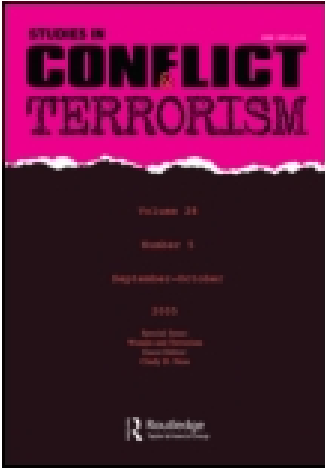


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Studies in Conflict & Terrorism

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/uter20>

Toward an Increasingly Heterogeneous Threat: A Chronology of Jihadist Terrorism in Europe 2008-2013

Petter Nesser^a

^a FFI's Terrorism Research Group, Kjeller, Norway

Accepted author version posted online: 20 Feb 2014. Published online: 15 Apr 2014.

To cite this article: Petter Nesser (2014) Toward an Increasingly Heterogeneous Threat: A Chronology of Jihadist Terrorism in Europe 2008-2013, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 37:5, 440-456, DOI: [10.1080/1057610X.2014.893405](http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2014.893405)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2014.893405>

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Toward an Increasingly Heterogeneous Threat: A Chronology of *Jihadist* Terrorism in Europe 2008–2013

PETTER NESSER

FFI's Terrorism Research Group
Kjeller, Norway

The 2012 Toulouse and Montauban shootings and the grisly murder of Drummer Lee Rigby in Woolwich in 2013 are stark reminders of a continued terrorist threat posed by jihadist terrorists in Europe. Whereas the 2011 death of Osama bin Laden and the advent of the "Arab Spring" fed expectations that international jihadism was a spent force, attack activity in Europe does not only seem to persist, but as will be shown here, the region has actually faced an increase in terrorist plots over the past few years.

The article contains a chronology of *jihadist* terrorist plots in Western Europe since 2008 and provides some preliminary observations regarding the scope and evolution of the threat, which will be presented thoroughly in forthcoming studies.¹ The chronology builds on Nesser (2008), which covers the period 1994–2007.² A careful reading of the cases presented gives a clear sense of how *jihadism* in Europe has grown increasingly heterogeneous over the last few years.³ Moreover, the cases demonstrate that it probably is misconception that current trends in international jihadism only involve amateurish solo-terrorists and lone wolves radicalized online, as many tend to believe. In fact, despite a relative increase in plots by individual terrorists, group plots are still more common among *jihadists* in Europe.⁴ Also, quite a few terrorist plans appear to have been hatched by groups and networks maintaining international connections to Al Qaeda's central organization or its regional branches.

Thus, amid growing security concerns over the fallout of the Syrian conflict and potential future hazards posed by its sizeable contingents of European foreign fighters, it is important not to lose track of ongoing efforts by *jihadists*, most of whom never set foot in Syria, to launch terrorist strikes across Europe. In fact, this is in tune with Ayman al-Zawahiri recent advice to Al Qaeda's followers worldwide, stating that the Syria *jihad* holds priority, but at the same time underscoring that "all Mujahid brothers must consider targeting the interests of the western Zionist-Crusader alliance in any part of the world as their foremost duty."⁵

Received 7 January 2014; accepted 13 January 2014.

Address correspondence to Dr. Petter Nesser, FFI's Terrorism Research Group, Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), P.O. Box 25, 2027, Kjeller, Norway. E-mail: petter.nesser@ffi.no

Sources and Methods

This chronology is based on media sources, expert interviews, and judicial papers. The Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) monitors international media to keep track of *jihadist* terrorist incidents in Europe. Media sources have a bad reputation for sensationalism and inaccuracies. However, it is important to remember that media is a tremendous tool in terrorism research. Media rarely misses out on significant events and several journalists are de facto terrorism experts, with access primary sources within law enforcement and even terrorists. In addition to media sources I have collected judicial papers which in general must be considered a good source in democracies. Last, I have consulted academics and security officials in countries where plots occurred, as they generally possess unique local insights.

All sources involve margins of error and potential bias. For example, journalists may ignore facts to pursue an angle, security officials may want to exaggerate a threat, academics may possess theoretical bias, and judicial sources may miss out on international aspects of plots. Therefore, I have tried to gauge each source critically, while triangulating them where possible.

Furthermore, I utilize a categorization system developed in Nesser (2008).⁶ As information on terrorist incidents rarely is complete I categorize them according to the extent to which they fulfilled the following criteria of documentation: (1) known *jihadist* perpetrator(s), (2) identified target, and (3) solid evidence (bomb-materials, suicide notes).⁷ Then, well-documented incidents were categorized as “category 1” cases (C1), whereas less documented incidents were defined as “category 2” (C2) and “category 3” cases (C3). I have found that in most cases, the level of documentation corresponds with the seriousness of terrorist plots.

The reason I introduced this system is to provide a nuanced sense of the threat, make sure to register all serious plots, and not miss out on plots that seemed insignificant at first, but turned out to be serious when additional information surfaced. The time factor is crucial when assessing terrorist plots. An attack may look quite different when time passes and new information comes to the fore. For example, it took nearly six years to establish that the 2004 Madrid bombings were hardly the sole work of homegrown terrorists, but rather connected to Al Qaeda via a Moroccan handler named Amer Azizi.⁸

Plot Chronology⁹

C1: In January 2008, in a counterterrorism operation known as “Cantata,” Spanish authorities arrested a group of Pakistanis and two Indians suspected of planning suicide bomb attacks on the transport system in Barcelona, in connection with a visit to several European countries by Pakistan’s president Pervez Musharraf. Prosecutors believed attacks in Spain were to coincide with attacks in Germany, France, Portugal, and the U.K. (all contributors to the International Security Assistance Force [ISAF] in Afghanistan). Spanish police raided several sites and confiscated computers and bomb-making materials, in addition to ideological texts and propaganda. The suspects were believed to be under the influence of the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) led by Baitullah Meshud. Alleged leaders of the cell were identified as Mahroof Ahmed M. and Mohammad Ayud Elahi B.¹⁰

