...)there is no doubt that, to achieve maximum efficiency, we need the support of the best technological applications."⁷¹ However, these methods have not been uncontroversial and there have been calls from civil liberties groups who claim that the widespread use of these technologies is transformed into a police state.

Pre-emptive raids

Italy has also continued to launch massive pre-emptive raids. For instance in July 2005 a two-day anti-terrorism campaign in and around Milan led to the arrest of 142 people, including 84 non-EU citizens, and the seizure of explosives. Scores of similar raids were carried out throughout the country after the Madrid and London bombings and particularly in the build up to the Turin Winter Olympics and the 2006 General Elections.

Reforming the Mosque environment: a dual-pronged approach

Italy is enforcing a tougher stance against mosques and imams stating, "either mosques respect the law or they close...We will not permit Italian mosques to transform into centres of occult finance and of recruitment for Islamist combatants."⁷² This was clearly illustrated in the more aggressive approach towards Abu Omar, the ex imam of via Quaranta, which is emblematic of the increasing effort to monitor and restrict imams. In July 2005, courts convicted Moroccan Mohamed Rafik, a former Florence imam, of belonging to an extremist cell alleged

⁷¹ Sofia Celeste, The Christian Science Monitor, October 04, 2005.

⁷² "Les mosques ne respectant pas la loi seront fermées (ministre.)," *Agence France Press*, September 2003, as quoted in Leiken 2004 Robert S. Leiken, "Bearers of Global Jihad? Immigration and National Security after 9/11", the Nixon Centre, 2004.

to have planned terrorist attacks in Italy.⁷³ He was convicted and received prison terms of four years⁷⁴.

Similarly, Sheikh Abdul Qader Fadlallah Mamour, was controversially deported from Italy in November 2003 to his native Senegal for security concerns and his vocal support of Osama bin Laden. In an interview in *As-Sharq Al-Awsat*, a London Arabic daily, an infuriated Mamour claimed he commands a formidable army and would seek revenge, promising new terrorist attacks against European targets⁷⁵. Likewise, the Carmagnola-based Abdoul Mamour and Bouiriqi Bouchta, the imam of Turin were deported to their native countries. In total, twelve imams have been deported from Italy since 9/11.

Others such as the Moroccan Mohamed Rafik, who preached in Cremona, Sorgane and Florence, was jailed in 2003 in Italy for raising funds for “attacks in Chechnya and inciting violence”. The same fate befell Rachid Maamri, from Florence’s Sorgane Mosque, Majid Zergout the imam in Varese, Milan-based Anwar Shaaban El Sayed, Cremona-based Najib Rouass, which were all tried and found guilty in Italy. Others such as Mouard Trabelsi, who is not an imam but frequently held sermons in the mosque in Cremona have also been put to trial. Interestingly it appears as if most, if not all, of these imams and preachers maintained close ties with each other and were, according to authorities, part of a loose network that sought to raise funds, recruit individuals and spread a radical Salafi ideology.

The Italian government, determined to fight the radicalization of their burgeoning Muslim populations, is also starting to explore the possibility of training local imams in order to ensure and encourage moderate Islamic teachings. Following similar initiatives in Holland, Britain, and Spain, the Italian government announced⁷⁶ its intention to finance the creation of an institute that will train and accredit imams. The expectation is that this should help in the determined fight against the radicalisation throughout these centres and will also help indirectly control what is preached inside mosques. In addition, Italy is playing a leading

⁷³ Convicted along with Tunisian Kamel Hamraoui for plotting to perpetrate terrorist acts against Milan's subway and Cremona's cathedral.

⁷⁴ Moroccan authorities have asked Italy for his extradition but Italy's highest court rejected the request.

⁷⁵ For an English summary of the original *As-Sharq Al-Awsat* article published in January 28, 2004, see the SITE Institute:

<http://siteinstitute.org/bin/articles.cgi?ID=publications2704&Category=publications&Subcategory=0>

⁷⁶ See: http://www.ansamed.info/ansamed/notizie/newshp/ultime/2005-05-16_326806.html

role⁷⁷ in setting up a European and Western partnership with moderate Islam, both in the countries of origin and in the Muslim communities residing in Italy. Efforts have also been made to reach out to mosques and religious centres to encourage liaising with the local police and cooperation in dealing with any criminal activity including terrorist threats. It remains to be seen how successful this initiative will be.

