



Two Decades of Jihad in Algeria: the GIA, the GSPC, and Al-Qaida

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Part I: The Afghan Theater

In December 1979, fearing the collapse of communism in Central Asia, the Soviet Union launched a military invasion to restore Soviet control over neighboring Afghanistan. Rather than achieving a quick victory, the Soviets found themselves surrounded by a relentless guerilla adversary. Countless numbers of Afghans joined the Islamic resistance, which was organized into several native mujahideen organizations with headquarters in Peshawar, Pakistan. The flurry of activity in Peshawar caught the attention of the entire Islamic world, far beyond the borders of battered Afghanistan. Groups of foreign Muslims from the Middle East, North Africa, and elsewhere began trickling into Pakistan—some to provide money and weapons the support the fight, others to join the growing corps of “holy warriors” under the lead of the legendary Palestinian Shaykh Dr. Abdullah Azzam.

These early jihadi fighters were of varying nationalities—including Saudis, Egyptians, Yemenis, Libyans, and others. Though the role of Saudis and Egyptians in establishing the Arab-Afghan movement has been the subject of exhaustive examination, groups from other nationalities have played an equally important part—particularly Islamic militants hailing from Algeria. According to the accounts of both Azzam and Usama Bin Laden, in the summer of 1983, the first Arab fighter to be “martyred” in Afghanistan in mid-1983 was “Nouradeen”, an Algerian national who had been studying abroad at an Islamic university in Saudi Arabia. Even though Nouradeen was actually killed by friendly fire from his own comrades, he was nonetheless touted in Arab-Afghan propaganda—such as Azzam’s *Bunyan al-Marsous Magazine*—as a shining example for others and was honored as “the first Arab and Algerian martyr” from the jihad in Afghanistan.¹

For the foreign mujahideen gathering in Pakistan, the major turning point came in early 1985 when Abdullah Azzam reached an agreement with Afghan mujahideen commander Shaykh Abid Rasool Sayyaf to establish an exclusive training camp for Arab mujahideen recruits near the latter’s headquarters in Jaji.² According to mujahideen fighters who were present at the time, “there was talk then about preparing a space for the young Arabs and training them... [we] started establishing a semi-independent camp there... There were about 30 Arabs present, most of them Algerians.”³ Likewise, one of the original instructors at Al-Qaida’s first training facility along the Pakistan-Afghan border—the Al-Sadda camp—was Algerian national Al-Hajj Boudella (currently being held as a detainee in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba).⁴

As Al-Qaida continued to develop from the ashes of the Soviet-Afghan jihad, it grew to heavily depend upon groups of Maghrebi mujahideen recruits arriving from various places in North Africa and Europe. In Peshawar, Algerian mujahideen commander Omar Chaabani (a.k.a. Abu Jaffar al-Jazairi) ran a guesthouse exclusively for Algerian volunteers that was “activated and funded by Usama Bin Laden.”⁵ Abu Jaffar was “close” to Palestinian Al-Qaida commander Abu

¹ Muhammad, Basil. *Al-Ansaru l’Arab fi Afghanistan*. The Committee for Islamic Benevolence Publications; ©1991. Pages 81-82.

² Muhammad, Basil. *Al-Ansaru l’Arab fi Afghanistan*. The Committee for Islamic Benevolence Publications; ©1991. Page 112.

³ Muhammad, Basil. *Al-Ansaru l’Arab fi Afghanistan*. The Committee for Islamic Benevolence Publications; ©1991. Page 111.

⁴ “Government’s Response to Defendant’s Position Paper as to Sentencing Factors.” *United States of America v. Enaam M. Arnaout*. United States District Court Northern District of Illinois Eastern Division. Case #: 02 CR 892. Page 48.

⁵ “Summary of Administrative Review Board Proceedings for ISN 1452.” “Testimony of Detainees and Documents Submitted on their behalf before the Administrative Review Boards.” United States Department of Defense Combatant

Zubaydah al-Falastini and many of Abu Jaffar's recruits ended up at the Khalden training camp overseen by Abu Zubaydah.⁶ According to former Al-Qaida member Jamal al-Fadli:

"[The Algerians] hung around in their group mostly. Not that they didn't mix with other people but they mostly hung around with their group of Algerians... al Farouq camp, for example, everybody can come from different nationalities. They can come and be trained in al-Farouq camp. But for Algerians, at certain times there came a group of Algerians, purely Algerians... they were separate."⁷

In January 1993, eager to put the Afghan jihad in the past, the Pakistani government ordered the closure of Arab mujahideen offices in the country and threatened official deportation to any illegal foreign fighters who attempted to remain in Pakistan. At the time, a spokesman for the Arab-Afghans in Jeddah bemoaned the difficult quandary faced by the mujahideen to either risk returning home and face harassment by local security forces or else "go into Afghanistan permanently."⁸ Consequently, between 1987 and 1993, an estimated 1,000 to 1,500 hardcore foreign mujahideen veterans abandoned their posts in Pakistan and Afghanistan and returned to settle in Algeria.⁹ Many of these men had dreams of bringing their Islamic revolution back with them, and they rallied groups of disaffected Muslim youths inside Algeria who were inspired by the legendary tales of their fellow countrymen in Afghanistan. This younger generation "lionized" the "Afghan" returnees, adopting their unusual, non-native forms of dress and conduct.¹⁰ The sudden influx of so many Afghan-trained mujahideen—matched with the flourishing of a domestic jihadist movement within Algeria itself—would eventually cause dramatic and disastrous consequences.



Algerian Guantanamo Bay detainee Al-Hajj Boudella

Part II: The Founding of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA)

On a more local scale, the origins of the Islamic extremist movement in Algeria can be traced to the year 1982 and a pioneering Islamic militant named Mustafa Bouyali. According to Arab-Afghan spokesman Abu Hamza al-Masri, Bouyali is one of the "most famous" Algerian jihadists and is at "the root of the militant Islamic groups in Algeria in general."¹¹ In the early 1980s, after an ugly dispute with the ruling regime, Bouyali formed a secret terror cell known as the Algerian Islamic Movement (MIA). In a brazen and unprecedented raid, the MIA stole a number of rifles and explosives from a military arms depot and fled to the hinterlands in a bid to wage a guerilla war against the Algerian government.¹² Bouyali was eventually captured by the Algerian military and executed in 1987. London-based mujahideen spokesman Abu Hamza al-Masri has attempted to explain the nature of Bouyali's underground mystique: "He took his struggle to the mountains and he was avoiding the population to the best of his ability. He was little known to the media but his struggle was known of by the Islamic militant groups, some of

Status Review Tribunal (CSRT) and Administrative Review Board (ARB) Documents. April 2006. Page 21978. [See also:](#) French Report. Page 122.

⁶ "Summary of Administrative Review Board Proceedings for ISN 1452." "Testimony of Detainees and Documents Submitted on their behalf before the Administrative Review Boards." United States Department of Defense Combatant Status Review Tribunal (CSRT) and Administrative Review Board (ARB) Documents. April 2006. Page 21978. [See also:](#) French Report. Page 122.

⁷ *United States of America v. Usama Bin Laden et al.* U.S. District Court Case S(7) 98 Cr. 1023; Southern District of New York. February 26, 2001. Pages 1378-1379.

⁸ Evans, Kathy. "Pakistan clamps down on Afghan Mojahedin and Orders Expulsion of Arab Jihad Supporters." *The Guardian (London)*. January 7, 1993. Page 7.

⁹ Compass Media. "Arab veterans of Afghanistan war lead new Islamic Holy War." October 28, 1994.

¹⁰ Dahlburg, John-Thor. "Algerian Veterans the Nucleus for Mayhem." *Los Angeles Times*. August 5, 1996. Part A; Page 11.

¹¹ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 83.

¹² Messaoudi, Khalida and Elizabeth Schemla. *Unbowed*. University of Pennsylvania Press; Philadelphia, PA. ©1998. Page 66.

whom still feel proud if they find a way to relate themselves to him in some way."¹³ Indeed, in a recent edition of its official online magazine, the Algerian Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat (GSPC) has directly referred to its fighters as the "saplings" of Mustafa Bouyali.¹⁴

Many Arab-Afghan veterans who returned to Algeria were disappointed with the lack of progress by Islamist political parties like the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in achieving power. These hardliners, who embraced the "Afghan" philosophy of jihad until victory or martyrdom, scoffed at FIS for being far too moderate and political in its approach. Abdelaziz Belkhadem, a former Algerian parliamentary speaker, explained, "People who had been in Afghanistan said: 'Listen, it's not your method that will give you power. The right way is what we did in Afghanistan, where we broke the Soviet Union into pieces.'"¹⁵ Shortly after the cancellation of the 1992 general elections in Algeria, remaining "Afghans" began defecting from the Islamic Salvation Front in order to form their own enigmatic splinter groups. With the FIS leadership in jail and the party torn between its political and military objectives, these splinter groups grew to define the very essence of the Algerian civil war.

But the Islamic Salvation Front was hardly the only party suffering from a serious identity crisis. By 1991, internal rifts were likewise proliferating among "Afghan"-trained Algerian militants themselves. Factions within the Islamic revolutionary movement began drifting in directions so extreme, or "Takfiri", that even the leaders of Al-Qaida found them to be distasteful. One such splinter group emerged calling itself "al-Muwahhidin", which "received their guidance and the main corpus of their teachings from a shadowy figure known as Dr. Ahmad."¹⁶ In 1991, the "mysterious Dr. Ahmad" returned to Algeria from Peshawar, Pakistan with "a large group" and began making bizarre, fanatical interpretations of Islamic law—including "label[ing]... everyone in Algeria a kaafir, including those who called democracy kufr and labeled the leaders to be kuffar."¹⁷ Another such Takfiri jihadist faction established a grip over the Algerian town of Baab al-Waad headed by "Abu Aminah [who] came from Peshawar and spent more than five years in Afghanistan."¹⁸

Amid this chaotic struggle for power, a new union of Algerian Islamic extremists began to evolve and coalesce—eventually becoming known as al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya al-Musallaha, or the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). According to Abu Hamza al-Masri, "the GIA formed from a collection of militant groups that all at one time had struggled against the military government of Algeria. Some senior Mujaahidin formed from [Mustafa] Buyali's group and others later followed suit with them. There then appeared scattered groups which were not well known, nor did they have swelling memberships."¹⁹ Between 1989 and 1991, this amalgamation was responsible for executing a series of significant military operations, including attacks in Bilada, Kasaba, Bufarik, and Baraki.²⁰ In August 1991, an initial, though still nameless GIA nucleus was founded under the leadership of commander Nur ad-Din Salaamina.²¹ Three months later, an extremist cell in league with Salaamina and led by Afghan-trained mujahideen commander Tayeb al-Afghani (a.k.a. Aissa Messoudi) launched a stunning raid on an Algerian army barracks in the town of Guemar—an infamous event that has become known since as "the butchery at Guemar."²² (Tayeb al-Afghani would later officially join the GIA and ascended to become one of its most senior leaders). The date of the attack in Guemar—November 29, 1991—is regarded by at least some observers as the unofficial birth date of the Armed Islamic Group.

Following the subsequent deaths of commander Nur ad-Din Salaamina and his official successor Mohammed Alaal, the quickly coalescing GIA network was taken over by Abdelhaqq Layada (a.k.a. Abu Adlane). According to Abu Hamza al-Masri, "when Abu Adlan took over

¹³ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 83.

¹⁴ Abu Mohammed, Salah. "Goodbye, Abu Ibrahim." *Al-Jama'ah Magazine*. Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat (GSPC). Vol. 1; No. 2. January 2005. Page 3. <http://www.salafia-algeria.com/aljamaan02.doc>.

¹⁵ Dahlburg, John-Thor. "Algerian Veterans the Nucleus for Mayhem." *Los Angeles Times*. August 5, 1996. Part A; Page 11.

¹⁶ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 79.

¹⁷ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 81.

¹⁸ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 81.

¹⁹ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 84.

²⁰ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 84.

²¹ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 84.

²² Dahlburg, John-Thor. "Algerian Veterans the Nucleus for Mayhem." *Los Angeles Times*. August 5, 1996. Part A; Page 11.

control of the group, this caused the formation of the core of the GIA, although it didn't have the name yet. This group then did quite a few difficult operations that annoyed the government and... forced other groups to reunite and others to join them or to try to unite the other groups into one mass in other areas."²³ The GIA network was particularly interested in acquiring the allegiance of commander Mansour Meliani, a former top MIA lieutenant under the legendary Mustafa Bouyali.²⁴ In July 1987, amid wide press coverage, Meliani was sentenced to death—a directive that was only to be rescinded two years later in a show of "good faith" by the Algerian government.²⁵ Meliani quickly broke his shaky truce with the government and, on February 1992, organized a brazen raid on a naval base near the capital Algiers by an Afghan-trained squad of mujahideen commandos. The attack killed a navy sailor and wounded two policemen. Meliani was also fingered by Algerian authorities as the mastermind behind the August 26, 1992 bombing of the international airport in Algiers, killing 9 and wounding 123. The accused ringleaders behind the airport bombing also included a commercial airline pilot for the national carrier Air Algerie and an Algiers municipal city official.²⁶ Clearly, by 1992, Mansour Meliani was moving far away from Mustafa Bouyali's early strategy of retreating to the mountains and avoiding innocent casualties at all costs.