C3: In February 2008 Danish authorities apprehended several individuals from Muslim backgrounds suspected of plans to assassinate one of the cartoonists behind the 2005 Mohammed caricatures. The head of the Danish police security service (PET) said

- the purpose of the arrests was to intercept concrete murder plans at an early stage. Reportedly the group of suspects included both Danish nationals and foreigners. Two Tunisians and a Dane were arrested. There was not sufficient evidence to prosecute them. The Tunisians were expelled from the country, whereas the Dane was released.¹¹
- C2: In April 2008 U.K. police arrested the 19-year-old convert Andrew Ibrahim in Bristol. Raiding his apartment police confiscated homemade explosives (HTMD), and equipment for the manufacturing of detonators. In 2009, he was convicted of plotting a bomb attack against the local Broadmed Shopping Centre. The son of an English mother and an Egyptian Coptic Christian father, Ibrahim was described as a shy boy with a strong interest in music. He used to dye his hair, had several piercings, and was known to pursue a drug habit. During 2005–2006, he converted to Islam and became a *salafist*. The conversion coincided approximately with his parents' divorce, after which he dropped out of school, lived for a while in a hostel for homeless people, began to attend mosques, and accessed sermons by radical preachers online.¹²
- C2: In May 2008, the 22-year-old convert Nicky Reilly attempted to detonate three bombs in a restaurant in Exeter. One of the devices exploded while Reilly was preparing it inside the restaurant's toilet. Suffering from Asperger's Syndrome and obsessive compulsive disorder, Reilly attempted to overdose at 16 after feeling rejected by his father. Reilly converted during 2002–2003 after his girlfriend ended their relationship and following another attempt to commit suicide. He befriended local Kurdish immigrants and learned the Kurdish language. A Kurdish woman he met online reportedly encouraged him to carry out the bombing. He was also influenced by Pakistani radicals and online propaganda.¹³
- C3: On 11 September 2008 French police arrested five North Africans in the city of Rennes suspected of forming a terrorist cell.¹⁴
- C2: In December 2008 Italian police arrested two Moroccans, Rachid I. (31) and Gafir A. (42), believed to be plotting bomb attacks against military barracks in Milan, police stations, a supermarket and a nightclub's car park in Lombardy. Government officials described the pair as self-starters, who had tried to connect with Al Qaeda networks in Iraq and Afghanistan before deciding to prepare attacks in Italy on their own. The plotters had not moved beyond reconnaissance and researching bomb-making and attack techniques, at the time when they were intercepted.¹⁵
- C1: In December 2008 French authorities intercepted alleged plans by Rany A., Nadir B., and Adrien to execute a car bomb attack against the headquarters of France's domestic intelligence service (DST) in Paris. The supposed leader of the group Rany A. had made several trips to Syria trying, but failing to join the insurgency in Iraq, and he reportedly connected with militants in Algeria attempting to obtain explosives. He also called for Holy War against France on the radical Islamist website dubbed minbar-sos.com. The three implicated were convicted to between four and six years in prison.¹⁶
- C2: In April 2009 U.K. authorities expressed concerns about possible Al Qaeda-style mass casualty attacks planned for the Easter holidays. Gordon Brown was quoted describing the suspected plot as "very big." Police arrested 12 suspects in a series of raids across Northern England. The chief constable of Greater Manchester police announced that 11 of those arrested were Pakistani nationals, and 10 of them were allegedly holding student visas. U.K. authorities believed the suspects had planned to mount suicide-bomb attacks against soft targets including shopping centers, a train station and a nightclub in Manchester. It later became known that the plotters were linked to a Norway-based cell plotting an attack in Denmark, as well as to the Afghan Najibullah Zazi plotting to bomb the New York Subway in September 2009.¹⁷

- C3: In May 2009 Italian police arrested two Islamists believed to be plotting suicide operations in France and the United Kingdom, including Charles De Gaulle airport. The suspects were identified as Bassam A. (62) and Raphael G. The former, who was Syrian, had acted as imam in a radical mosque in Belgium, whereas Raphael G. was described as a computer expert. Both men had travelled between Europe, Afghanistan and Pakistan and they were linked to the female Internet *jihadi* Malika al-Aroud (widow of one of the Tunisian suicide bombers who killed Ahmad Shah Massoud 9 September 2001). The terrorist suspects had also been involved in smuggling Syrians and Palestinians into Italy, presumably for terrorist purposes.¹⁸
- C1: In October 2009 the Libyan Mohammed Game attempted to break into the Santa Barbara military barracks in Milan and detonated a small explosives device at the entrance while guards tried to stop him. The attacker suffered serious fire wounds, and one guard had minor injuries. An Egyptian national and another Libyan were arrested suspected of helping the Game acquire chemical materials and assemble a bomb. Mohammed Game was known to harbor radical Islamist views, but investigations did not appear to reveal ties to organized *jihadi* networks.¹⁹
- C1: In October 2009 U.S. authorities arrested two men suspected of plotting a car bomb attack against the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*. One of them, Tahawwur Hussain Rana (48), was of Pakistani origin and the other, David Coleman Headley (49) was an American citizen who had lived in Pakistan. Both men had graduated from a Pakistani military academy, and were believed to maintain ties with and receive instructions from a Pakistani militant known as Ilyas al-Kashmiri. Kashmiri apparently had ties to Al Qaeda and headed the Pakistani-based Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami (HUJI).²⁰
- C3: In October 2009 Adlène H. (32), a French-Algerian nuclear physicist, was arrested after discussing terrorist attacks against French businesses and military facilities with representatives of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) online. Supposedly he communicated with the group via e-mails. The case received much attention and raised concerns because the suspect was employed at a nuclear research center overseen by the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), and thus he was believed to possess unique knowledge and capacities that could be utilized for terrorism purposes.²¹
- C1: In December 2009 a Nigerian mechanical engineering student, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, attempted to smuggle a homemade bomb device hidden inside his underpants onboard a U.S. flight from Amsterdam to Detroit. He managed to cause a small explosion, but fortunately, it only injured the terrorist and did not tear a hole in the aircraft. The Nigerian had studied in the United Kingdom and connected with *jihadists* on travels to Yemen. Investigations revealed that he had received training, support and instructions from Al Qaeda's Saudi branch, Al Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and its ideologue Anwar al-Awlaki.²²
- C1: In January 2010 a Danish-Somali named Mohammed Geele broke into the home of one of the cartoonists behind the 2005 Mohammed caricatures, Kurt Westergaard. Armed with a knife and an axe Geele threatened to kill Westergaard who was forced to enter his panic room, after which Danish police rendered the would-be-assassin harmless by shooting him in his knee and shoulder. Geele had ties to the Al Qaeda-associated al-Shabaab movement, although there was little to suggest he acted on direct orders from the group.²³
- C1: In February 2010 U.K. authorities arrested Bengali Rajib Karim, a BA computer expert for communicating with AQAP leader Anwar al-Awlaki via encrypted e-mails, and receiving instructions to smuggle explosives or a person carrying explosive onboard a