Anti-terrorism drills

In order to test and fine-tune its terrorism response, Italy recently undertook several terrorism drills, involving the staging of multiple, simulated attacks in several cities including Rome, Turin, Milan and Naples. The drills –which included the involvement of several thousand people – included simultaneous fake train blasts, simulated attacks on an airport bus, attacks against a tourist attraction and hostage-taking. They were seen as an important exercise in gauging the preparedness and response of emergency services.

Document security

Improved document security is another prominent counter-terrorism tool which is being pursued in Italy. In order to guarantee adequate protection against the possible forging of passports and other travel documents, Italy has sought to promote the insertion of biometric data into such documents. The EU is also preparing to apply new technologies to travel documents so as to establish a reliable link between the citizen and the document. Agreements on joint approaches and standards in this area of considerable operational importance are being discussed within the ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organisation). Proposals have also been put forward to promote Italy's system of checking ID's online and thus create a partnership with the public who can check these to detect and report stolen or lost documents.

⁷⁷ A meeting of the Mediterranean Observatory was held in Rome in October 2004 on the theme "Islam and Peace", aimed at encouraging dialogue and denouncing violence, which saw the participation of the foremost Islamic institutional organisations.

Data retention

After the London bombings, new anti-terror laws were passed that obliges Internet cafes and public telephone shops with at least three terminals to seek a license permit. They are now forced to store traffic data for at least six months. WIFI hotspots and locations that do not store traffic data have to secure ID information from users before allowing them to log on. For example, users may be required to enter a number from an ID card or driving licence. Software also needs to be installed that saves a list of all sites visited by clients, and Internet cafe operators should periodically turn this list into their local police headquarters. Although these security measures were rigorously enforced immediately after the laws were passed, this is no longer always the case.

Persons who want to activate a new mobile phone account must identify themselves before service activation, or before a "SIM card" may be obtained and resellers of mobile subscriptions or pre-paid cards must verify the identity of purchasers and retain a photocopy of identity cards. These new provisions also extend to telephony data including location data, on fixed line and mobile telephony which must be retained for 29 months. There is no requirement to store the content of calls but telephone operators must retain a record of all unsuccessful dial attempts. These measures have been hailed as effective counter-terrorism tools but there appear to be indications here too, that persons of ill intent can circumvent these measures by for instance purchasing stolen SIM cards through black markets.

Deportations

A prevalent trend in Italy in recent years has been the use of deportations. In 2006, Italian officials detained several Moroccans allegedly belonging to the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat cell, which was allegedly plotting to attack targets in northern Italy. The suspects were deported to Morocco rather than tried in Italy. In another case, Italian authorities claim they foiled attacks against the Milan subway system and Bologna's Basilica of San Petronio, home of a 1415 fresco by Giovanni da Modena that depicts the Prophet Mohammed being tormented in hell, by deporting seven people linked to the ALF and GSPC. The suspects, who were returned to Morocco and Tunisia without a trial following a six-month investigation, purportedly planned the Milan attack for around the time of the April 9, 2006, Italian parliamentary elections.

The reason for this trend stems largely from the fact that the Italian legal process could have taken years and even ended up in acquittals – illustrated by a 2005 case, where Iraqi-bound operatives were released as the judge ruled that they were “guerrilla fighters” rather than terrorists. Deportations without trials have also been the preferred strategy to avoid increasing the militant populations in Italian jails. Italian authorities also argue that this reduces the risk of militants taking hostages or committing attacks to secure their comrades' release.⁷⁸

Much to the dismay of Human Rights groups, the Italian Government coordinates expulsions with, for instance, the Moroccan and Tunisian governments, which take a hard-line stance against militants and have less stringent requirements for the burden of proof. This practically ensures that the suspects will be detained without trials in those countries as soon as they arrive.⁷⁹ The government has been criticised for its willingness to collaborate and unquestioningly deport (and sometimes back) regimes that commit gross human rights abuses.

International cooperation and legislative instruments

Italy responded promptly to the terrorist threat emerging after 9/11, in keeping with the resolutions and regulatory instruments adopted by the United Nations⁸⁰ the EU⁸¹, NATO⁸² and the G8 Action Plan: SAFTI – Secure and Facilitated

⁷⁸ Although this gets the suspects out of the country, it sometimes puts them back into circulation in other areas. If the process is properly carried out, however, the accused militants can be tailed or interrogated by authorities in their home countries. For more on this particular process see Stratfor, “The Moroccan-European Militant Connection”, May 10, 2006.