Meliani's subsequent capture by the Algerian government in the late summer of 1992 and his replacement by commander Ahmad al-Wud offered the GIA a new opportunity at force consolidation.²⁷ During later media interviews, the former top religious advisor to the GIA, Omar Chikhi, has offered a detailed narrative of the events leading up to the formal establishment of the GIA in October 1992:

"With Djaafar El Afghani [Slim al-Abbasi] as the intermediary, I contacted Abdelhak Layada in Algiers. He had told me of his wish to unify the ranks... He asked me to serve as an interlocutor to convince [former Mustafa Bouyali lieutenant Abdelkader Chebouti] and Mansour Meliani to act under a single leadership. He suggested his house in Baraki for the meeting. At the time, Mansour was in jail. Indeed, but I knew everyone who was active with him and the majority of whom were 'Afghans.' I managed to bring the two parties together. There was Ali Zouabri (Antar Zouabri's brother), Djaafar El Afghani, Abdelhak Layada, Brahim Zekioui, a man named Mounir who was close to Meliani, Fethi, Sid Ahmed, Lahrani, and myself... We had chosen Layada as our emir and Meliani's people were charged with the basic organizational work since they had experience in that area. Lahrani suggested the name Armed Islamic Group. The seal was already ready. He had brought it back from Afghanistan... Layada accepted and announced the creation of the GIA in October 1992 in his house which was called Dar el hadja in Baraki... [Layada] drew up GIA's statutes and charged me with leading it in the wilaya of Bouira. That was the starting point."²⁸

As a result of the landmark October 1992 militant conference, Ahmad al-Wud finally agreed to merge the forces of Mansour Meliani with Abdelhaqq Layada's unified alliance: "From this day, it was called the GIA (Armed Islamic Group). Mr. La`ayaayda became the leader for the GIA and issued a statement which claimed responsibility for large operations all over the country. He then issued the main rule of conduct for the Jama`ah of GIA... From then onwards, the world started to know about the GIA, as the faction began to expand very rapidly and strengthen itself politically."²⁹

A reflection of both the ferocity of the GIA military campaign and the severe counterstrikes by the Algerian government, the reign of individual GIA leaders tended to be brief and end in violence. In June 1993, Abdelhaqq Layada was captured by authorities in neighboring Morocco and extradited home to face criminal charges. Two months later, in August 1993, Layada's replacement 'Isa ibn 'Ammar was killed in a clash with Algerian security forces. Ibn 'Ammar's own appointed successor—Saifullah Jaffar—was himself killed in February

²³ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 84.

²⁴ Ellman, Paul. "Algeria to execute four rebels." *The Guardian* (London). July 11, 1987.

²⁵ Ellman, Paul. "Algeria to execute four rebels." *The Guardian* (London). July 11, 1987.

²⁶ "38 death sentences handed down for airport bomb attack." *Agence France Presse (AFP)*. May 26, 1993.

²⁷ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 85.

²⁸ Tlemcani, Salima and Tayeb Belghiche. "Interview with Omar Chikhi, a founding member of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA)." *El-Watan* (Algiers). April 13, 1999.

²⁹ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 85.

1994 and was thereupon replaced by commander Cherif Gousmi (a.k.a. Abu Abdullah Ahmad).³⁰ The high rate of attrition also meant that the ranks of the GIA were continuously being refilled with increasingly more junior fighters: "the average age of the mujahadeen is 19-20, up to 24. The leaders of the GIA are 27. Occasionally you get an old one who's 30 or 35."³¹

With their wide representation in the GIA, Arab-Afghan veterans helped in large part to define the essential image of the group. GIA propaganda materials—such as the Al-Qitaal newsletter—gave special emphasis to "martyred" Algerian mujahideen "who were Afghanistan veterans." One such dispatch recounted the biography of "Brother Abu Zakariyya" who was "well-known to brothers in Afghanistan" and later was killed during an Algerian government artillery attack in "the fourth zone."³² According to Omar Chikhi, the GIA's former religious affairs advisor, the direct links between Usama Bin Laden and the GIA date back to 1993, when Algerian Arab-Afghans "acted as go-betweens, sending envoys to meet GIA chiefs who did not have satellite phones at the time."³³ Former Al-Qaida member Jamal al-Fadl testified in U.S. federal court in 2001 that the GIA movement was treated as an affiliate of Al-Qaida and had a standing representative within the Al-Qaida organization identified as "Qari Said al-Jazairi."³⁴ In a 1998 report delivered to an Interpol convention in Madrid, the director of the Algerian Judiciary Police likewise charged that bin Laden was directly colluding with the GIA and was responsible for running "a genuine network supplying arms and military equipment to the Algerian guerillas."³⁵

Distancing itself from other Algerian Islamist activists, the GIA began to adopt increasingly more stringent interpretations of Islamic law—and killed anyone who dared to violate them. By late 1995, the GIA was responsible for the deaths of over 200 school teachers (guilty of "taming the youth") and more than 100 other competing Muslim clerics and political leaders whom it deemed to be heretics.³⁶ In the fall of 1993, GIA supreme commander Saifullah Jaffar deemed it necessary to racially purify Algeria and declared open season on hunting all foreigners living there. In a subsequent communiqué, GIA commanders explained:

"The GIA has fought all Unbelievers of all ethnicities and groups, and ordered every Unbeliever to leave these lands (Algeria), and gave them a period of one month... similar to what the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, did... And so GIA has cut them off from the security of living in Algeria, and allowed the spilling of their blood if they chose to stay in our land. Some have heeded the warning, and others refused, so GIA started to kill them, singles and in groups, and after that another group fled, after that only those whose presence is essential to fight Muslims and Islam have stayed behind. Among those are politicians, military personnel, and missionaries."³⁷



During an attack on an Algerian village, GIA extremists use the blood of victims to inscribe the word "Jihad" on the wall of one residence.

³⁰ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 85.

³¹ Benesh, Peter. "Algeria's violence strikes fear in Europe." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. May 8, 1995. Page A1.

³² "Theater of Operation: MUSLIM ALGERIA." *Islam Report*. American Islamic Group (AIG). April 4, 1996.

³³ Tazaghart, Atmane. "Meet Algeria's 'Salafi Group.'" *Al-Majalla*. June 17, 1999.

³⁴ *United States of America v. Usama Bin Laden et al.* U.S. District Court Case S(7) 98 Cr. 1023; Southern District of New York. Page 297. February 6, 2001.

³⁵ Manresa, Andreu. "Algiers accuses the Saudi millionaire Bin-Ladin of paying the GIA terrorists." *El Pais* (Madrid). October 8, 1998.

³⁶ Phillips, James. "The Rising Threat of Revolutionary Islam in Algeria." *The Heritage Foundation*. Background No. 1060. November 9, 1995.

³⁷ Zitouni, Djamel. "Communiqué No. 43: Issuing a Communiqué on the Kidnapping of the Monks (Tahreer al-Bayan Hawla Khatf al-Ruhban)." Armed Islamic Group (GIA). April 18, 1996. As reprinted in the *Islam Report*. American Islamic Group (AIG). May 26, 1996.

The campaign begun by GIA commander Saifullah Jaffar targeting Western nationals resulted in the assassination of over 90 innocent civilians and eventually forced a mass European exodus out of Algeria.³⁸

After closely studying their enemies, the GIA's leadership determined that foreign workers from multinational petroleum and gas companies provided an excellent target for expanded military operations in Algeria. In an official communiqué from 1996 titled "Voiding Excuses and Confusion of All Oil Employees", GIA commander Djamel Zitouni wrote:

"It is well-known that the oil resources of this land are the largest source of revenue for the apostates which they use to fight Mujahideen and to finance their operations ... by that they are taking what Allah had given to people and made it for themselves to fight the religion of Allah the Almighty... oil companies like NIFTAL and SONTRAC and others and their employees and workers ... these companies are giving the apostates what Allah had given to the people, so that these resources are divided among the apostates as directed by their Kuffar masters and as dictated by their own evil ways. Using it to fight Islam and oppress Muslims, and strengthening their ranks to fight Mujahideen. The employees of these companies are helpers and aids of the apostates, they serve them, and present them with what they utilize to fight Islam and Mujahideen. Thus, for all of that, GIA orders all employees of the oil companies to stop work... and those who abide by the order, then he served himself, and those who refuse to stop work, then they have intended to fight, and have transgressed against themselves, and they will be killed."³⁹

In December 1994, the GIA launched its most sophisticated international terrorist attack to date: the hijacking of an Air France jetliner in a failed bid to suicide crash it into the streets of Paris.⁴⁰ During a dramatic 54-hour long regional crisis, a cell of four GIA terrorists (known as the "Signatories with Blood" group) seized control of an Air France flight in Algiers with the goal of carrying out—in the words of their comrades—the "first Martyrdom operation... to blow up the Air France [flight] with its... passengers over Paris."⁴¹ On December 24, the four operatives were able to sneak through security onto the tarmac at Boumedienne International Airport in Algiers. According to a communiqué later issued by the Armed Islamic Group, their illicit entrance was facilitated by sympathetic "contacts at the highest levels" within the airport itself. The men approached their target in a small vehicle, boarding the Air France jetliner and—after introducing themselves as Algerian security police—began checking passports and identity cards. Once the cabin door was closed, and before the jet could depart, the terrorists revealed their true identities and announced that the plane was in fact being hijacked.⁴²

The situation grew more serious as the hijackers ordered the pilots to fly from Algiers to Marseilles, where the aircraft was to be fully fueled at their explicit direction. By this time, the French government was running out of patience. French military commandos stormed the plane without warning, freeing all 171 passengers and killing the four hijackers.⁴³ The GIA scoffed at media accounts that celebrated the miraculous rescue: "the escape of the plane and its passengers was not because of the bravery of these special forces, but because of the Will of Allah, the four kilograms of explosives [onboard] did not detonate."⁴⁴ Then-GIA chief Djamel Zitouni eulogized the fallen hijackers in an open letter, mourning "O' Martyred convoys, O'

³⁸ Phillips, James. "The Rising Threat of Revolutionary Islam in Algeria." [The Heritage Foundation](#). Backgrounder No. 1060. November 9, 1995.

³⁹ Zitouni, Djamel. "Communiqué No. 42: Voiding Excuses and Confusion of All Oil Employees (Raf' al-A'thar wal-Shubhat 'an 'Umal Sharikat al-Mahrooqat)." Armed Islamic Group (GIA). January 31, 1996. As reprinted in the [Islam Report](#). American Islamic Group (GIA). February 13, 1996.

⁴⁰ U.S. Department of State. [Patterns of Global Terrorism 1999](#). April 2000. See "Terrorist Group Profiles: Armed Islamic Group (GIA)."

⁴¹ "Malhamat al-Shahadah: A political analysis of the goal of the Martyrdom Operation." [Islam Report](#). American Islamic Group (AIG). December 31, 1994.

⁴² "Malhamat al-Shahadah: A political analysis of the goal of the Martyrdom Operation." [Islam Report](#). American Islamic Group (AIG). December 31, 1994.

⁴³ "Malhamat al-Shahadah: A political analysis of the goal of the Martyrdom Operation." [Islam Report](#). American Islamic Group (AIG). December 31, 1994.

⁴⁴ "Malhamat al-Shahadah: A political analysis of the goal of the Martyrdom Operation." [Islam Report](#). American Islamic Group (AIG). December 31, 1994.

Deathmakers, Know well that you have made for the khilafah [the Islamic empire] a new height with your blood, and a towering structure from your body parts."⁴⁵

Within days, an "official" inquiry began within the highest ranks of the GIA to determine why the hijacking operation had failed—and what lessons it provided for the future of terrorism. The Algerian mujahideen identified two specific technical errors that had cost valuable time and opportunities: announcing the hijacking before the plane had taken off and making an interim stop in Marseilles "under the reason of taking on more fuel, although the plane had enough fuel" to fly to Paris. A follow-up communiqué issued by well-connected GIA activists suggested, "Since they were half way, Mujahideen may have wanted to fill up the tanks of the plane for later blowing it up over Paris. These will be lessons learned for future operations." Furthermore, "in conclusion... this operation is the start of a new phase which is the Martyrdom phase in which the enemy will be completely overwhelmed by the attacks. This is a result of an organized Mujahideen army which now includes a huge number of Muslim youths... Mujahideen have the resources, the personnel, the ability and the power to do that. The operation will be imprinted forever in our Islamic history."⁴⁶

The Air France hijacking marked a new and troubling escalation in the GIA's campaign of violence. Reflecting its rapidly expanding vision, the GIA had initially offered to free some of the airliner hostages in exchange for the release of captured fellow militants from elsewhere in the Muslim world—such as Shaykh Omar Abdel Rahman (a.k.a. "The Blind Shaykh"). Rahman had recently been arrested by U.S. federal authorities for his role in organizing a series of terrorist plots targeting New York landmarks (including the World Trade Center)—and the GIA boasted in its communiqués that "in calling for the release of Dr. Omar Abdel Rahman... it showed the main principles of Islam adopted by GIA in aiding Muslims everywhere and in carrying the message of Jihad to the whole world."⁴⁷

Similarly, by 1995, the GIA and its global supporters began taking a greater interest in activities by other "infidel" powers in North Africa—particularly, the United States. The GIA issued urgent messages to its supporters warning that the U.S. had made Algeria a "top priority" in its "crusade" to gain control of petroleum-producing regions and to stop the spread of Islam: "The American International Monetary Fund and World Bank have transferred millions of Dollars under the cover of agricultural and industrial projects in order to pay for the millions of civil and military workers in the country... Oil production from Muslim Algeria is critical for Spain, France and Italy who have been putting strong pressure on the US monopoly of the Muslim oil which the US is controlling in the Islamic Peninsula."⁴⁸ These reports were further buttressed by rumors broadcast by the GIA that the U.S. military was attempting to construct a covert airstrip in southern Algeria near Tamanghasset in order "to protect Oil fields and Uranium mines in anticipation of the collapse of the criminal [Algerian] regime."⁴⁹

Part III: Collapse of the GIA

Facing a stepped-up counterinsurgent campaign by the Algerian government in 1994, the GIA's newly-appointed leader Cherif Gousmi (Abu Abdullah Ahmad) decided that major political action would be necessary to confront the Algerian government. Gousmi—a graduate of Arab mujahideen training camps in Afghanistan—was considered a charismatic figure and his "good manners and character" helped "to orchestrate the merging of other major groups in Algeria to the GIA, such as the FIS and the Movement for the Islamic State" in May 1994.⁵⁰ While Gousmi had accomplished an significant feat with the ultimately short-lived May 1994 merger, he

⁴⁵ Zitouni, Djamel. "A Letter to Death Makers." Armed Islamic Group (GIA). As reprinted in the *Islam Report*. American Islamic Group (AIG). December 30, 1994.