transatlantic airliner. Rajib Karim (31) was convicted to 30 years in prison, by a British court in 2011.²⁴

- C1: In May 2010 the female Pakistani student Roshonara Choudry stabbed the British MP Stephen Timms. She had dropped out of English and communications studies at Kings College and was inspired by the Yemen-based Al Qaeda–linked *jihadist* ideologue Anwar al-Awlaki via lectures downloaded from the Internet. In a police interview she said she wanted to become a martyr and that she was fulfilling an obligation and standing up for Muslims suffering in Iraq. Choudry apparently radicalized and prepared on her own, and at the time of writing investigations had not tied her to any specific *jihadist* organizations.²⁵
- C1: In July 2010 the Norwegian police security service (PST) arrested a 39-year-old Uighur and a 31-year-old Uzbek suspected of having ties to Al Qaeda and planning terrorist attacks. In a simultaneous operation German BKA arrested a 37-year-old Norway-based Iraqi Kurd linked to the plotters while he was on vacation in Germany. The cell had produced a small quantity of peroxide-based explosives, and appeared to have been plotting attacks against *Jyllands-Posten* or Kurt Westergaard. It was alleged that the ringleader Mikael Davud had received training in Waziristan and received orders from Al Qaeda’s former Chief of External Operations Saleh al-Somali. Investigations also indicated links to active terrorist networks in the United Kingdom and the United States, most prominently the Afghan Najibullah Zazi who attempted to bomb the New York subway on orders from Al Qaeda during 2009.²⁶
- C1: In September 2010 a Chechen living in Belgium, Lors Doukaiev (24), accidentally set off an explosion inside a Copenhagen hotel, suffering minor injuries. Police believed that the explosion occurred while he was preparing a letter bomb with the strength of a hand grenade, to be sent to the Danish Newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*. The Chechen said he had acquired bomb-making skills when living in Chechnya, was associated with radical Islamist networks in the German city of Bremen, and had tickets for a bus en-route Belgium two hours after the explosion occurred (indicating he did not plan a suicide mission).²⁷
- C2: In September 2010 U.K. press reported that European security services had disrupted advanced (but not imminent) plans to launch terrorist attacks in Britain, France, and Germany, by a Pakistan-based, Al Qaeda- and Taliban-linked terrorist network. Allegedly, the plans involved paramilitary modus operandi, inspired by the 2008 Mumbai attacks. According to security officials, a “senior Al Qaeda leader” going by the name of Younis al-Mauretani was a central organizer of the plot. He was in contact with Hamburg-based *jihadists* who had been going to Pakistan for training. Reportedly, a member of the 11 September Hamburg cell still at large, Said Bahaji, met with people involved in the plans.²⁸
- C3: In October 2010 Swedish police was tipped off about alleged plans for a bomb attack in central Gothenburg, possibly against the premises of the security service (Säpo). Two individuals were arrested in connection with the threat. They had previously been questioned by Swedish authorities in connection with the Mohammed caricatures controversy.²⁹
- C3: In November 2010 Belgian authorities arrested 11 Islamists in Antwerp suspected of planning attacks against unspecified targets in Belgium. One security official told the press that the suspects had held general discussions about attacks against Jewish interests and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) vehicles with associates in Germany and the Netherlands, but no targets or the time of an attack had been specified. Investigators looked into links between the suspects and a Belgian Islamist organization

dubbed Sharia4Belgium as well as the Ansar al-Mujahidin website. The investigations also involved arrests in Spain, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia.³⁰