⁷⁹ Stratfor, “Italy's Attraction for Islamist Militants” April 04, 2006.

⁸⁰ Italy has ratified all 12 international Conventions against terrorism and supports the actions of the Counter Terrorism Committee as well as the Sanctions Committee against Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Italy has also presented seven proposals for a total of 79 individuals and 14 organisations listed by the Committee's. Italy is in second place, after the US, in terms of the number of proposals for additions to the list.

⁸¹ Italy actively contributes to the realisation of the Plan of Action against terrorism adopted by the European Council on 28 September 2001 which contains a wide range of measures to be adopted in various sectors in the fight against terrorism including: judicial and police cooperation, transport safety, border controls and document security, blocking financing, political dialogue and external relations and defence against biological-chemical-radiological-nuclear. Italy has also been a staunch supporter of the EU Commission's "Declaration on solidarity against terrorism", which establishes the obligation to assist, "with all the instruments available, including military resources", any Member State struck by a terrorist attack. Italy is also one of the countries that has most insistently pressed the European Parliament to amend its Directive on Protection of Telecommunications Data and Information.

⁸² Italy is taking part in the naval mission "Active Endeavour" whose objective is to combat terrorism in the Mediterranean. In addition, NATO approved a Declaration on terrorism at the ministerial level informal Atlantic Council on 2nd April 2004. The Declaration reaffirms the principles of cooperation and solidarity between member states and refers to the guidelines

International Travel Initiative⁸³. Urgent measures were adopted, through Law No. 438/2001, for the prevention and prosecution of crimes committed for the purposes of international terrorism, along with the introduction of a new category of criminal collusion for the purposes of international terrorism (art. 270 bis of the Penal Code)⁸⁴. Legislation was also passed to prevent terrorist organisations from using the Italian financial system by coordination Italy's efforts to halt the financing of terrorism by authorising the freezing of assets⁸⁵ of individuals or organisations associated with terrorist organisations.

In the aftermath of the 7 July 2005 attacks on London's public transport system Act 155 was passed into Law on the 31 July 2005. The counter-terrorism Act has both an incentive and a punitive side. The introduction of the granting of residence permits for investigative purposes to aliens who turn prosecution's evidence in judicial or police probes into international terrorism aims to break the hold of communities often distrustful of the state authorities. The limit for police detention is extended from 12 to 24 hours, and taking hair or saliva samples with a view to tracing the suspect's DNA is now permitted. Legislation allowing "investigative interviews" conducted without the defence attorney present is already in force against the Mafia, and Act 155 extended this to terrorist suspects⁸⁶.

The Act also provides extra investigative powers, allowing the intelligence services to conduct wiretaps, hitherto the exclusive responsibility of the crime police, although a magistrate must authorise the wiretaps. It also requires Internet point operators to demand identification of all customers and to be licensed by the provincial police chief.

Bi-Lateral cooperation

established by the UN for collaboration in opposing international terrorism. Italy is involved in NATO's activities related to the development of cooperation for civil protection and defence in the case of CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear) attacks.

⁸³ The Plan principally concerns air traffic and consists of a short Declaration and a more detailed Action Plan covering a wide series of measures intended to heighten aircraft safety standards, improve airport control procedures and facilitate exchanges of information. One section of the Plan concerns the safety of maritime transport and infrastructures.

⁸⁴ For more information see http://www.esteri.it/eng/4_28_63_60.asp

⁸⁵ The value of the financial assets frozen by the Italian administrative authorities amounted, as of December 2004, to approximately 500,000 euro; in addition, assets and property worth approximately 4 million euro were seized at the request of the judicial authorities. See: http://www.esteri.it/eng/4_28_63_60.asp

⁸⁶ Jane's, Op Cit.

Another cornerstone in the Italian counter-terrorism effort has been the strengthening of bilateral cooperation. This has yielded positive results and, for instance, the improved cooperation with Lebanese and Syrian security services helped to thwart the 21 September 2004 attacks on the Italian embassy in Beirut when 300 kg of explosives were discovered. The incident illustrated the potential for Italian "soft targets" - embassies, aircraft, businesses - to be attacked by Islamist extremists and showed the importance of bi-lateral cooperation in thwarting attacks.