⁴⁶ "Malhamat al-Shahadah: A political analysis of the goal of the Martyrdom Operation." *Islam Report*. American Islamic Group (AIG). December 31, 1994.

⁴⁷ "Malhamat al-Shahadah: A political analysis of the goal of the Martyrdom Operation." *Islam Report*. American Islamic Group (AIG). December 31, 1994.

⁴⁸ "Theater of Operation: MUSLIM ALGERIA." *Islam Report*. American Islamic Group (AIG). February 25, 1996.

⁴⁹ "Theater of Operation: MUSLIM ALGERIA." *Islam Report*. American Islamic Group (AIG). March 24, 1995.

⁵⁰ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 85. See He explained that once this was done, they would help the government move for democracy again."⁵⁰also: Bruce, James. "Arab Veterans of the Afghan War." *Jane's Intelligence Review*. April 1, 1997; Vol. 7; No. 4; Page 175.

also inadvertently had helped to sow the seeds of the GIA's own demise by diluting its ranks and making the group more fractious and ideologically diverse.

On September 26, 1994, Gousmi was finally killed in a clash with security forces, and replaced by Djamel Zitouni (a.k.a. Abu Abdelrahman Amin). Zitouni's two-year reign of power would see some of the most impressive achievements by the GIA—such as the unprecedented Air France hijacking. However, Zitouni's rise to power also marked the beginning of the end for the GIA, which had become ideologically strained and a target for Islamist political competitors. According to Abu Hamza al-Masri—before Zitouni had a chance to assume control—the Algerian FIS party “attempted to infiltrate the group in order to later take control of it... But other senior members of the GIA led a counter offensive against these tactics... [former] FIS members were excluded, along with their leadership being shunned... One of the senior members of the FIS who joined the GIA... confessed to a conspiracy of trying to take over the GIA and further added that he joined the GIA only to take control of the Islamic militants.



Djamel Zitouni (a.k.a. Abu Abdelrahman Amin)

Reacting to the attempted coup within the group, Zitouni adopted a ruthless, iron-fisted strategy to ensure his own survival. This blunt approach led the GIA to face off in “long wars” against a host of Islamist opponents; including “members of the FIS who... insist[ed] on the democratic path” and, on the other side of the spectrum, “hardcore” Takfiri fanatics from within the ranks of the GIA.⁵¹ The brutal internecine conflict within the Algerian Islamist movement may have helped briefly solidify Zitouni's control over the GIA, but it also “put off” many GIA admirers “from joining or carrying on giving their support to this movement. Many Mujaahidin have claimed that they left the GIA due to fear for their own lives and the harsh punishment applied on them.”⁵² Others began to believe implausible rumors that the GIA itself was a covert branch of the Algerian government.⁵³

The popularity of the GIA took further hits as it engaged in a tit-for-tat war of attrition against the Algerian military and anyone allied with it. Recognizing the threat, the Algerian government decided to provide weapons to civilian villagers in order to defend themselves against attacks by GIA militants. This policy had a debilitating impact on GIA recruitment and support in these areas: “[It] put the armed civilians at war with the Islamic groups, particularly the GIA... Step by step, this government trap managed to create a war between the GIA and the general population of Algeria.”⁵⁴ The GIA managed to further exacerbate tensions with the public by orchestrating elaborate revenge plots on would-be spies, informants, and supporters of the government. The attacks eventually extended out to target family members of the accused. In retrospect, even Abu Hamza al-Masri has characterized this tragic turn of events as “unfortunate.”⁵⁵

Furthermore, while GIA commander Djamel Zitouni may have been admired for “taking the war to the streets of France”, some of his “innovative” tactics were crude and divisive. In March 1996, GIA commandos raided a monastery near Medea, kidnapping seven French monks living there. Within weeks, the GIA issued a communiqué claiming custody of the hostages and offering to exchange them for “Muslim prisoners, and we mentioned among the list Brother Abdel Haq Liyadeh... we said: ‘If you set them free, we set the Monks free, and if you refuse we will slaughter [them].’” When the French government publicly refused to negotiate with the GIA, an enraged Zitouni wasted no time in ordering his men to behead the seven monks.⁵⁶ The killing of the monks was very controversial, especially since their personal safety had previously been

⁵¹ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 86.

⁵² Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 86.

⁵³ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 86.

⁵⁴ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 87.

⁵⁵ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 87.

⁵⁶ Zitouni, Djamel. “Communiqué No. 44: The Evident Declaration of the Execution of the French Monks (Al-I'lan al-Mubeen 'an Qatl al-Ruhban al-Farancien.” Armed Islamic Group (GIA). May 21, 1996. As reprinted in the *Islam Report*. American Islamic Group (AIG). May 26, 1996.

guaranteed by another lower-ranking GIA commander. According to former GIA religious affairs advisor Omar Chiki:

"Zitouni told me had carried out this act to make France move and create a buzz in the French media about himself. We knew that Sayah Attia had assured them that they would not be killed. But with Zitouni, the fatwas had changed. He kidnapped them and sent an emissary, who discussed matters with the French ambassador. Zitouni had an audio cassette recorded in which the emissary recounted the contents of the discussion. He told them to put an end to the arrest operations in Islamist circles in France and support of the Pouvoir, following which the seven monks would be freed... At that time Zitouni had changed. He was starting to make decisions without asking his close advisers for their advice."⁵⁷

Zitouni's rogue behavior—demonstrated by the senseless murder of the French monks—caused infighting to spawn once again within the ranks of his movement. Former FIS leaders who had joined the GIA in 1994 now grew thoroughly disenchanted with Zitouni and his associates. Abu Hamza al-Masri has described how many militants and their supporters decided "to pull out and... denounce the GIA and to distance themselves from it."⁵⁸ Unmoved by these defections, Zitouni ordered violent retaliation on his former comrades, and even their families. According to Omar Chikhi, the victims even reportedly included members of an Al-Qaida delegation who had been personally sent by Usama Bin Laden to Algeria in an effort to "help the GIA."⁵⁹

In the Al-Qitaal newsletter, the GIA elite defended their unyielding policies in the face of "the cowardice of the sick-hearted people [who have broken] away from the straight path." The group further ordered its fighters to resist any call for peace or reconciliation with the Algerian government:

"Mujahideen never felt a day of truce with those apostates who sold out their religion and waged war (on Islam) with everything at their hands... It is a cry repeated today by every Mujahid youth of GIA, he repeats it with courage and steadfastness and do not fear anyone of the apostates... it is the cry of No Truce, No Reconciliation and No Dialogue... Repeat it, my brother, while you are in your trench awaiting the soldiers of the apostates despite their hate. Repeat it while on your way in a raid over the Mubtadi'a despite the hate of the hypocrites and rumor spreaders. Repeat it while you are beheading France."⁶⁰

In spite of these pleas for solidarity against the "infidels" and "apostates", Zitouni would ultimately die ingloriously not in battle with the "apostates", but instead at the hands of fellow jihadists. In July 1996, he was abruptly assassinated "in an ambush by some of those who had separated from him."⁶¹

Rather than serving as an impetus for various GIA factions to reconcile and re-unite, this development only caused increased infighting and internecine violence. In the wake of Zitouni's demise, there was an immediate power vacuum at the top ranks of the GIA. In short order, one of the most junior members of Zitouni's GIA Shura Council—Antar Zouabri—stepped forward from the shadows to seize the reins of power.⁶² Zouabri did not have especially noteworthy military credentials himself, relying instead upon the fame of his brother Ali as one of the original founders of the GIA. What Zouabri lacked in practical experience, he made up for with blind ruthlessness. According to former GIA advisor Omar Chikhi:

⁵⁷ Tlemceni, Salima and Tayeb Belghiche. "Interview with Omar Chikhi, a founding member of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA)." *El-Watan* (Algiers). April 13, 1999.

⁵⁸ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 88.

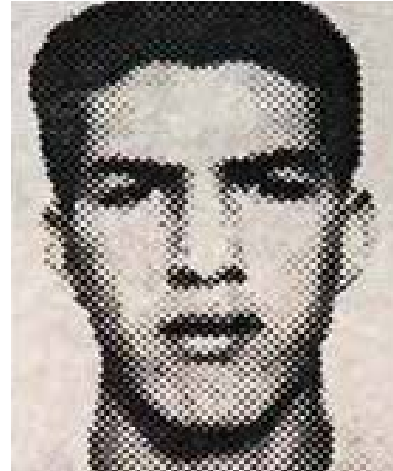
⁵⁹ Tlemceni, Salima and Tayeb Belghiche. "Interview with Omar Chikhi, a founding member of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA)." *El-Watan* (Algiers). April 13, 1999.

⁶⁰ *Al-Qitaal Newsletter*. Armed Islamic Group (GIA). Vol. 1.; No. 35. As reprinted in the *Islam Report*. American Islamic Group (AIG). July 7, 1996.

⁶¹ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 88.

⁶² Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 88.

“He did not even ask for a meeting for him to be appointed as emir... Even the douates (muftis) who dared [speak back to him] were killed. He started killing anyone he did not like. He used to tell us that he would never engage in a dialogue; as for me, I used to tell him that our deeds had to result in that possibility. There were some elements who withdrew and tension began to reign within the group.”⁶³



Antar Zouabri

Zouabri’s erratic and unsettling grip over the GIA only further alienated the group’s own membership and fellow Islamists in North Africa. By this point, the Armed Islamic Group had become its own worst enemy. Defying repeated threats from Zouabri and his followers, the leader of FIS’s military wing broke ranks and began the process of negotiating a peace accord with the Algerian government. As these negotiations continued on with FIS, mysterious armed assailants carried out a wave of shameful massacres in isolated villages and rural areas, killing hundreds of innocent civilians—including a “great many” women and children.⁶⁴ Though the GIA was always considered a possible culprit, initial suspicion widely focused on the Algerian security services because the killings had equally targeted “people who used to give the biggest help and support to the GIA Mujaahidin and many of [its partisans] were recruited from these areas.”⁶⁵

Indeed, the remaining supporters of the GIA—particularly those outside Algeria—initially scoffed at allegations that the group had played any role in the massacres, which made headlines around the world and caused revulsion in the Muslim world. Abu Hamza al-Masri has commented, “No one at the time believed that this could be the work of any Islamic group, even the anti-Muslims themselves, they have all agreed that this is the work of the Algerian government, trying to put people off from Islam and Islamic ideas.”⁶⁶ However, even some of the GIA’s most trusted foreign contacts began to grow suspicious when they discovered inexplicable inconsistencies in published communiqués claiming attacks on the Algerian military: “strangely enough, these so-called operations were dateless and it looked as if some of these mythical operations were claimed previously.”⁶⁷ Various attempts by these representatives seeking an explanation for these inconsistencies were met with even more silence: “it appeared they were fed up with their own supporters, even those outside Algeria.”⁶⁸

During the summer of 1997, Zouabri finally crossed the line when he began to distribute a shocking new fatwah “so chilling” that the GIA’s own official spokesmen abroad “were unsure if this had been the same group that they had known before.”⁶⁹ Though the document was dated August 9, 1997, pre-



GIA Communiqué #52 - August 9, 1997

⁶³ Tlemceni, Salima and Tayeb Belghiche. “Interview with Omar Chikhi, a founding member of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA).” *El-Watan* (Algiers). April 13, 1999.

⁶⁴ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 93.

⁶⁵ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 93.

⁶⁶ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 88.

⁶⁷ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 93.

⁶⁸ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 93.