- C3: In December 2010 Dutch police arrested 12 Somali men aged 19–48 in Rotterdam suspected of plotting a terrorist attack in the Netherlands. An anonymous intelligence source told the Dutch newspaper *Telegraaf* that some of those arrested planned to use rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) to attack an Apache helicopter at Gilze-Rijen air base near Rotterdam.³¹
- C2: In December 2010 U.K. authorities disrupted a plot to launch bomb or guerilla-style shooting attacks against London Stock Exchange, Parliament, the U.S. embassy, and the mayor of London. The plot involved nine Britons of Pakistani and Bengali origin who belonged to local Islamist extremist environments including Islam4UK, and had become increasingly radicalized in the time leading up to the arrests. They had partaken in fierce protesting against the English Defence League (EDL), before becoming followers of Yemen-based Al Qaeda ideologue Anwar al-Awlaki and AQAP. Reportedly, several members of the network were discussing going abroad to obtain additional training to pursue a terrorist campaign.³²
- C1: In December 2010 a Swedish-Iraqi suicide bomber blew himself up in central Stockholm, wounding two passersby. The suspect, a 28-year-old Iraqi, had prepared a written martyrdom testament and one audio-recording stating he wanted to avenge Swedish military participation in Afghanistan and mocking of Islam by the Swedish artist Lars Vilks. The bomber carried some explosives on him, and had placed others in a car. The explosions occurred near a busy shopping street during Christmas preparations and were potentially very lethal. Fortunately, the bombs went off prematurely and several failed to explode, something that prevented mass casualties. The suicide bomber immigrated to Sweden with his family when he was ten. He later studied in the United Kingdom where he is believed to have become radicalized and traveled in the Middle East during the time leading up to the attack. Iraqi security sources later claimed that the suicide bomber had gone through a three-month training course apparently organized by the Islamic State of Iraq (Al Qaeda in Iraq). Investigations have also revealed links to a possible accomplice in Scotland who probably helped finance the attack.³³
- C1: In December 2010 five men were arrested in Sweden and Denmark suspected of preparing a “Mumbai style” terrorist attack (reference to the 2008 guerilla-style attacks against a hotel and public spaces in Mumbai by Pakistani militants) against the offices of the Copenhagen newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*. The Danish Police Security Service (PET) believed the suspects planned to storm the localities of the newspaper and kill as many as possible. It is also highly conceivable that the plotters could have created a prolonged hostage taking situation. During arrests police seized a machine gun and plastic strips suitable to be used as handcuffs. Three of the suspects were Swedish nationals, one was a Tunisian citizen and the last was an Iraqi asylum seeker living in Denmark.³⁴
- C2: In January 2011 the Kosovar Arid Uka shot and killed two American soldiers at Frankfurt international airport and wounded several others. He entered a shuttle bus and started firing at servicemen sitting in seats while shouting the *jihadist* slogan “Allahu Akbar” (God is greater). His gun jammed and Uka escaped, but was later hunted down and captured by two of the victimized soldiers. Uka was allegedly triggered by a feature movie displaying American soldiers raping a young Iraqi girl. He had contacts with well-known *salafist* in Frankfurt and other parts of Germany via the Internet, but did not seem to be part of an organized group. He came from a religious family and did relatively well in school, but suffered from psychological problems. Reportedly he

withdrew from social contacts in the months leading up to the attacks, spending much of his time surfing *jihadist* websites.³⁵

- C1: In April 2011 German authorities disrupted a purported Al Qaeda–linked terrorist cell headed by the Moroccan Abdeladim El-Kebir, who had attended training in Waziristan, Pakistan, and who presumably was tasked by Al Qaeda handler Younis al-Mauritani to carry out a mass casualty bomb attack in Germany. El-Kebir reportedly recruited three other cell members and started assembling bomb-making materials and scouting targets before the cell was intercepted. In May, one individual referred to as Halil S. escaped the first arrests and tried to carry on with a hand weapons based operation on his own seeking advice and receiving instructions from Anwar al-Awlaki and AQAP in Yemen.³⁶
- C1: In September 2011 U.K. security services launched an operation against a terrorist cell composed of British-Pakistanis believed to be plotting a series of suicide bombings in the United Kingdom. The cell was supposedly headed by Irfan Naseer, who had attended Harakat al-Mujahidin training camps and connected with Al Qaeda handlers in Waziristan during spring 2011, and the bombs were possibly supposed to be made from ammonium nitrate.³⁷
- C3: In September 2011 four people were arrested on suspicion of plans to assassinate the Swedish artist Lars Vilks at an exhibition at a Røda Sten cultural center in Aarhus, Denmark. The alleged plotters (Kulan Mohamud A., Mahamud Abdi A., Mahmood Salar S. and Mohamud Abdi W). were of Somali and Iraqi origins and aged between 23 and 26. Reportedly, one of the men did online research into Vilks’s self-announced visit at the exhibition, and bought a pocket knife believed to be a potential weapon. The evidence was not sufficient to have the alleged plotters convicted on terrorism or murder charges and they were only fined for carrying a knife in a public place.³⁸
- C3: In September 2011, Norwegian media reported that the Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard cancelled his participation in a book release at Litteraturhuset cultural center in central Oslo due to an alleged assassination plot. Officially the artist cancelled due to his health condition, but he indicated to the press that this was not the real reason. Neither Danish nor Norwegian security services provided any additional explanations besides stating that Westergaard was living under constant threat. Coinciding with the news about Westergaard’s return to Denmark, heavily armed operators from the police’s emergency response unit (Delta) arrested a well-known former criminal for a minor traffic offence. Reportedly, police believed that he had access to automatic weapons and explosives suitable for assassination plans. Although the suspect was not identified in the media, likely it was Arfan B., a Norwegian-Pakistani criminal turned Islamist, who was prosecuted and convicted of aiding and abetting a shooting against the Oslo Synagogue in 2006. He was also prosecuted for alleged terrorist plans against the U.S. embassy the same year, but acquitted.³⁹
- C1: In March 2012 the young French-Algerian Mohammed Merah executed a series of single actor shooting attacks in Montauban and Toulouse, Southern France. Merah first killed three French soldiers in two separate assaults with an automatic pistol, approaching and escaping the attack scene on a motorbike. Using a similar *modus operandi* he then launched a horrendous attack on a Jewish school, killing one teacher and three children. Merah was first believed to be a so-called lone wolf, but investigations revealed that he had interacted with an extremist network known as Forsane Alizza in France, and attended training camps in Waziristan, Pakistan. Merah was rounded up and killed by security forces after a 30-hour siege. He told police investigators he acted on behalf of Al Qaeda.⁴⁰