Conclusion: assessing Italian counter-terrorism tools and plotting the challenge ahead

The Italian Government realized that there is a great need for sharing as much information as national security will allow and this has led to several success stories of collaboration and teamwork between national police and intelligence institutions, as well as with supra-national agencies, such as Interpol, Europol and the United Nations. For instance, Italian authorities have sought to improve cooperation with European governments such as Germany (in retracing communications of the Hamburg cell in the build up to 9/11), Norway (where cooperation in the Mullah Krekkar case is illustrative), Spain (in cooperating to arrest "Mohammed the Egyptian") and United Kingdom (with the extradition of Hussain Osman (Hamdi Issac) where the two governments collaborated in tracking the failed London bomber out of the UK, through France and into Italy, where he was eventually arrested in Rome and deported back to London).

Whilst this increased cooperation between national police and intelligence agencies must surely be seen as a positive development, other measures are more controversial. The way that the Italian Government has dealt with deportations of suspected terrorists is one such example. For instance, since the 9/11 attacks, the Italian government has gone along with the American viewpoint that the terrorist threat to countries in this new millennium has 'changed the rules of the game.' Further, the Berlusconi Government followed up this rhetoric with concrete plans to deal with the threat of terrorism within Italy's own borders and has empowered the police and security services to carry out pre-emptive raids and use monitoring technology with fewer pre-requisites and restrictions.

A clear example of this re-designing of the 'rules of the game' can be seen in plans to make it easier for Government to bypass the courts in deporting imams and terrorist suspects to countries in the MENA region. Not to be deterred by objections that this would be contrary to international Human Rights Law, and in particular the 1996 Chahal case where the European Court of Human Rights prevented deportation to a country where there was a risk of death or torture, there have been suggestions that the Italian Government, similar to what is occurring in the United Kingdom, should review the jurisprudence regarding the European Human Rights Convention in the light of this new, 21st century threat from terrorism.

How successful measures such as these will be remains to be seen. The 21st century terrorist is a different animal to similar threats seen in the past, from for example the Red Brigades. The scale of the 9/11 attacks was unforeseen and a shock to the world, and the possibility of Salafi-Jihadi terrorists committing devastating attacks on Italian soil should not be underestimated, and thus there is certainly a case for adopting a different approach to immigration, asylum and individual liberties of citizens. In the jurisprudence of most nations, and in international law, there is, and always has been, scope for derogating from certain commitments of the state in the interests of national security. However, this is a very fine line for the government to tread.

Muslim communities form a large and growing block of the population in Italy and there is an increasing sense of discrimination and victimization among these communities, most of whom have never fully assimilated to their new country. It is important for the government to recognize that there comes a certain point whereby its actions in coming down tough on terrorist suspects is adding fuel to the fire. Although the link has not been formally established it is conceivable that this could at least play a part in the future radicalization and recruitment process of Salafi-Jihadi terrorism in Italy. For every ten terrorist suspects taken out of the country, twenty formerly moderate Muslims may be pushed towards the extremists in dismay and anger over what they may see as a targeted attack on their own. A heavy-handed approach which is perceived as unjust may alienate individuals who may become reluctant to collaborate with authorities and may even harbour extremists in their midst, protecting them because to expose them is to give the faith and community a bad name. Further, there is an argument to say that deportations are inherently illogical. If such suspects are likely terrorists, then deporting them to far away countries is not likely to deter them from plotting

attacks, and possibly carrying them out themselves given the porous borders of today's world. On the other hand, if suspicions were wrong, and the deportees were not likely to become terrorists, then deporting them against their will is surely only likely to build up hatred for Italy within them and push them into the hands of the extremists.

These and ongoing efforts represent a response that aims to cut off the spreading of a cause from within, without necessarily addressing the causes themselves. To address the issues such as the co-operation in Iraq or what the terrorists see as Western decadence would be to give credence to some fundamental parts of their ideology, which the Italian government rightly does not consider an option. The only response that immediately eradicated the cause for the attack happened in Spain immediately after the Madrid bombings and that was carried out by the electorate, not by the government. So while the Italian Government continues to try to make it harder for Salafi-Jihadi terrorist ideology to spread from within, it will continue to face an uphill battle so long as it is perceived to be providing a just cause for violence.

These are early days, and the Italian government is still trying to fine-tune its way towards that thin line between national security and individual freedom. There are many parts of the machine that need to be adjusted - foreign policy, intelligence services, immigration policy etc - to provide a coherent and appropriate response to this new 21st century threat from Slafi-Jihadi terrorism. Whilst it is surely too early to judge how effective the Italian governments' counter-terrorism tools in this area will be, the threat - evidently - is real and time is short.