⁶⁹ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 93.

release copies had reached other Arab jihadist leaders as early as mid-July.⁷⁰ The statement "boldly" and "for the first time since the genesis of the GIA" condemned the entire Muslim population of Algeria as "kuffar, apostates, and hypocrites" for "not supporting them in their struggle against the government."⁷¹ Though the edict did not offer any specifics, it generally accepted responsibility "for killing, slaughtering, massacring, burning and even kidnapping and raping women of their opponents and [enslaving] the women of their opponents. They classed all of that as sacrificing for the cause of Allah and a sign of sincere worship."⁷² In a major departure from the typically carefully composed language of mujahideen communiqués, Zouabri's "abusive" letter included "obscenities" and "vulgarity", which was a public embarrassment and "a delight for everyone opposed to jihaad."⁷³ Any hopes among jihadists that the letter might be clever trick by the Algerian government were quickly dashed when further contacts with the GIA "confirmed that the statement was indeed from them and that they meant every word contained therein."⁷⁴

Under the lead of Antar Zouabri, the GIA had finally succumbed to its most extreme Takfiri tendencies, rendering death sentences upon innocent Muslims without any discernible religious justification. The letter was a major setback—not just for other Algerian Islamists, but also for the larger brotherhood of Arab-Afghan mujahideen organizations. At the time, Abu Hamza al-Masri recalled "there was a mixture grief and sadness among the ranks that this could be the Islamic end of one of the most terrifying group to the kuffar this century." He described Zouabri's communiqué as "horrible" and "a stab in the back from the GIA to the Muslim Ummah in general and the Mujaahidin in Algeria and worldwide in particular."⁷⁵

Other North African mujahideen organizations quickly took steps to distance themselves from the spiraling mess caused by Antar Zouabri and the GIA. In June 1996, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) issued a statement acknowledging that it had been engaged in "support[ing] the Jihad against the apostates in Algeria" and "the Armed Islamic Group in Algeria... based on the clear and scrupulous path that this group adopted throughout the years."⁷⁶ However, the LIFG also announced that it was immediately halting all such "support and assistance" rendered to the GIA:

"After [Djamel Zitouni] became the leader of the group, there was a noticeable change in the characteristics of the jihad waged under the banner of the Armed Islamic Group. Breaches and violations of Shariah law increased incrementally day after day... Blood was spilled, and even now, there is still no clear or compelling Shariah basis for its spilling... This was the case with [the killing of] Shaykh Mohammed al-Said, Abdelrazak Radjam, and others. Even some people whose sincerity and faith were recognized by the Armed Islamic Group were killed such as Abdelwahab Li-Amara... The group allowed itself to kill anyone who was not in line with it, even if he was striving to avoid dividing the ranks. Many Algerian Muslims were killed and their death was either denounced or was said to be as an act of deterrence or something like that. Eventually, the struggle appeared to be a battle between the movement and the Muslims of Algeria."⁷⁷

Yet, just as they distanced themselves from Zitouni and Zouabri, LIFG representatives were also quick to add, "we will... [resume] supporting the Armed Islamic Group if it replaces its current leadership and changes its policy, because we know that there are good and righteous people among its ranks."⁷⁸ Among the key demands from the LIFG was for their brothers in the GIA to

⁷⁰ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 93.

⁷¹ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Pages 88, 93.

⁷² Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Pages 88, 93.

⁷³ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Pages 88, 93.

⁷⁴ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 94.

⁷⁵ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Pages 89, 93.

⁷⁶ "Communiqué #6 from the Islamic Fighting Group Regarding the Jihad in Algeria." Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG). June 6, 1996. <http://www.almuqatila.com/AMEER/bayanat/bayan6.htm>.

⁷⁷ "Communiqué #6 from the Islamic Fighting Group Regarding the Jihad in Algeria." Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG). June 6, 1996. <http://www.almuqatila.com/AMEER/bayanat/bayan6.htm>.

⁷⁸ "Communiqué #6 from the Islamic Fighting Group Regarding the Jihad in Algeria." Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG). June 6, 1996. <http://www.almuqatila.com/AMEER/bayanat/bayan6.htm>.

restore a command structure run strictly by those "who took part in the Afghan jihad... known for... their active role in firmly rooting the jihad in Algerian soil."⁷⁹

Cast out by other mujahideen, abandoned by many of its supporters, and targeted by both its "apostate" enemies and its own former Islamist allies, the GIA was no longer an effective or cohesive military force. Despite the tremendous pressure on Zouabri to recuse himself, the young commander desperately clung to his remaining assets and "managed to hold onto power... still in control of what is left of the GIA."⁸⁰ The GIA was never officially dissolved, though by 2001, it had become largely defunct. Zouabri was finally killed in a clash with Algerian security forces in the town of Boufarik in February 2002. At the time of his death, Zouabri was little more than an anachronism and not considered to be a significant player in the continuing Islamic insurgency.

Part IV: Arrival of the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat (GSPC)

Commander Antar Zouabri's drift into targeting innocent Muslim victims left many of his former GIA military commanders stranded and without a trustworthy ideological umbrella to work under. Some mujahideen decided to lay down their weapons and seek peace with the Algerian government, after being thoroughly disillusioned by Zouabri's "corruption" and "deviation."⁸¹ Yet, other GIA veterans were not quite ready to abandon their mission of jihad so easily.

Within months, surviving GIA members who had opposed Zouabri began to once again slowly gather together in groups under a restored and "purified" banner of jihad. This activity was directly encouraged by foreign Arab-Afghan militants who were alarmed by the apparent collapse of the jihad in Algeria. According to later testimony before an Algerian tribunal from captured militant Mohamed Berrached, Usama Bin Laden had used his satellite phone from Afghanistan to make contact with former GIA commanders in Algeria during the summer of 1998. Berrached claimed to have personally witnessed such a telephone conversation between Bin Laden and Hassan Hattab (a.k.a. Abu Hamza), a former Algerian paratrooper who had joined the GIA and served under Djamel Zitouni as the commander of a zone in eastern Algiers.⁸² Mindful of how appallingly the GIA had tarnished its name throughout the Muslim world, Bin Laden allegedly urged Hattab to work with others to establish a rival mujahideen organization in Algeria and present a "better image of the Jihad" against the secular government.⁸³

In March 1999, the organization was officially established as Al-Jamaah al-Salafiyah li-al-Dawah wal Qital, or the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat (GSPC). According to Abu Omar Abdul Birr, the director of the GSPC's media wing, "The GSPC is a military organization, following the Salafist creed and ideology, fighting in jihad against the Algerian regime which has abandoned Islam and its masters among the Jews and Christians [in order] to restore the rightly-guided Caliphate and to implement Shariah and remove the oppression and humiliation from the shoulders of our oppressed brothers."⁸⁴ Abu Omar added, "The GSPC is not limited by a narrow regional vision. It is important for us to spread the fragrance of jihad in every country and region, and ignite flames under the feet of the Jews, Christians, and apostates."⁸⁵ The initial founding meeting of the GSPC was attended by "representatives" from former GIA units in the second, fifth, sixth, and ninth zones—"absent were representatives of the West and the fourth and the third zones; plus, the first and the seventh zones from the East, because they could not make it at the time." Finally, "Allah... blessed the efforts of the brothers and some brigades from the first zone

⁷⁹ "Communiqué #6 from the Islamic Fighting Group Regarding the Jihad in Algeria." Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG). June 6, 1996. <http://www.almuqatila.com/AMEER/bayanat/bayan6.htm>.

⁸⁰ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 88.

⁸¹ "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

⁸² Tazaghart, Atmane. "Meet Algeria's 'Salafi Group.'" *Al-Majalla*. June 17, 1999.

⁸³ "Bin Laden held to be behind an armed Algerian Islamic movement." *Agence France Press (AFP)*. February 15, 1999.

⁸⁴ "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

⁸⁵ "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

have joined the group. Then the fourth zone joined and then part of the seventh zone and the Al-Furqan brigade in Jalayzan."⁸⁶

The GSPC issued its first official communiqué, titled "The Group is a Blessing", on April 24, 1999.⁸⁷ The statement described the formation of the group as "a continuation of the Armed Islamic Group, following its ideology, before it deviated and went astray. Thus, [the GSPC] represents the genuine path that jihad has followed since its inception in Algeria." Echoing the tribunal testimony of Mohammed Berrached, the letter explained that "it was agreed to change the name of the Armed Islamic Group to the GSPC, since the first name has become a slogan for the callers of immigration and callers of making an infidel. Many actions were attributed to those who adopt that way... The [GSPC] is at the forefront of the fight against those massacres, many of our brothers were killed in battles with the deviated Zouabri faction."⁸⁸ The GSPC also denounced the massacres that had been committed and invited all mujahideen to come together and fight the regime.⁸⁹ With its new agenda, the group managed to amass hundreds of defectors from both FIS and the GIA; in less than two years, the GSPC grew nearly five times in size—from an estimated 700 to 3,000 active fighters.⁹⁰

According to media director Abu Omar Abdul Birr, the first official commander of the GSPC was chosen to be Abdelmajid Dishu (a.k.a. Abu Musab).⁹¹ Dishu, known as an expert in Shariah law, did not last long as commander before being killed—reportedly in yet another fratricidal ambush by dissident mujahideen. Dishu's successor was former paratrooper and GIA commander Hassan Hattab. Though Hattab successfully managed to distinguish himself from the dark days of Antar Zouabri, the GSPC made no major achievements of note during his tenure as chief, nor did it launch the dramatic, inspiring military operations of previous eras. Over time, Hattab's mujahideen colleagues increasingly saw him as "weak" and ineffectual. The deputy director of the GSPC media wing would later complain that due to "treachery" and a lack of public support, "the operations of our fighters were limited [during this phase] to preparing ambushes and executing several attacks on the bases of the apostates."⁹²

In the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, rival commanders within the GSPC complained that Hattab had begun displaying "signs of surrender" and was wavering in his commitment to jihad in Algeria. Finally, during a critical 2003 meeting of GSPC leaders, the group announced the official resignation of Hassan Hattab as its top commander. Contradicting these accounts, Hattab publicly denied ever resigning from the group, and has subsequently insisted that he played a much more central role in founding the group than the GSPC's current leadership is now willing to admit. In February 2005, the GSPC issued a formal statement addressing the longstanding controversy over Hassan Hattab, explaining:

"Since [2003], Abu Hamza has kept himself secluded from the mujahideen. Recently, we learned about some of his suspicious behavior after he contacted one of our brothers in an attempt to



Hassan Hattab
(a.k.a. Abu Hamza)

⁸⁶ "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

⁸⁷ "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

⁸⁸ "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

⁸⁹ "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

⁹⁰ Tazaghart, Atmane. "Meet Algeria's 'Salafi Group.'" *Al-Majalla*. June 17, 1999.

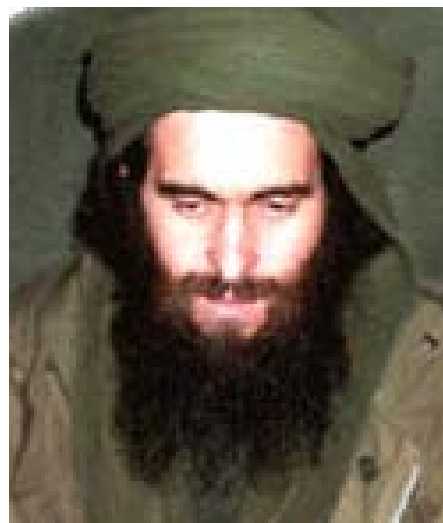
⁹¹ "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

⁹² Abu Yasser Sayyaf, Deputy Chief of the Media Wing. "Wise and Desirable Advice for the Guards of the Frontiers." January 8, 2005. <http://www.ansarnet.ws/vb/showthread.php?t=24575>.

convince him to agree to the apostate reconciliation project. He also published a statement which appeared to be signed by the GSPC. In that statement, he abandoned his principles and religion. Therefore, the leadership and the fighters of the GSPC disavow Abu Hamza and consider his recent actions to be a betrayal of Allah, his messenger, the path of jihad, and the blood of the martyrs. As a result of Abu Hamza's behavior, he has become a foreign entity in this holy jihad corps, and thus he represents no one but himself."⁹³

Seven months later, in response to "some media sources [who] have insisted on spreading false perceptions", the GSPC issued a follow-up statement emphasizing that it had long since cut all ties to Hassan Hattab "after he resigned and joined the oppressors. He is not related to us in any way whatsoever."⁹⁴

With Hattab's relative moderate influence excised from the group, the GSPC named a suitable new commander during the summer of 2003 whose selection was intended to spur a major renewal of their campaign of violence: Nabil Sahrawi (a.k.a. Abu Ibrahim Mustafa).⁹⁵ Sahrawi—37 years old at the time of his accession as GSPC leader—was a native of the city of Batna in eastern Algeria. He was considered among the old guard of the Algerian mujahideen, starting with his initial work on behalf of FIS in the late 1980s.⁹⁶ The GSPC has described Sahrawi as a "towering minaret and a courageous hero... His legacy still lights the road and inflames [our desire for] vengeance, and encourages our path... He is one of the few who greatly influenced the path of the Algerian jihad, even though his leadership did not even last a year."⁹⁷



Nabil Sahrawi
(a.k.a. Abu Ibrahim Mustafa)

Nabil Sahrawi's reputation was first cemented in 1992 when he served as a pioneer among the Algerian mujahideen, helping to form underground militant cells in the Elouras region and eventually taking charge of the entire Batna province. When GIA chief Cherif Gousmi launched his historic mujahideen unification initiative in May 1994, Sahrawi agreed to merge his forces and swear allegiance to the GIA under the lead of Gousmi. A year later, in mid-1995, Sahrawi was promoted by Gousmi's successor Djamel Zitouni to be GIA's top commander in the fifth zone.⁹⁸ Even after the tumultuous demise of the GIA, Sahrawi retained his control over mujahideen activity in this region. In May 2004, several months after taking power, Sahrawi issued an important video address laying out his new vision for the future of the jihad in Algeria:

"Here, we have evil America declaring a crusade and preparing the troops of the infidels to attack Islam everywhere. President Bush and many high officials clearly and loudly declared that this is a religious war under the banner of the cross. The goal of this war, which they called a 'war on terrorism' and 'war against evil' and other names, is to keep Islam and the Muslims from establishing the Country of Islam that would rule people with the book of Allah and His prophet."⁹⁹

⁹³ Abu Yasser Sayyaf, Deputy Chief of the Media Wing. "A Statement Disavowing Hassan Hattab and his Disgraceful Acts." Algerian Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat (GSPC). February 10, 2005. <http://www.ansarnet.ws/vb/showthread.php?t=27792>.