- C1: In June 2012, a gang composed of British-Pakistani and British-Bengal Islamist extremists from Birmingham prepared a terrorist attack against a rally organized by the right-wing, anti-Islam extremist organization English Defence League (EDL) in Dewsbury, U.K. The group was discovered by coincidence during a routine traffic control, driving from Dewsbury to Birmingham after learning that the EDL rally had ended early. One of their cars contained a number of knives, machetes, swords and a sawn-off shot gun, in addition to an improvised explosive made out of fire-works and nails and ball bearings meant to function as shrapnel. The militants admitted intent to attack EDL on the grounds that the organization had insulted Prophet Mohammed, and the plotters received lengthy prison sentences.⁴¹
- C2: In April 2012 U.K. antiterrorism police arrested five men aged between 21 and 30 of in Luton who were suspected of plotting terrorist attacks. Three of them were of Pakistani origin and one was from a Bengali family background. According to press reports, those arrested had been involved in a wide range of activities encouraging and supporting militancy terrorist acts, but there were also reports that they had pursued a concrete plan to launch an attack on a British military facility using an improvised explosive delivered by a model car. The alleged leader of the cell presumably received instructions from Al Qaeda in Pakistan, whereas the “second-in-command” traveled to Pakistan and appeared to be in charge of recruiting cell members for training abroad. The plotters were in possession of several Al Qaeda training manuals, including AQAP’s *Inspire Magazine* promoting simple “do-it-yourself”-attacks.⁴²
- C2: In May 2012, two Danish-Somali brethren aged 18 and 23 were arrested in Copenhagen and Aarhus, respectively, on the suspicion that they were plotting a terrorist attack. The older brother had attend a training camp run by al-Shabaab in Somalia from January to February and Danish security services considered it necessary to intervene to avert terrorist acts, although it was not clear from the case what type of attack was being planned, and where it was going to be launched.⁴³
- C2: In July 2012, U.K. authorities disrupted a plot by convert Richard Dart (29) and two accomplices, Imran Mahmood and Jahangor Alom, to kill U.K. intelligence officials in Royal Wootton Bassett, including “MI5 and MI6 heads.” Mahmood and Jahangor had received training in Pakistan over a two-year period and tried to recruit others to Pakistan training camps. Dart’s radicalization supposedly began through his interaction with an Islamist extremist group and website called Muslims against Crusades. The plotters were secretive and cautious, communicating in sign-language and codes to avoid detection, indicating some level of professionalism.⁴⁴
- C2: Between 2011 and 2013, information from press sources and the well-informed *Long War Journal* blog, suggested that Al Qaeda had planned attacks against the 2012 London Olympics, employing a cell composed of young Somali-Britons dubbed “London Boys.” Supposedly, the plotters had received training by al-Shabaab in Somalia and were also supposed to attack U.K. schools and hotels. Allegedly, Osama bin Laden had ordered the attacks, which were coordinated by al-Shabaab leaders and also involved the wife of London bomber Jermaine Lindsay, “White Widow” Samantha Lewthwaite.⁴⁵
- C3: In March 2012, a Shi’a imam was killed in an arson attack on a mosque in Brussels. A 46-year-old family father armed with an axe forced himself inside the building, attacked the imam and set fire to the mosque using fuel. Witnesses at the scene said the attacker was a *salafist* and claimed he shouted Sunni slogans and cries related to the conflict in Syria on his way out of the mosque.⁴⁶

- C2: In August 2012, Spanish and French authorities made coordinated arrests of suspected terrorists hailing from Chechnya, Turkey, and Dagestan. They were suspected of plotting terrorist attacks in Gibraltar, possibly using para gliders to bomb a shopping center. The suspects were in possession of explosives and suspicious videos. The purported ringleader, a Dagestani former Russian special soldier was believed to have connected with Al Qaeda and the Uzbek Islamic Jihad Union in Waziristan, Pakistan in 2010, and to have taken part in terrorism-related activities.⁴⁷
- C1: In September 2012, two radical Islamists threw a hand grenade into a kosher supermarket in a Paris suburb. One of them, a former delinquent turned religious was rounded up and shot dead in an exchange of fire with the police early October. Jeremie Sidney (33) had become radicalized in jail and joined a militant network involved in recruitment for the Syria insurgency and *jihadist* propaganda. From Sidney's home, police investigators retrieved what looked like a target list of Jewish associations.⁴⁸
- C3: In February 2013 an individual dressed as a mailman approached the home of former journalist and a fiercely outspoken Islam-critic Lars Hedgaard (70) in Copenhagen, and attempted to kill him with a handgun. Reportedly, the attacker had a foreign appearance and fired one shot that missed Hedgaard's head, after which the gun malfunctioned in an attempt to fire another. The attacker then fled the scene and has not been arrested or identified since. Hedgaard has been a highly controversial figure in Danish public debate and even went to trial on racism charges based on his harsh Islam critique. However, he was freed from the charges by the Danish High Court. No Islamist network has taken responsibility for the attack.⁴⁹
- C2: In February 2013 Moroccan Mohammed E. was arrested in Valencia, Spain on suspicion of plotting a global *jihad*-inspired attack on public figures or other targets in Spain or other European countries. The suspect had attempted to obtain explosives and firearms and investigators believed he was inspired by Mohammed Merah who launched attacks in Toulouse and Montauban in March 2012. According to press reports, there were also indications that Mohammed E. had intentions to travel to Gaza aiming to launch an attack on Israeli interests.⁵⁰
- C2: In March 2013, three radical Islamists were detained in the South France city of Marignane near Marseilles, accused of plotting a terrorist attack on French soil. Government officials told reporters they believed the attack was supposed to be a tribute to Mohammed Merah. The DST confiscated automatic weapons and explosives in the counterterrorism operation.⁵¹
- C2: In March 2013, German authorities arrested four radical *salafists* believed to be planning and preparing the assassination of right-wing politician and leader of the Pro-NRW Party, Markus Beisicht. Police raids were launched against three radical Islamist associations dubbed Dawa FFM, Islamische Audios, and An-Nussrah, which all have an online presence and pursue fund-raising, recruitment, and propaganda purposes. Two of the suspected terrorists were apprehended while driving a car near the politician's residence, and police confiscated one firearm and explosives among the suspects' belongings.⁵²
- C1: On 22 May 2013, two Britons of Nigerian decent, Michael Adebolajo (Mujaahid Abu Hamza) (28) and Michael Adebowale (22), killed a soldier of the British Army, Drummer Lee Rigby, in proximity of the Royal Artillery Barracks in Woolwich, southeast London. The assailants ran Rigby down with a car before hacking him to death with knives and a meat cleaver, attempting to decapitate the victim while shouting "Allahu Akbar." The killers remained at the murder scene and talked to bystanders