⁹⁴ "An Interview With the Commander of the GSPC on Monday 22 Shaaban 1426 (September 26, 2005)." *Al-Jama'ah Magazine*. Vol. 1; Issue 5. October 20, 2005. <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=36423>.

⁹⁵ "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

⁹⁶ "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

⁹⁷ "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

⁹⁸ "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

⁹⁹ Abu Ibrahim Mustafa. "A Word That Must Be Said." Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat (GSPC). May 2004. <http://www.jihad-algeria.com/real/video/kalima1.rm>.

When the Algerian government first claimed it had killed Sahrawi and several of his associates in June 2004, the GSPC quickly issued a statement admitting that their leader had gone "missing" but initially refused to acknowledge his death.¹⁰⁰ Eventually, as more facts became public, the GSPC had no choice but to confirm the "martyrdom" of Sahrawi in a clash with the Algerian military in the Bejaia region.¹⁰¹

The fourth commander of the GSPC was selected to be Abdelmalik Dourkdal (a.k.a. Abu Musab Abdel Wadoud), a 37-year old native of the Blida region raised in a religious household. Dourkdal is intelligent and well-educated, earning a Bachelors degree in Mathematics in 1989 and subsequently studying "technology" for another three years at the University of Blida. According to Dourkdal, "In 1992, I managed to make contact with Shaykh Said Makhloufi—one of the commanders of the Algerian jihad—and I was honored to join the mujahideen brothers in December 1993. I was assigned to fabricate explosives... because of my previous university education."¹⁰² Three years later, in 1996, Dourkdal was placed in charge of all military training courses for soldiers from the so-called "al-Ahwaal Brigade" ("Horrors Brigade") in the second zone; "Afterwards, I commanded the Al-Ouds Brigade (nowadays known as the Abu Bakr al-Siddiq Brigade) and then I was busy manufacturing, teaching, and assembling materiel for the mujahideen brothers." Dourkdal formally joined the GSPC in 2001 and served as their official representative in the second zone until 2003.¹⁰³ As of April 2007, Dourkdal remains at large and in undisputed control of the GSPC, now known as Al-Qaida's Committee in the Islamic Maghreb.



**Abdelmalik Dourkdal
(a.k.a. Abu Musab Abdel
Wadoud)**

The GSPC has insisted that the rapid-fire succession of top commanders between 1999 and 2004 should not be interpreted as a sign of defeat or weakness. Rather, according to Abu Omar Abdul Birr, "The Algerian jihad was never affected by the killing of its leaders, because it was never associated with individual people; Muhammad Aalaal... was killed; and, [Saifullah] Jaffar... was killed; and, Abu Abdullah [Cherif Gousmi]... was killed; and, Abdelhaqq Layada was captured... and, Abu Ibrahim [Mustafa] was killed... But jihad is still alive, admired by the righteous and angering the infidels."¹⁰⁴ Shrugging off any sense of regret, Abu Omar suggested, "war is a contest, one day it goes for you, and another day against you... We kill them as they kill us."¹⁰⁵

The GSPC has also vigorously denied reports from the Algerian government and various press agencies that the jihadist movement has been so thoroughly undermined by internal defections and arrests by local security forces that it is on the verge of being completely wiped out. While acknowledging that "the path of jihad has experienced many mistakes" along the way, the GSPC has nonetheless insisted that "the mujahideen have learned their lessons from previous trials" and that "repeated allegations calling us 'terrorist remnants' and 'bands'... about to

¹⁰⁰ "Special Statement Regarding the News of the Killing of the Commander of the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat (GSPC). June 17, 2004. http://salafia.net/html/bay/last_bayan/nabil.htm.

¹⁰¹ "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

¹⁰² "An Interview With the Commander of the GSPC on Monday 22 Shaaban 1426 (September 26, 2005)." *Al-Jama'ah Magazine*. Vol. 1; Issue 5. October 20, 2005. <http://www.alheshbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=36423>.

¹⁰³ "An Interview With the Commander of the GSPC on Monday 22 Shaaban 1426 (September 26, 2005)." *Al-Jama'ah Magazine*. Vol. 1; Issue 5. October 20, 2005. <http://www.alheshbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=36423>.

¹⁰⁴ "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

¹⁰⁵ "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

be exterminated... are [an effort] to trick your intellect."¹⁰⁶ GSPC media wing director Abu Omar Abdul Birr has taunted, "We challenge them to try and exterminate us... Allah is greater than America, he is greater than the Jews, and France—and we have a just cause."¹⁰⁷

Part V: The GSPC and the "War on Terrorism"

Though the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks may have seemed a world away from Algeria, Al-Qaida's strikes on the United States and their resulting aftermath—particularly the subsequent American military invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan—have had a major impact in reviving recruiting efforts and popular support for the GSPC. Prior to 9/11, the Algerian jihad was ideologically in disarray, lacking a cohesive political agenda or burning grievances to mobilize around. Islamist fighters had delved into such terrible excesses during the Algerian civil war of the 1990s as to overshadow the misdeeds of the "apostate" Algerian government—and even the hostile legacy of French colonialism.

When U.S. President George Bush declared a sweeping "war on terrorism" in 2001 and openly labeled this effort as a "crusade", a wave of anger quickly spread across the Muslim world and the notion of jihad once again gained in popularity. Though Hassan Hattab was reluctant to ally the GSPC directly with Al-Qaida, this hesitation faded under the later regimes of Nabil Sahrawi and Abdelmalik Dourkdal. Within months of Sahrawi taking power, the GSPC openly began adopting its role within a larger, transnational jihad against America "[who] is leading the new crusader war against the Muslim world under the banner of a war on terrorism."¹⁰⁸ In a communiqué issued in September 2005, Sahrawi's successor Dourkdal elaborated on this vision:

"...The world war between Muslims and Christians has already begun... the leader of the infidels, Bush, has clearly declared this war three times to be a crusader war... the defeat that America is suffering now along with the other Western nations... has played a critical role in awakening young Muslim men around the world, including in Algeria. There is no doubt that defeating evil America will bring an end to all the apostate and treacherous regimes on the planet, including the apostate regime in Algeria."¹⁰⁹

According to GSPC doctrine, virtually all of the current governments in the Arab and Muslim world have sold out the interests of their own people and are instead "competing amongst one another... in desperate attempts to prove that each one of them is more able, or more deserving, or more successful in leading the fight against the jihad and the mujahideen, hoping to obtain the approval and endorsement of these infidels."¹¹⁰ GSPC leaders argue that not only has the Algerian government become an agent of "crusader America", but further that Algeria occupies a "very prominent role in this war, perhaps even more dangerous than the role taken by the Pakistanis, the Saudis, and the Egyptians"¹¹¹:

"[The Algerian government] is 'the first and in the forefront' in fighting against jihad and they possess what nobody else has, in terms of plotting, planning, tactics, and field expertise... expertise that the others are lacking... One will notice the prints of the Algerian régime on many fronts, in Afghanistan, and Iraq, for example; we notice that strategy of the [Kurdish] Peshmerga, the National Guard, and 'civil defense' forces is nothing more than a mirror image of the so-called 'Municipal Guards', 'Self-Defense Units', and 'the Patriots'... These are nothing but carbon copies of the Algerian model."¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

¹⁰⁷ "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

¹⁰⁸ "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

¹⁰⁹ Abu Musab Abdel Wadoud. "No Peace Without Islam." Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat (GSPC). Dated September 27, 2005; Released October 1, 2005. <http://www.salafia.net/html/bay/paix-non.htm>.

¹¹⁰ "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

¹¹¹ "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

¹¹² "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

The GSPC has also consistently attempted to frame developments within the Algerian jihad as essential facets of the larger U.S. "war on terrorism." Late in 2004, the group proposed that a far-reaching international conspiracy was afoot to murder prominent jihadist leaders, including in Algeria: "The killing of Shaykh Abu Ibrahim [Mustafa], the leader of the GSPC, coincided with the killing of the leader Abdelaziz al-Muqrin... the leader of Al-Qaida's Committee in Bilad Al-Haramain [Saudi Arabia], and with an assassination attempt on the hero Shaykh Abu Musab al-Zarqawi... the leader of Al-Qaida's Committee in Mesopotamia."¹¹³ Thus, the GSPC has directly put its own commanders in the same category as such notorious international jihadist figures as al-Muqrin and Zarqawi.



"The Enemies of Islam": An image from the GSPC propaganda film "Jahim al-Murtadeen" ("Apostate Hell"), 2005.

As the jihad in Iraq continued to expand in 2004 and 2005, Algerian nationals came to represent an increasingly important cross-section of the foreign fighters working under the banner of Zarqawi's local Al-Qaida franchise. One of those men, known as "Abu Asil al-Jazairi", was studying abroad in Syria when he decided to join under Zarqawi's banner in Iraq. Using experience gained while previously working as a "senior official" in the Muslim Brotherhood, Abu Asil was appointed in charge of "both administrative and military tasks" on behalf of Al-Qaida, including overseeing the cross-border traffic of arriving Al-Qaida recruits. According to his colleagues, the Algerian "was responsible for all the Arab brothers that came to fight in the jihad" including arranging their personal matters, giving them identification numbers, and assigning them to various active frontlines.¹¹⁴ Another Algerian national killed fighting in Iraq—Abu Qutaybah al-Jazairi—was profiled in Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's first full-length propaganda film, "The Winds of Victory."¹¹⁵ The video featured an excerpt of Abu Qutaybah's "martyrdom" will, just prior to him executing an apparent suicide car bombing targeting the "CIA headquarters" at the Mount Lebanon Hotel in Baghdad. Wearing ordinary clothing and seated on a couch, Abu Qutaybah begged for "Allah to bestow the best of rewards to those who were the reasons for which I came here to fulfill my ultimate goal. By Allah, you should target the tyrants. May Allah make us be those who reach the tyrants. May Allah make us those who tear the tyrants down."¹¹⁶



Abu Qutaybah al-Jazairi

Likewise, the U.S. military has acknowledged capturing and killing dozens of other Maghrebi fighters working for Al-Qaida inside Iraq, such as "Abu Dour" and "Abu Uthman"—Algerians who allegedly worked as facilitators for other foreign fighters and "helped direct... numerous bombing attacks in the Mosul area."¹¹⁷ Saudi Arabian intelligence sources report that, as of March 2006, there were more than 1,200 Algerian jihadists fighting with Al-Qaida in Iraq.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

¹¹⁴ "Martyr Story # 12: Abu Asil al-Jazairi (Allah have mercy on him)." <http://www.al-boraq.com/showthread.php?t=9037>. April 28, 2006.

¹¹⁵ "Winds of Triumph." Tawheed wal-Jihad Movement (Iraq). Video released in July 2004.

¹¹⁶ "Winds of Triumph." Tawheed wal-Jihad Movement (Iraq). Video released in July 2004.

¹¹⁷ "Three North African Terrorists Killed." U.S. Department of Defense; American Forces Press Service. August 28, 2005. <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=16784>.

¹¹⁸ Obaid, Nawaf. "Fractured Iraq: Implications for Saudi National Security." June 23, 2006. <http://www.saudi-us-relations.org/fact-book/documents/2006/060821-snsap-fractured-iraq.pdf>.

More recently—back inside North Africa—the widely-read newspaper El-Khabar has also reported on the arrests of approximately 120 individuals between the ages of 18 and 30 who were suspected by the Algerian government of working as local recruiters for Al-Qaida in Iraq, being veterans of Al-Qaida's jihad in Iraq, or else conspiring to travel to Iraq in hopes of joining Al-Qaida's delegation there.¹¹⁹

Yet—despite the noteworthy contributions of Algerian fighters to Al-Qaida's struggle in Iraq—the GSPC has sternly cautioned about the dangers of dispatching too many of its own recruits to hot-button conflicts elsewhere in the Muslim world, while carelessly abandoning the flagging frontline at home. According to GSPC media wing deputy director Abu Yasser Sayyaf:

"Anyone who looks can witness the capabilities of the brothers in the Arabian Peninsula, their equipment, financial support, and the number of fighters they have. And yet now we are watching as they send martyrs over to Shaykh Abu Musab [al-Zarqawi]—so why don't these brothers target the centers of the apostates and other supporters of disbelief [in Saudi Arabia]? We can observe the effectiveness of such actions from the operation [targeting] the Interior Ministry that took place in the Arabian Peninsula... The brothers in Mesopotamia certainly are aware that targeting mayors, local municipal officials, and the Shiite vermin sometimes has a more beneficial impact than attacking the Americans."¹²⁰

By publishing such statements, the GSPC has made it clear that the purpose of renewed terror attacks in North Africa is not simply to "punish" the Algerian government for its diplomatic support of the U.S. and Iraqi governments. Instead, the aim is to re-awaken popular interest in waging frontline combat within the borders of the Maghreb itself against the "crusaders" and "apostates." In other words—by virtue of GSPC logic—if Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and his associates can be so successful in implanting the seed of jihad in Iraq during the present era, then there should be nothing standing in the way of a parallel campaign by the mujahideen in Algeria either.