while allowing them to film. They said the attack was aimed at the British soldier as revenge for Muslims he had killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Investigation revealed that Adebolajo had been a longtime part of the U.K. Islamist scene surrounding al-Muhajiroun spin-offs and Anjem Choudary, and that he had been arrested in Kenya in 2010 supposedly on his way to attend training with the al-Shabaab movement in Somalia.⁵³

- C2: On 27 May 2013, only five days after the killing of Drummer Lee Rigby, a convert referred to as Alexandre D. attacked a French soldier patrolling a train and subway traffic hub in the La Défense financial area of Paris. The attacker jumped the guard and stabbed him with a box-cutter in the neck. He was known to the police as a fundamentalist who had been increasingly radicalized over the last few years, but has yet to be connected to an organized group at the time of writing. The attack was believed to have been inspired or triggered by the U.K. soldier attack days before.
- C2: In June 2013 French security services apprehended six individuals aged between 22 and 38 suspected of plotting attacks on public figures. Four of the suspects held French citizenships whereas one hailed from Benin and another from Comoros. One prosecutor told the press that the plotters represented the “biggest terror threat” since the *Group Islamique Armée* [Armed Islamic Group] (GIA) attacks in France during the 1990s.⁵⁴
- C2: In June 2013 the purported head of the Sharia4Italy network, Anas El A., was arrested by Italian police, believed to be planning an attack. The suspect had applauded the murder of Drummer Lee Rigby online and conducted reconnaissance of the central train station and military barracks in Brescia, Italy, via Google Maps. According to press reports he had previously announced his hatred of the West and Jews because he had been harassed after the 9/11 attacks. Reportedly, he had also distributed training and explosives manuals online and shown an interest in launching attack in other parts of Italy and France. Moreover, he was involved in support activism and recruitment for the insurgency in Syria.⁵⁵
- C2: In June 2013, German antiterrorism police raided addresses in Stuttgart, Munich, and Danau to intercept an alleged assassination plot by Tunisian Islamists. The police confiscated one or several model aircrafts powerful enough to carry explosives in the raid. The operation was prompted by intelligence that Islamists were plotting to use remote control model aircrafts as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) to deliver bombs onto unspecified targets.⁵⁶
- C2: In October 2013, British MI5 intercepted four individuals believed to be plotting a Mumbai-style terrorist attack in central London. The alleged plotters were young British men hailing from Turkey, Algeria, Azerbaijan, and Pakistan. Apparently, they had actively been trying to obtain weapons suitable for a guerilla-style attack.⁵⁷ Reportedly, the terrorist suspects had returned from Syria in recent times, and the plot may be the first in Europe to involve foreign fighters having joined the armed struggle against the Assad-regime after 2011.⁵⁸

Concluding Remarks and Observations

Based on this collection of *jihadi* terrorist plots in Western Europe since 2008 I draw some preliminary conclusions.

First, *jihadi* attack activity continues to grow in Europe despite the militants' heavy involvement in multiple conflicts, in Af-Pak, North and West Africa, the Caucasus and the

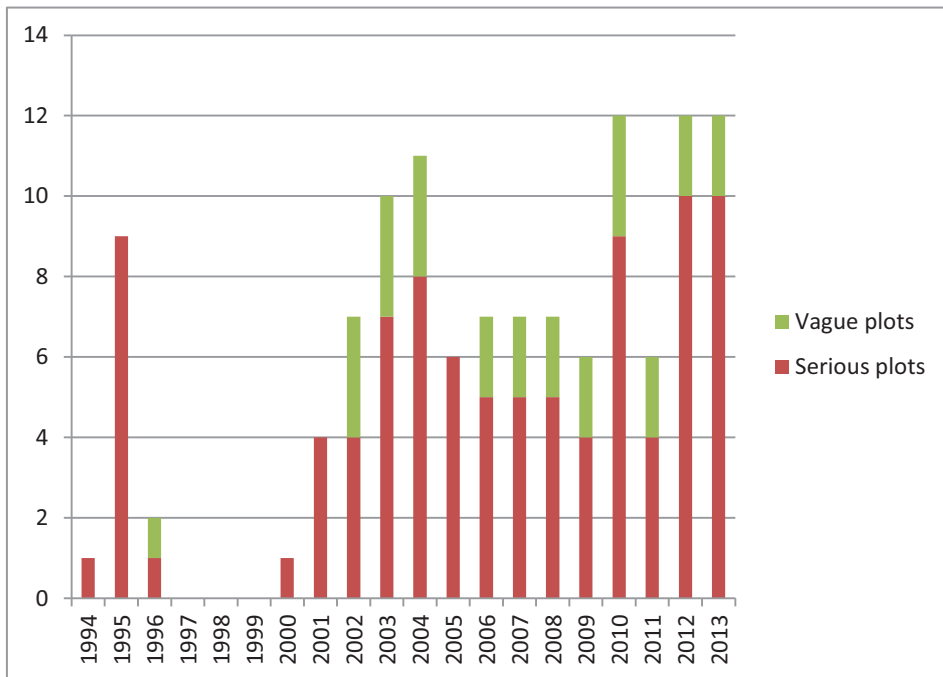


Figure 1. Jihadist terrorist activity in Europe 1994–2013 ($N = 120$). (Color figure available online).