Part VI: The GSPC's Transformation into Al-Qaida

The exact nature of the relationship between the GSPC and Al-Qaida has been the subject of intense discussion over the past eight years. The GSPC has made no secret that it shares the same ideological and, in some cases, material foundations as Al-Qaida and its leaders. According to GSPC media wing director Abu Omar Abdul Birr, "We support the writings of the honorable Shaykhs who have revealed the truth... such as Abu Mohammed al-Maqdisi, [Al-Qaida deputy commander] mujahid Ayman al-Zawahiri, the imprisoned Abu Qatada al-Falastini, and [the founder of Al-Qaida's network in Saudi Arabia] the mujahid Youssef al-Ayyiri... we pray to God to reward them with goodness for what they did for Islam."¹²¹ Not only do Al-Qaida and the GSPC share the same religious leaders and Salafi jihadist perspective, but furthermore, significant numbers of commanders, operatives, and supporters from both groups have shared frontline combat experiences together in foreign conflict zones—particularly Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Caucasus, and Iraq.

Though Al-Qaida chief Usama Bin Laden may have played a role in encouraging Hassan Hattab to initially form the GSPC, Hattab's departure as its chief seems to have precipitated a much more aggressive campaign from within the GSPC to support and work on a joint basis with Bin Laden and Al-Qaida. Under the command of Nabil Sahrawi and Abdelmalik Dourkdal, the GSPC loudly professed its admiration and support for mujahideen around the world, towards the ultimate aim of re-establishing an Islamic caliphate. According to media director Abu Omar Abdul Birr, "The [GSPC] regards their mujahideen brothers everywhere on earth, as the forefront of the coming Islamic army, that will not emerge, but from the school of trenches, and weapons... The jihad in Algeria is one of their brigades and one of its frontlines.... The GSPC in Algeria sends a

¹¹⁹ "Algeria detains 120 suspected Iraq fighters-paper." Reuters. April 5, 2007.

¹²⁰ Abu Yasser Sayyaf, Deputy Chief of the Media Wing. "Wise and Desirable Advice for the Guards of the Frontiers." January 8, 2005. <http://www.ansarnet.ws/vb/showthread.php?t=24575>.

¹²¹ "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat: Part 2." Al-Faath Magazine. Vol. 1; No. 2. January 2005. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag_no2/ft-2.zip.

friendly greeting to all jihad organizations."¹²² Birr expanded further on this concept of a "jihad fraternity":

"Our mujahideen brothers in Iraq and [Saudi Arabia], also in Afghanistan, and Chechnya and Palestine, and Philippines and Kashmir... are the crowns on our heads; they are white freckles on the forehead of glory; they are torches lighting our dark alien night; and, they are a part of us. We are wounded if they get wounded; what makes them happy will make us happy. Allah knows that we would sacrifice our blood for theirs, and our bodies for theirs... If it is in your destiny to visit the mujahideen camps that are scattered in the mighty Algerian mountains, you will notice that the mujahideen are following newscasts through the radio, and their eagerness to hear the news of their mujahideen brothers—well, I would not even be exaggerating if I said that their interest in the news of their mujahideen brothers is greater than their interest in their own families, children, and wives."¹²³

Yet, despite these lofty declarations—until recently—the GSPC seemed to hesitate short of officially merging its forces with Al-Qaida. In December 2004, the deputy director of the GSPC's media wing Abu Yasser Sayyaf quickly responded to an online message purporting to be an oath of allegiance from an ethnic Berber GSPC unit to Al-Qaida—dismissing it as "nonsense" aimed at "confusing the brothers in Al-Qaida and in Algeria." However, Abu Yasser was careful in choosing his words, and took pains to cite GSPC commander Nabil Sahrawi's stated policy of providing general "support to the brothers from Al-Qaida."¹²⁴

The GSPC's awkward reluctance to initially join under the banner of Al-Qaida can perhaps be traced to lessons learned from Al-Qaida's recent disappointing forays in Saudi Arabia. The decision by Afghan-trained mujahideen cells in 2003 to establish a local Al-Qaida franchise organization inside the Saudi Kingdom and to launch an aggressive campaign of terrorism was not without serious cost. As a result of the stunning May 2003 suicide bombings in Riyadh, Saudi security forces were embarrassed into immediately redoubling their efforts to uproot underground terrorist networks, badly undermining Al-Qaida's top tier leadership. Al-Qaida's emergence in Saudi Arabia also caused a significant public backlash—even many Saudis who generally supported the jihadi cause were skeptical about the need for Al-Qaida to target innocent civilians inside Muslim countries. Within two years of the initial bombings in Riyadh, Al-Qaida's regional network had been thoroughly decimated and broken into a collection of scattered, disorganized remnants.

The potential perks of forming a regional Al-Qaida franchise organization were demonstrated much more clearly by the celebrated victories of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq between 2004 and 2006. Indeed, Zarqawi's explosive rise to infamy under Al-Qaida's banner seems to have spurred the GSPC into itself seeking a much deeper relationship with Usama Bin Laden and other Al-Qaida leaders. In January 2005, GSPC leaders were delighted to be singled out for praise by Zarqawi in an audio message released on the Internet. In response, Abu Yasser Sayyaf offered "greetings in the name of the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat under... Abu Musab Abdel Wadoud to the dear gentleman, the fighting Shaykh Abu Musab al-Zarqawi"—and tendered an apology to Zarqawi "for not returning your audio greeting directly, but our situation is different from that of Iraq, [Saudi Arabia], and perhaps Chechnya because our mujahideen are fortified in remote places that are difficult for the tyrants to reach." Sayyaf continued, "We say to the righteous Shaykh Abu Musab al-Zarqawi that Allah can testify how you have pleased our hearts by what you have done to our enemies among the crusaders and their apostate supporters in frustrating [their plans] and killing them... May Allah protect you, O' Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and your brothers."¹²⁵

¹²² "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

¹²³ "An Interview with the Chief of the Media Wing from the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat." *Al-Faath Magazine*. Vol. 1; No. 1. December 2004. http://www.geocities.com/alfat7_mag/ft-1.zip.

¹²⁴ "The Al-Qaidat ul-Jihad Organization in the Berber Regions." <http://www.ansarnet.ws/vb/showthread.php?t=23479>. December 26, 2004.

¹²⁵ "The Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat offers our greetings and congratulations to the Al-Qaidat ul-Jihad Organization [in Iraq] and its beloved Commander." <http://www.ansarnet.ws/vb/showthread.php?t=25997>. January 24, 2005.

The GSPC appeared to derive particular meaning and significance from the kidnapping of Algerian diplomats in Baghdad during the summer of 2005. In mid-July, Algeria's top foreign envoy in Iraq and another colleague were seized by Al-Qaida gunmen outside a restaurant in western Baghdad, in what appeared to be a well-planned ambush. The hostage drama played out over a week, as Zarqawi's associates staged a formal trial of the two diplomats before an "Islamic court", sentencing them to death and eventually executing them. Throughout the entire episode, the GSPC played the role of sideline cheerleader, urging Al-Qaida to produce videotaped confessions by the two men and applauding their ultimate murder. When asked about it during a later interview, GSPC commander Abu Musab Abdel Wadoud offered his "congratulations" to "all the beloved courageous brothers from Al-Qaida's Committee in Mesopotamia along with their commander Abu Musab al-Zarqawi... We have blessed the operation that killed these diplomats because they were representatives of the apostate Algerian regime... Moreover, their role as diplomatic representatives helped to buttress the occupation, providing support to the apostate Iraqi government and adding legitimacy to the American occupation."¹²⁶

Meanwhile, as Zarqawi unfurled the banner of jihad against American "crusaders" in Iraq, media stories began to circulate describing parallel covert U.S. counterterrorism efforts in North Africa—including the controversial use of American military forces. These reports provoked an enraged response from the GSPC, which issued an open call to young North African Muslims in September 2005—laying out their vision for the future of the GSPC as the dominant regional mujahideen franchise organization:

"O' young men of Islamic Maghreb... from Egypt to Mauritania, Algeria to Nigeria, and the remainder of Muslim minorities in Africa. Many of you were unable to go to Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, or Chechnya... however, Allah has brought those evil people to your own homelands... these days, America is depositing its Marines in the grand desert and this is your chance to seek revenge for the events of Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, Al-Aqsa [Jerusalem], and Al-Haramain [Saudi Arabia]... When you declare war on these evil cross worshippers, then you will be able to lighten the load on your brothers [in other countries]... We also ask you to dismantle the forces of the crusader enemy by opening a new active Muslim frontline against the crusader enemy, adding yet another nail into the coffin of our enemy. This prolonged and exhaustive war that was begun by Shaykh Usama Bin Laden is starting to bear fruit... This is your chance to erase the colonial borders... that were established surrounding our Islamic countries and turning them into prisons ruled by various oppressors who have trampled on our religion and defended our enemies... therefore, demolish those borders, O' young Muslim men, travel to the battlefields and attack the fortresses of the criminals and their supporters... Our war against the crusader American enemy is closely linked to the wars of our Muslim brothers around the world. [We] will be another brigade to join the brigades of holy jihad manifested by the holy attacks on New York and Washington under the leadership of Usama Bin Laden."¹²⁷

The statement further added that "even if our [travel] documents have made it impossible to meet him [Bin Laden], he should know that he is more dear to us than our parents, brothers, and children—and we keep praying for him every day."¹²⁸ By this point, it had become a nearly unbroken routine for the GSPC to conclude their communiqués and propaganda videos by hailing Bin Laden as rightful leader of the global jihadist movement.

Yet, as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi demonstrated in Iraq, the process of formally merging a regional mujahideen organization into the ranks of Al-Qaida is not as simple as it might first appear. When Zarqawi finally swore a bayat, or oath of allegiance, to Usama Bin Laden in October 2004, he admitted at the time that it had only come after more than eight months of bitter wrangling with other Al-Qaida leaders.¹²⁹ Likewise, the GSPC has acknowledged that its decision to join Al-Qaida was the result of "approximately a year" of "continuing contacts and

¹²⁶ "An Interview With the Commander of the GSPC on Monday 22 Shaaban 1426 (September 26, 2005)." *Al-Jama'ah Magazine*. Vol. 1; Issue 5. October 20, 2005. <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=36423>.

¹²⁷ "A Call to Battle from the Mujahideen of the GSPC to the Monotheists of the Islamic Maghreb." September 5, 2005. <http://www.ansarnet.ws/ansarnet/showthread.php?t=2583>.

¹²⁸ "A Call to Battle from the Mujahideen of the GSPC to the Monotheists of the Islamic Maghreb." September 5, 2005. <http://www.ansarnet.ws/ansarnet/showthread.php?t=2583>.

¹²⁹ Abu Maysarah al-Iraqi. "The announcement of the good news regarding Jama'at al-Tawheed wal-Jihad joining under the banner of Al-Qaida." October 17, 2004. <http://www.ansarnet.ws/vb/showthread.php?t=17282>.

discussions."¹³⁰ The process began in the late summer of 2005 and finally culminated in an official communiqué released on September 14, 2006.

"We are glad to inform our Islamic nation and our Muslim brothers around the world world about the great news which the mujahideen have been waiting for... the news of the merging of the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat in Algeria with Al-Qaida, and swearing bayat [an oath of allegiance] to the Mujahid Shaykh Abu Abdullah Usama Bin Laden, may Allah protect him... The destruction of war, the difficulty of the present situation, and the unified coalition of our enemies against us make it necessary for us to confront this coalition with our own coalition, their alliance with our alliance, face their unified forces against our unified forces... The United States of America will only be defeated by a United States of Islam... After a long period of careful observation, it became clear to us that our brothers in Al-Qaida organization under the lead of Mujahid Shaykh Usama Bin Laden—may Allah protect him—are the best ones in this era to unify the scattered Muslims against their enemies and to lead them in their present war... We have discovered that which makes the crusaders most angry, sad, and regretful is our union with our brothers from the Al-Qaida organization... We have decided to swear bayat to Shaykh Usama Bin Laden and to continue our jihad in Algeria as soldiers under his command, for him to use us in the cause of Allah when and where he sees fit... The Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat considers itself to be one brick in constructing the future Islamic State."¹³¹

Oddly, for almost four months after it officially joined Al-Qaida, the GSPC continued to use its old name (the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat) in published statements and other material. Finally, in late January 2007, the group finally announced that it would henceforth be known as "Al-Qaida in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb." According to a message from the leaders of the GSPC, the decision to ultimately adopt the Al-Qaida moniker was made "as an indication of the group's vibrancy, the strength of its coalition [with Usama Bin Laden], and the sincerity of the link between the mujahideen in Algeria, and other brothers from the Al-Qaida organization." Addressing the inexplicable four month delay in reaching this decision, the GSPC explained, "we were careful about this issue since the first day of the merger" and added that the final decision to name themselves "Al-Qaida" came only after "consultations with Shaykh Usama [Bin Laden], may God preserve him... and his consent."¹³²

Already by this point, the GSPC had given other indications that major new developments were beginning to take shape. On January 3, 2007, the group released a video message from commander Abu Musab Abdel Wadoud, ominously titled "We Are Coming." Directing his first message to Al-Qaida leader Usama Bin Laden in Afghanistan, Wadoud beseeched, "only Allah knows how much we miss you, and how hard it is for us to be far from you. In the name of Allah, if we could be carried by birds, we would come to you. We remember you in our hearts and visualize you in our minds. We ask Allah to reunite us after missing you for so long." While addressing Bin Laden, Wadoud likewise declared, "We are eagerly awaiting your instructions and orders regarding the next phase." The GSPC commander further challenged the notion that the Algerian jihad has collapsed, claiming that the group had managed to recently acquire substantial new "stores of weapons and ammunition."¹³³

Even before Wadoud's speech, the inaugural operations of the GSPC's new campaign had already begun in earnest. Only a month previous, on December 11, the GSPC planned and executed an elaborate roadside bombing attack on a bus carrying contract workers for "Brown Root Condor", a joint corporate venture between Kellogg, Brown, and Root (KBR) and Condor Engineering, an affiliate of Algerian state energy group Sonatrach. The stunning attack—which took place in the Bouchaoui region just west of the capital Algiers—killed an Algerian driver and wounded four Britons, one American, a Canadian, two Lebanese, and another Algerian national. A video later released by the GSPC purported to show how carefully the operation had been

¹³⁰ "Statement Regarding the Merger [with Al-Qaida] and the Salafist Group Swearing Allegiance to Shaykh Usama Bin Laden, may Allah protect him." September 14, 2006. <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=85119>.