Middle East. This is counterintuitive, especially when we consider statements by Al Qaeda's central leadership urging followers to prioritize the struggle in Syria. The sustained growth in Europe *jihadist* plots is also somewhat puzzling if we consider that the main target of global *jihad*, the United States, appears to have experienced a slight decrease in the number of domestic plots by *jihadists* after 2010.⁵⁹ There have also been some interesting developments in the geographical distribution of terrorist plots by Islamist militants in Western Europe, which I will come back to.

Second I argue it is noteworthy that most plots still seem to be part of organized extremist groups and terrorist networks (i.e., very few plots involved totally independent “lone wolves”).

Third, quite a few plots (and more than before 2008) had some kind of connection to Al Qaeda's regional affiliates in Yemen, Iraq, Somalia, and Algeria.

Last, despite the fact that many of its leaders and central operatives have been killed or captured, Al Qaeda's central organization in Pakistan appears to have had a hand in staging Europe plots until quite recently.

Figure 1 illustrates variation in *jihadist* plot activity in Europe since 1994. Numbers before 2008 are based on Nesser (2008), but differ slightly, as I have continuously included or removed plots from my chronology based on new information and analyses.

Figure 1 shows peaks in terrorist plotting in connection with France's 1990s involvement in the Algerian Civil War, the 2003 Iraq war, and an upswing in attack activity in connection with the 2005 Danish Mohammed Cartoons. Furthermore, it shows a substantial increase in the number of incidents between 2008 and 2013.

The latest increase came amid several major developments that were bound to influence the threat from transnational *jihadism* one way or another: the “Arab Spring,” the death

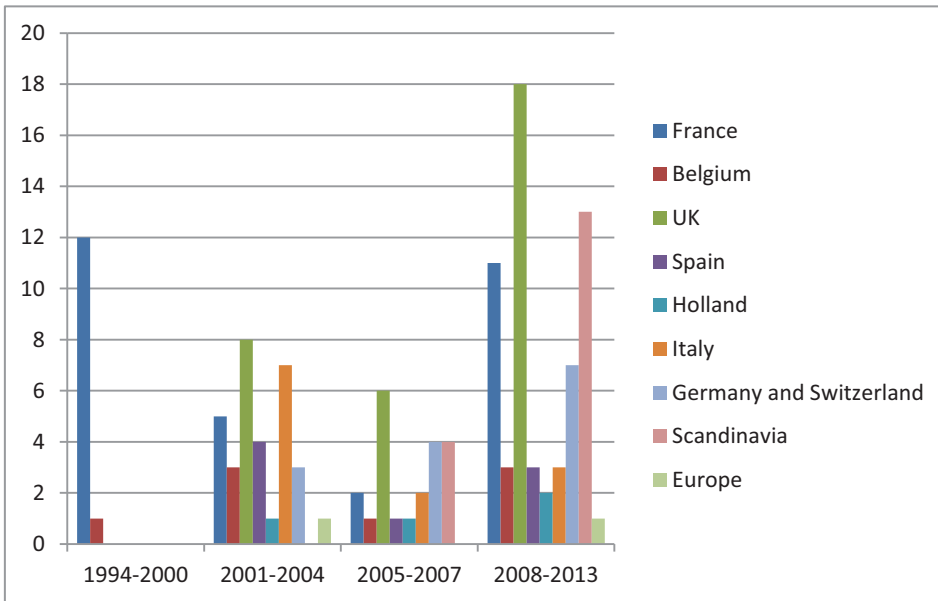


Figure 2. Geographical distribution of terrorist plots 1994–2013 (serious and vague plots).⁶⁰ (Color figure available online).

of Osama bin Laden, and the weakening of Al Qaeda's Af-Pak networks, and last but not least, the proliferation of *jihadism* in social media.

For now, it seems as if the Middle East turmoil and the jihadist social media mobilization may have revitalized Al Qaeda and likeminded movements, and that the militants continue to possess both the will and capacity to strike in the West. At least this appears to be the case in Europe.

Based on the current chronology and Nesser (2008)⁶¹ I would also like to highlight some evolutions in the geographical distribution of *jihadist* plots in Western Europe. Figure 2 provides a rough estimate of where attacks were going to be launched in the region between 1994 and 2013.

The overview shows that central European states with a history of involvement in Muslim world affairs clearly have been most exposed to plots over time. This is particularly the case with the United Kingdom and France, former colonial powers in Muslim lands that have been involved in military campaigns in Muslim countries until recently.

Similarly, Italy and Germany also experienced quite a few plots. However, as will be shown in a forthcoming study, plots in Germany and Italy tended to be vaguer than in the United Kingdom and France, and plots in these countries more often targeted American or Jewish interests and symbols, relatively speaking.⁶²

It is also noteworthy that all of the most exposed countries have faced serious challenges of radicalization among their respective Muslim Diasporas, and proliferation of support networks for Islamist insurgencies across the Muslim world.

However, as illustrated by the plot distribution chart, plots have occurred all across Western Europe in the time period surveyed; in Spain, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, as well as Scandinavian countries.