¹³¹ "Statement Regarding the Merger [with Al-Qaida] and the Salafist Group Swearing Allegiance to Shaykh Usama Bin Laden, may Allah protect him." September 14, 2006. <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=85119>.

¹³² "The Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat: Notice of a Change in our Name." January 26, 2007. <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=107264>.

¹³³ "The Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat Presents a Speech by our Commander Abu Musab Abdel Wadoud: 'We Are Coming.'" January 8, 2007. <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=104401>.

organized, depicting mujahideen using Google Earth software and the Internet to painstakingly map out the route of their intended target.¹³⁴ The GSPC also issued a written communiqué claiming the bombing in Bouchaoui "targeting crusaders working for the American company Brown & Root - Condor in Bouchaoui... [as] a modest gift that we offer to our Muslim brothers who are suffering from the misfortunes of the new Crusade that is targeting Islam and its sanctuaries."¹³⁵

Subsequently, on March 3, the GSPC (now known as Al-Qaida's network in the Islamic Maghreb) continued along the same track with yet another provocative roadside bombing targeting foreign contractors—this time, employees of the Russian company Stroy Trans Gaz, which has made significant investments in the development of Algerian gas pipelines. The attack took place nearly 80 miles southwest of Algiers, killing one Russian national and wounding another. In a statement released two days later, Al-Qaida claimed responsibility for the operation, offering it as a "small gift to our Muslim brothers in Chechnya, whom the government of the criminal Putin shows them killing and oppression with the support of the Russian people."¹³⁶

These two recent attacks demonstrate a critical aspect of the GSPC's revived military campaign under the banner of Al-Qaida: a fixated interest in striking at foreign energy and petroleum interests. Certainly, Algerian jihadists have always had a sharp awareness of how to use global energy markets to compound the politically destabilizing impact of terrorist attacks. It should be recalled that, as early as 1995, the GIA openly identified Algeria's natural energy resources to be "critical" for the continued survival of petroleum-driven Western economies in Spain, France, Italy, and the United States.¹³⁷ This equation has only become more important in the years since 9/11 and the evolution of Al-Qaida's global military strategy. By 2003, Al-Qaida's leaders including Usama Bin Laden began placing significantly increased public emphasis on attacking petroleum-related targets. In 2006, Al-Qaida in Saudi Arabia even issued a detailed guidebook to the "laws of targeting petroleum interests."¹³⁸



Meanwhile, back in Algeria, the GSPC has carefully studied these strategic lessons and how "the jihads in Iraq and Saudi Arabia" have forced the U.S. to seek alternative energy sources beyond the borders of the traditional Middle East. Thus, according to the GSPC, the U.S. has "decided to utilize the African continent and its vast deserts—especially those extending from Sinai to Nouakchott where there are substantial oil and natural gas resources and also large areas that could be used as American military bases."¹³⁹ In response, the GSPC has directed its forces to sabotage the export of Algerian oil and gas supplies by Western companies without causing permanent damage to potentially valuable material resources. As



The April 11 suicide bombers

such, foreign energy contractors and corporate interests inside Algeria present an ideal terrorist target. By re-focusing its antipathy towards Western influence in North Africa, the GSPC has also

¹³⁴ "The Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat Presents 'The Battle of Bouchaoui.'" January 21, 2007.

<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=106457>.

¹³⁵ "The Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat Issues a Statement Regarding the Raid on Bouchaoui Targeting the Americans." <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=100186>. December 11, 2006.

¹³⁶ "Al-Qaida's Committee in the Islamic Maghreb Claims Bomb Attacks on the Russians and Successful Raids by the Mujahideen on the Infidels." March 5, 2007.

<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=113864>.

¹³⁷ "Theater of Operation: MUSLIM ALGERIA." *Islam Report*. American Islamic Group (AIG). February 25, 1996.

¹³⁸ "A New Report from Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula on the Secret Details Behind the Battle of Shaykh Usama Bin Laden." February 25, 2006. <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=55164>.

¹³⁹ "A Call to Battle from the Mujahideen of the GSPC to the Monotheists of the Islamic Maghreb." September 5, 2005. <http://www.ansarnet.ws/ansarnet/showthread.php?t=2583>.

managed to distract public attention away from the dark days of civilian massacres and internecine mujahideen warfare under the former GIA regime of Antar Zouabri.

Nonetheless, foreign nationals are hardly the only desirable target for the "new and improved" GSPC under the banner of Al-Qaida. This much was demonstrated in stunning clarity on April 11, 2007, when the group launched an unprecedented series of suicide truck bombing attacks in and around the city of Algiers—including the office of the Prime Minister—killing 30 people and wounding more than 200 others. In a statement released on the same day, Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb identified the three suicide bombers (along with accompanying photos) and boasted of having executed a "special type of an operation for the very first time." The letter continued, "behold the young Muslim men who are coming to you, behold those who cherish death more than life itself, and cherish martyrdom the same way that you cherish your corrupt lifestyle. We shall not put away our swords and we shall never live in peace until every last Muslim land is set free from the crusaders, the apostates, and the collaborators."¹⁴⁰ Less publicized was the accompanying wave of bombings stretching from January to April in Algiers, Boumerdas, Tizi Ouzou, and Bejaia—virtually all of which targeted Algerian police, military, and counterterrorism forces. Concurrently, the GSPC has demanded that members of the Algerian security services "repent" and abandon their support for the ruling regime—or else be marked for death as "apostates."

Part VII: The GIA/GSPC Operational Presence in Europe

In the early 1990s—faced with an intense crackdown on armed Islamists by the Algerian government—many extremists fled their homeland for political asylum in various foreign countries, primarily in western and southern Europe. These men established themselves in Muslim communities and mosques, networking closely with other like-minded militants from the Egyptian Al-Gama`at al-Islamiyya and Islamic Jihad organization, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), and the Tunisian An-Nahdah. According to Abu Hamza al-Masri, "After many of the supporters [of the Algerian jihad] in Europe took over the moral and media support by issuing magazines from France, they were able to give the world the news about jihaad and the reasons

for it. At once the French government cracked down on them heavily to block news from being heard. They were then forced to move to other countries, which allowed more freedom of speech, such as England, Sweden and others."¹⁴¹ In approximately mid-1993, a group of Islamic militants—including Algerian exiles "who came from Afghanistan"—founded the *Usraat al-Ansaar* magazine in the United Kingdom.¹⁴² Published on a weekly basis from London exclusively in Arabic, the *al-Ansaar* magazine quickly became the GIA's most credible and well-known public mouthpiece. Its editorial board featured some of the most prominent and diverse names from the world of global jihad, including Abu Hamza al-Masri, Abu Qatada al-Falastini, and Abu Musab al-Suri. For European

GIA/GSPC Operational Zones in Europe: 1992-2007



¹⁴⁰ "Al-Qaida's Committee in the Islamic Maghreb: The Battle of Badr in the Islamic Maghreb." April 11, 2007. <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=121075>.

¹⁴¹ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 90.

¹⁴² Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 90.

subscribers outside of Great Britain, the magazine reportedly also offered an alternate correspondence mailing address at Box 3027 in Haninge, Sweden.¹⁴³ Usraat al-Ansaar found itself fully enmeshed in the politics of the GIA and "was fought viciously by other Algerian groups in Europe who were secularist or pro Democracy, such as FIS, with all of its factions."¹⁴⁴

Despite its controversial reputation, the nefarious GIA found many eager supporters from downtrodden North African communities throughout Western Europe. With soaring unemployment and racial intolerance against Arabs, French cities, depressed suburbs, and even jails particularly provided ideal breeding grounds for youths to be brainwashed in radical Islam. In 1995, one Parisian of Algerian descent explained, "There are millions of us who feel excluded and unwanted... A lot of us think since we have nothing to lose, we might as well turn to violence to get some respect. There is so much disgust around here that one day the authorities will wake up and find they are fighting a civil war." Another unemployed North African immigrant in Paris chimed in, "I think you have to be a little soft in the head to follow these Islamic radicals, but I understand why there is so much frustration. When you can't get a job and you get checked five times by the police even when you are well dressed, you begin to think that society has declared you an enemy. So you want to fight back."¹⁴⁵

Algerian mujahideen volunteers saw themselves as heirs to the legacy of a multi-generational, pan-Islamic clash with Christian "crusaders"—whether it be in North Africa, Central Asia, or in Europe. The failure of France and other Western European powers to intervene and stop sectarian bloodshed in the Balkans (and later in Chechnya) became symbolic of a perceived systematic war of aggression by "Christian Europe" against the entire Muslim world. "I hate the French," explained one Algerian Arab-Afghan fighting with Muslim forces in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo, "I hate them—more than I do other countries, because of what they did in Algeria. We drove them out of my country and we will also win in Bosnia."¹⁴⁶ As the dominant armed Islamist faction in the Maghreb, the GIA (and later the GSPC) became a transnational corporate umbrella not only for Algerian exiles, but also for many likeminded "free-floating" Tunisian and Moroccan extremists.

Rather than seeking to join the mujahideen inside Algeria, many European GIA adherents instead opted for alternate emerging jihad frontlines in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Caucasus, and Afghanistan for training and organization. By 1993, the chaotic central and western Balkans had developed into a primary hub for GIA activity—in cities such as Zagreb, Sarajevo, and Zenica. The official leader of the El-Mudzahid Unit of the Bosnian Army 3rd Corps became a young Algerian who had been studying abroad in Italy, Abdelkader Mokhtari (a.k.a. Abu el-Ma`ali). So disgruntled were one small group of Saudi fighters by the dominant influence of Al-Gama`at al-Islamiyya and the Algerians over the El-Mudzahid Unit in Bosnia that they angrily split from it and formed their own autonomous mujahideen faction. Meanwhile, underground GIA logistical networks established in European cities (such as Stockholm, London, Nice, Lyon, and Paris) proved not only "ideal" for organizing the departure of Maghrebi mujahideen recruits to frontlines in Bosnia and Afghanistan, "but eventually also for other activities."¹⁴⁷



Abdelkader Mokhtari
(a.k.a. Abu el-Ma`ali)

In mid-1995, France experienced a wave of violent incidents perpetrated by Bosnian and Afghan-trained North African militants eager to "prolong their jihad on French territory." The attacks included the bombings of urban Metro lines near popular Parisian tourist destinations, the

¹⁴³ Mirak-Weissbach, Muriel. "The case of the GIA: Afghans out of theater." *Executive Intelligence Review*. October 13, 1995.

¹⁴⁴ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 90.

¹⁴⁵ Drozdiak, William. "France's 'Unwanted'; Alienated Arab Youths Turning to Violence." *The Washington Post*. November 14, 1995. Page A14.

¹⁴⁶ Fisk, Robert. "An alien 'brother' fights for Muslims." *The Independent* (London). July 14, 1993. Page 9.