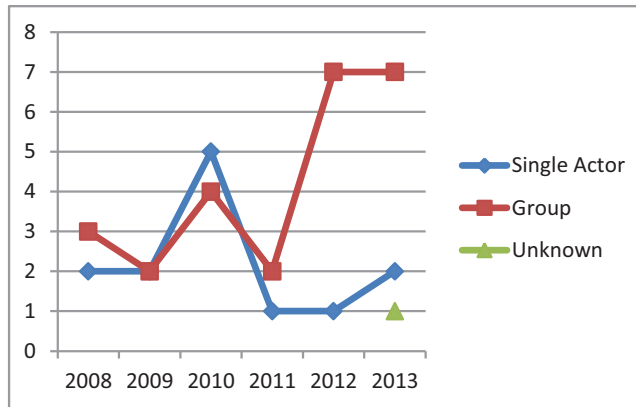


Figure 3. Single actor/group terrorism 2008–2013 (serious plots). (Color figure available online).

The most striking development in the geographical distribution of plots is the steep increase in Scandinavia incidents after 2005. These plots, many of which occurred in Denmark, probably reflected the significance of the 2005 Mohammed cartoons as driver for attacks. However, as shown in the chronology, the Scandinavia plots also included attacks or attack-related activities in Sweden and Norway, something indicating that motivations to strike in Scandinavia was not limited to Denmark and the cartoons.

Actually, in the period 2008–2013 attack activity in Scandinavian countries superseded that of the *ihadists'* archenemy France, and almost reached the level of the United Kingdom. However, it should be noted that Scandinavia experienced more vague plots than the United Kingdom and France, and that the purported terrorists mostly targeted individuals and institutions involved in the Mohammed cartoon controversy, rather than national institutions or the general population.

Another point I would like to highlight from this overview of Europe plots from 2008 and onward, is the relationship between single actor and group terrorism in current trends of *ihadism* in Europe. Before 2008, there were actually only 2–3 plots involving single actor attackers (Richard Reid's attempt to bomb trans-Atlantic Jet in 2001, his co-plotter Sajjid Badat and Mohammed Bouyeri who killed Theo Van Gogh in 2004). The increase in single actor plots is believed to have been caused by *ihadists'* tactical considerations under counterterrorism pressure, as well as ideological justifications by key Al Qaeda ideologues and spokes figures.⁶³ However, as shown in Figures 3 and 4, group plots are still more common.⁶⁴

Last, in the period 2008–2013 Al Qaeda and its local or regional affiliates appear to have played a more significant role than commonly assumed. It is often difficult or impossible to identify, verify and measure the strength of links between terrorist cells in Europe and international Al Qaeda networks based on open sources, and we basically have to rely on informed guesses in most instances. My assessment after going through different source-material related to each plot is that out of altogether 49 plots (C1, C2, and C3), at least 12 were overseen by Al Qaeda central's networks in Pakistan. In addition I found at least seven cases to be linked to Al Qaeda local and regional affiliates in Yemen, Iraq, Somalia, and Algeria.

Furthermore, several purported independent cells and individual attackers were clearly inspired by the ideological figurehead of AQAP, the late Anwar al-Awlaki, and possessed ideological material, propaganda, and operational advice produced by the group, notably

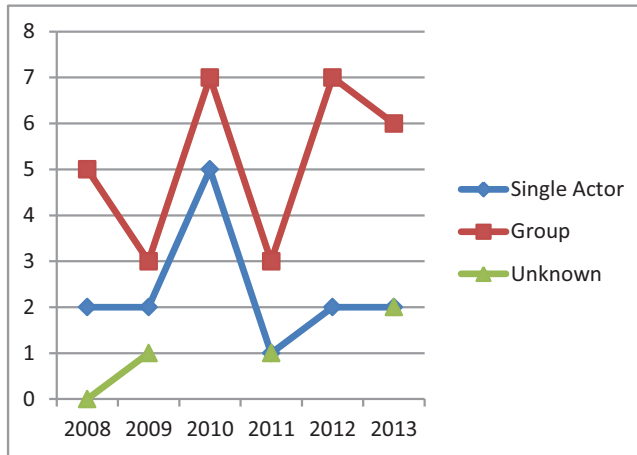


Figure 4. Single actor/group terrorism 2008–2013 (serious and vague plots). (Color figure available online).

Inspire Magazine. Moreover, out of the 30 cases I was not able to tie directly to Al Qaeda or an affiliate by open sources at this point, the plotters were usually embedded in European extremist communities with clear Al Qaeda sympathies and a global *jihad* outlook.

Notes

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3. It has been documented through several studies that the majority of significant *jihadist* plots internationally have had some kind of connection to Al Qaeda’s Af-Pak networks, see, for example, Bruce Hoffman and Fernando Reinares, eds., *Leader-Led Jihad* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming). This may no longer be the so in the European case.

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60. This plot distribution chart should be read with caution. It is based on registration of where it was believed attacks were going to happen in the plots presented. In several cases more than one place of attack is mentioned in the plot description, and in those cases I have counted each mentioning. In some cases it was hard to decide what target country to register. For example, in a 2012 plot uncovered in Spain, the target was most likely Gibraltar (U.K.), but in that particular case I registered both the U.K. and Spain as attack countries. Moreover, the plot distribution sheet should not be confused with an analysis of target selection. The geographical distribution of plots shown here does not necessarily signify the terrorists' target selection. In some cases plots uncovered in one country involved plans to attack international interests in that country, typically U.S., or Israeli/Jewish targets, or plans to launch an attack in another country. U.S. and Jewish targets have generally been much exposed, throughout the region in the time period studied. For a detailed analysis of European *jihadists'* target selection, consult Stenersen and Nesser, "Modus Operandi of Islamist Terrorism in Europe."

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63. Petter Nesser, "Individual Jihadist Operations in Europe: Patterns and Challenges." *CTC Sentinel* 5(1) (2012), pp. 15–18; Petter Nesser, "Research Note: Single Actor Terrorism: Scope, Characteristics and Explanations," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 6(6) (2012).

64. A group plot is here defined as an attack plan that involves more than two or more people, whereas a single actor plans to attack on his own. Single actor attackers rarely operate in complete isolation, and usually have some kind of connection to more or less organized extremist communities or militant networks.