¹⁴⁷ Jean-Louis Bruguiere and Jean-Francois Ricard. "Requisitoire Definitif aux Fins de Non-Lieu. De Non-Lieu partiel. De Requalification. De Renvoi devant le Tribunal Correctionnel, de maintien sous Controle Judiciaire et de maintien en Detention." Cour D'Appel de Paris; Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris. No. Parquet: P96 253 3901.2. Page 72.

attempted derailing of a high-speed TGV passenger train, and the assassination of exiled Algerian Islamist moderates. French authorities later concluded that the rail bombing campaign was the work of a vast, 41-member decentralized network of Algerian Islamic militants based across France. Though these men were alleged to be under the command of an envoy of GIA leader Djamel Zitouni, nearly all of them had previously taken part "in military training courses at Khalden [camp] in Afghanistan for the [purpose] of jihad in Algeria."¹⁴⁸ At the time, then-French Interior Minister Jean-Louis Debre commented that "[a]lthough these groups have a certain freedom of action, they have close links to and obey those who give the orders who are the pivots of a campaign of destabilization."¹⁴⁹

One of the young mujahideen recruits who was enrolled in at Khalden camp in Afghanistan during this period was Algerian exile Ahmed Ressay, who received specialized training there during mid-1998 (and was subsequently intercepted by U.S. Customs inspectors in December 1999 while attempting to cross the U.S.-Canadian border with more than 100 pounds of explosives in his trunk). Ressay later testified in U.S. federal court that he had been assigned to be part of an "Algerian group" based at the Khalden camp comprised of approximately 30 other militants: "The big person in charge was Montaz. He had others working with him, Abu Doha and Abu Jaffar [a.k.a. Omar Chaabani]."¹⁵⁰ According to Ressay, the Algerian network being trained at Khalden was part of a "large group divided into cells. Each cell had a certain area, for example, Europe. Each cell had its emir that was in control. They stayed in touch in Pakistan with Abu Jaffar and Abu Doha who was in Europe."¹⁵¹ Ressay admitted to being assigned to a six-man "Europe cell" within the Algerian network, led by a commander known as "Fodail." He also acknowledged that his "European" cell had held regular discussions about "conducting a terrorist operation."¹⁵² During law enforcement interrogations, Ressay described how the various cells would gather each Friday to address their intentions to strengthen links with Algerian-based mujahideen, how to fundraise to support the jihad, and how to recruit new cells inside Europe. Ressay further indicated that the cells loyal to the Algerian network were considered semi-autonomous and "do not need the green light for an attack from leaders like Abu Doha, Abu Zubayda or Abu Jaffar."¹⁵³

Though the complex Algerian jihadist web in Europe continued to develop throughout the 1990s, its progress was clearly hampered by critical infighting over the increasingly controversial tactics of the GIA back at home in the Maghreb. These quarrels began taking shape in late 1995, following the GIA-ordered assassination of other respected mujahideen leaders in Algeria, such as Shaykh Mohammed Said. According to Abu Hamza al-Masri, the editors and writers of *Usraat al-Ansaar* in London were initially divided: "some of the writers of *al-Ansaar* demanded more explanation from the GIA regarding these events while others continued their support. Then, after a while, some of the supporters decided to pull out and to stop giving support to the GIA by issuing statements in the media distancing themselves from the GIA."¹⁵⁴

As the murders continued and spiraled into the wholesale massacre of innocent civilians, a major split took place between the editors of *Usraat al-Ansaar* and the GIA's rogue leadership in Algeria—a conflict which spread throughout Algerian Islamist communities in Europe and "had far-reaching consequences that sent an earthquake of instability among the adherents to the GIA and the group's aims."¹⁵⁵ When Antar Zouabri arrogantly defended his decision to kill Muslim civilians, the *al-Ansaar* trustees in London "immediately" issued a statement "denouncing them... This refutation was published in Arabic and English newspapers, in which the GIA were exposed as *Khawaarij* [deviants]."¹⁵⁶ At least two former editors from *Usraat al-Ansaar*—Abu Hamza al-Masri

¹⁴⁸ Zerrouky, Hassane. "Attentats de 1995 : comment le GIA a tissé sa toile." *L'Humanité*. June 1, 1999.

¹⁴⁹ "France to maintain anti-terrorist guard." *Agence France Presse*. November 16, 1995.

¹⁵⁰ Direct Examination of Ahmed Ressay. *United States v. Mokhtar Haouari*. United States District Court Southern District of New York. Case: 00CR15. June 27-July 6, 2001. Page 553. July 3, 2001.

¹⁵¹ Direct Examination of Ahmed Ressay. *United States v. Mokhtar Haouari*. United States District Court Southern District of New York. Case: 00CR15. June 27-July 6, 2001. Page 553. July 3, 2001.

¹⁵² Direct Examination of Ahmed Ressay. *United States v. Mokhtar Haouari*. United States District Court Southern District of New York. Case: 00CR15. June 27-July 6, 2001. Page 553. July 3, 2001.

¹⁵³ Italian Division of General Investigations and Special Operations (DIGOS) Intelligence Report on Ahmed Ressay. Dated July 24, 2001.

¹⁵⁴ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 90.

¹⁵⁵ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 91.

¹⁵⁶ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 95.

and Abu Musab al-Suri (a.k.a. Mustafa Setmariam Nasar)—have subsequently written full-length books explaining their decision to ditch the GIA as a “deviant sect.” Prior to his capture in 2005, Abu Musab al-Suri freely acknowledged his willingness to “renounce [the leaders among the GIA] who had deviated from the righteous path, who had transgressed against Muslims, and who shed their blood and [violated] their sanctuaries through the cunning of the Algerian intelligence.”

The fissure between Usraat al-Ansaar in London and Zouabri’s GIA command in Algeria caused major and lasting complications. The GIA made no secret of its ruthless policy of targeting former mujahideen allies who had abandoned their joint mission. After the statement was issued from London in response to Zouabri, “death threats were made against Usraat ul Ansaar, not to mention the attendants at Finsbury Park Masjid [in London].”¹⁵⁷ Even though many GIA members would eventually concede that Zouabri had gone too far in his draconian dictates, it did little to quell hurt feelings over the incident. When digital copies of Abu Musab al-Suri’s book on the GIA began re-circulating over the Internet in 2005, deputy director of the GSPC media wing Abu Yasser Sayyaf offered a bitter retort over the Muntada al-Ansar chat forum, charging that al-Suri is “biased against the jihad... he [has] defamed the jihad in Algeria and has ascribed blame to the mujahideen and has acquitted and defended the policies of the apostates.” He continued on by referring to al-Suri’s book as “slanderous” and an “insult.”¹⁵⁸

The political ruptures in the European jihadist community caused by Antar al-Zouabri would not last for long. Almost immediately after Hassan Hattab and other former GIA commanders formed the GSPC in Algeria, European security services began to learn of its existence from monitoring terrorist suspects in France, Italy, and the United Kingdom—the majority of whom were eagerly seeking to join under its banner. By the summer of 2000, the Italian DIGOS noted a “significant upsurge of activities” by locally-based North African militants, who were “converging to support from abroad the activities of the Salafist Group [for Prayer and Combat]. Many Tunisian fighters were sent to Algeria... and they fought with the organization of Hassan Hattab (commander of the Salafist Group).”¹⁵⁹ According to information gathered by Italian prosecutors, these men followed a risky journey through Spain, “the primary connection for Algeria”, where they would first be pre-screened by a “deeply-rooted cell of the GSPC.”¹⁶⁰

Yet, once again, many Algerian mujahideen recruits from Europe would choose alternative jihad combat zones to North Africa—in this case, the Caucasus. In 1999, the Saudi Arab-Afghan commander Ibn-ul-Khattab reopened frontline combat with Russian military forces in Chechnya and Dagestan, prompting a flood of European volunteers to rise to the occasion. In 2000, reports of French nationals being killed in combat with Russian forces prompted inquiries into a host of their associates, including Zacarias Moussaoui. Two years later, in December 2002, the anti-terrorism section of the Paris prosecutors office opened an official investigation into nine specific individuals, at least three of whom had trained with mujahideen in Chechnya. Subsequent raids in the Paris suburbs of Romainville and La Courneuve turned up diagrams of chemical formulas for explosives and a substance that, when subjected to heat or put in contact with water, would release a highly toxic gas. Investigators also found electronic components, a motorcycle battery, a chem-bio warfare suit, two empty gas canisters, falsified documents, and electronics designed “to ignite explosives from a distance with the aid of cell phones.” One of the alleged members of the “Chechen Network” was Said Arif, a former Algerian military officer who had deserted his post in order to attend Al-Qaida training camps in Afghanistan. Later, Arif and several associates traveled on to the lawless Pankisi Gorge, straddling the Caucasus regions of Georgia and Chechnya. French counterterrorism magistrate Jean-Louis Bruguiere has suggested that North African terrorist cells in Europe have “more and more connections with Chechnya and

¹⁵⁷ Al-Masri, Abu Hamza. *Khawaarij and Jihad*. Maktabah al-Ansar; Birmingham, UK. ©2000. Page 95.

¹⁵⁸ “The Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat issues a Response to the Book From Omar Abdel Hakeem.” <http://www.ansarnet.ws/vb/showthread.php?t=25778>. January 23, 2005.

¹⁵⁹ “Apprehension of a Suspect of a Crime.” Indictment of Tarek Maaroufi, Essid Sami Ben Khemais, et al. Public Prosecutor’s Office; Dr. Stefano Dambruoso. Penal Proceeding No. 13016/99 RGNR (A4/DIGOS/sez, 3/C). Milan, Italy. April 2, 2001.

¹⁶⁰ “Apprehension of a Suspect of a Crime.” Indictment of Tarek Maaroufi, Essid Sami Ben Khemais, et al. Public Prosecutor’s Office; Dr. Stefano Dambruoso. Penal Proceeding No. 13016/99 RGNR (A4/DIGOS/sez, 3/C). Milan, Italy.

use this area as the new base to continue as an aircraft carrier", using it to launch trained terrorist operatives back into Europe and to "continue the fight against the west."¹⁶¹ It should be added that, since 2003, the ongoing jihad in Iraq has significantly supplanted the conflict in the Caucasus for North African extremists from Europe and the Maghreb. Abu Adam al-Maqdisi—a Palestinian fighter with Al-Qaida's "Islamic State of Iraq"—has confirmed, "the brothers from Algeria, they used to come to Iraq and then return to Algeria. There is coordination between us and them."¹⁶²

Likewise, Italian prosecutors studying the "illicit activities" of local militant cells observed that the mission of GSPC partisans was multi-faceted: "to guarantee the logistical continuity of the Italian cell or of interlinked European cells... [and] to provide auxiliary support to Islamic militants working/engaged in areas of conflict, including Chechnya and in particular Algeria, sustained by the GSPC led by emir Hassan Hattab." The Italians also noted that the GSPC was considered to be "operating militarily in Africa but with a logistical infrastructure spread across Europe", including "notably England, Germany, France and Spain."¹⁶³ Generally speaking, GSPC cells in Europe were "trained both ideologically and militarily in extremist camps in the Pakistan / Afghanistan region" and were primarily engaged in the "commission of a number of crimes, including the procurement of weapons/arms or explosives, the falsification or sale of identification documents, facilitating clandestine immigration, and dispatching warriors/mujahidin to theatres of war and other places."¹⁶⁴ Though the European network of GSPC supporters had a significant degree of autonomy from the group's hierarchy inside Algeria, Italian authorities uncovered convincing evidence of the "close relationship that exists between the branch of the mujaheddin functioning in Europe (specifically in Italy) and the combatants who operate in Algeria", including discussions referring to the "calls from the brothers 'down there'"—interpreted as scheduled telephone conferences with mujahideen leaders in Algeria.¹⁶⁵



Peter Cherif, a French national of Moroccan origin who allegedly escaped with other Al-Qaida members from an Iraqi-run prison

More recently, the GSPC has given strong indications that it intends on expanding its renewed campaign of violence back on to European soil. In August 2005, the group issued an open "call to the Muslims in France", imploring them for active support and direct assistance:

"Our true enemies are not only the military leaders but they also include a large number of civilian groups who have demonstrated their total loyalty to French politicians. These people have an overwhelming degree of control over the most senior figures in the regime. These people are in control of the Algerian bureaucracy, major media, leading public companies, cultural organizations, diplomatic delegations, and other important organizations in the country... What is needed from our brothers and supporters in France? Brothers in religion and faith: are you content to allow Algeria to be separated from its identity, returned to colonial status, and filled with the corruption of the Americans and European people? Are you content that your brothers in Algeria are being killed, their wives are becoming widows, and their children are becoming orphans while you stand aside and watch the butchers kill them? Are you going to allow them to relax in France and regain strength so that they can return to Algeria strong enough to fight Islam and its faithful? Bring victory for your Algeria brothers by executing those criminals in France—watch them and drive

¹⁶¹ "Terrorist Are Adapting to Increasingly Hostile Environment." CNN (Cable News Network). Aired May 13, 2003. <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/030513/se.06.html>.

¹⁶² Paltalk Online chat session with "Abu Adam al-Maqdisi." April 27, 2007.

<http://www.globalterroralert.com/pdf/0507/isimaqdisi0507.pdf>.

¹⁶³ "Apprehension of a Suspect of a Crime." Indictment of Tarek Maaroufi, Essid Sami Ben Khemais, et al. Public Prosecutor's Office; Dr. Stefano Dambruoso. Penal Proceeding No. 13016/99 RGNR (A4/DIGOS/sez, 3/C). Milan, Italy.

¹⁶⁴ "Apprehension of a Suspect of a Crime." Indictment of Tarek Maaroufi, Essid Sami Ben Khemais, et al. Public Prosecutor's Office; Dr. Stefano Dambruoso. Penal Proceeding No. 13016/99 RGNR (A4/DIGOS/sez, 3/C). Milan, Italy.

¹⁶⁵ "Apprehension of a Suspect of a Crime." Indictment of Tarek Maaroufi, Essid Sami Ben Khemais, et al. Public Prosecutor's Office; Dr. Stefano Dambruoso. Penal Proceeding No. 13016/99 RGNR (A4/DIGOS/sez, 3/C). Milan, Italy.

them out from France. If you ask yourselves, 'where can we find them,' then look for them inside the underground centers of corruption, gambling, and entertainment. Lie in wait for them outside of the nightclubs and the liquor stores because they are like dung beetles which are found in places of wickedness and evil. If you are not able to eliminate them, then you should at least initiate a campaign in the Muslim community aimed at revealing their corruption."¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ "A Call to the Muslims in France." Media Wing; Algerian Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat (GSPC). <http://www.salafia.net/html/bay/abna2faransa.htm>. Dated August 1, 2005; Released August 15, 2005.