

Despite these losses, the TTP clearly remains a dangerous organization. The October 5 suicide attack on a United Nations office in Islamabad, and the October 10 assault on the military's General Headquarters in Rawalpindi, show that the TTP remains highly effective under Hakimullah's leadership. These two attacks have caused an irreparable loss of confidence in the Pakistan Army. Moreover, the October 15 attacks in Lahore show that Hakimullah retains strong links with jihadist groups with access to Punjab Province. In the face of the government's major offensive in South Waziristan Agency, TTP spokesman Azam Tariq vowed that the group would continue such strikes if military operations against them were not ceased.²⁸ The assassination of a Pakistani brigadier amid heavy rush hour traffic in Islamabad on October 22 could be a sign of a new TTP assassination campaign.²⁹

It appears that the TTP is currently at a crossroads, and its future could move in two directions. Either the TTP will successfully escalate its activities and increasingly make use of its Punjabi network to shake Pakistan, or it could splinter into smaller factions due to internal disagreements, heightened sectarian tendencies, or Pakistan's current offensive against its central leadership.

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²⁸ "GHQ Attackers Demanded Release of 100 Militants," *Dawn*, October 13, 2009.

²⁹ Jane Perlez and Salman Masood, "Pakistani Brigadier Assassinated in the Capital," *New York Times*, October 22, 2009.

The October 2009 Terrorist Attack in Italy and its Wider Implications

By Federico Bordonaro

ON OCTOBER 12, 2009, at approximately 7:45 AM, a Libyan citizen named Mohamed Game¹ attacked an Italian Army barracks in Milan with an improvised explosive device similar to the type used by terrorists in the London Underground attacks of July 7, 2005.² It is believed that the attack was an attempted suicide bombing, although Game survived the explosion due to poor construction of the IED. Nevertheless, the bomb was powerful enough to injure him severely. By October 19, Game was still hospitalized and in a coma, having lost one hand and the use of both eyes. The IED's blast also lightly injured the Italian soldier who managed to stop Game's attempt to access the inhabited sections of the barracks.

After five days of investigations, Italy's intelligence services believe that Game and his apprehended accomplices—the Libyan Mohamed Imbaeya Israfel³ and the Egyptian Abdel Hady Abdelaziz Mahmoud Kol⁴—may be linked to an unspecified Egyptian terrorist organization.⁵ Although many of the details are not yet clear, some conclusions can be drawn about the operative and tactical aspects of the attack, and especially on the wider political and security implications for Italy. Italy's north is home to Muslim immigrants, and the activities of some

¹ Game, a 35-year-old engineer and electrician, has been living in Italy for nine years and has a relationship with an Italian woman. The couple have two children and are reportedly undergoing serious economic troubles after Game's business failed to pay back debt. See Carlo Bonini, "Dal sogno di fare fortuna ai debiti il mistero di Mohamed, lupo solitario," *La Repubblica*, October 13, 2009.

² "Libyan in Milan Bomb Attack," ANSA Press Agency, October 12, 2009.

³ Israfel is a Libyan citizen aged 33 and currently unemployed. He attracted the attention of Italy's DIGOS police service in July 2009, as he was wiretapped speaking in extremist religious terms. He has a clean criminal record.

⁴ Kol, a 52-year-old Egyptian living in Italy, has a clean criminal record but is suspected of being linked to Egyptian extremist networks.

⁵ "Attentato, spunta un testimone 'Ho visto nascondere il nitrato,'" *La Repubblica*, October 16, 2009.

Muslim religious leaders have been strictly monitored in recent years due to fears of radicalization in mosques.

This article will first describe the operative and tactical aspects of the October 12 terrorist attack and report the findings of the ongoing investigations. It will then briefly illustrate the recent history of Islamist terrorist threats in Italy before analyzing the wider implications of the seemingly minor incident in Milan.

The Dynamics of the Milan Terrorist Attack

According to initial reports, Mohamed Game tried to enter the "Santa Barbara" barracks by waiting near the facility until the arrival of an authorized vehicle enabled him to follow it through the automatic gate. Once the gate opened, he tried to reach the core area of the barracks, but was immediately confronted by an armed soldier, Corporal Guido La Veneziana, whose unit is currently deployed in Herat, Afghanistan. Before the soldier could physically block him, Game reportedly detonated the IED. The device, however, was not prepared properly, and the blast did not cause the desired amount of damage. According to the soldier's declarations, the Libyan shouted some words in Arabic moments before the explosion.⁶

Early probes found that the IED was carried by the attacker in a toolbox placed in a rucksack. It had been assembled with five kilograms of ammonium nitrate, likely mixed with ammonia and acetone, while the trigger may have been electronic.⁷ The explosive mixture used by Game was similar to ANFO,⁸ although the exact chemical composition of the device has not been revealed by authorities.

While the prompt intervention of Corporal La Veneziana denied Game the possibility of proceeding deeper into the barracks, the damage could have been considerable had the terrorist been able to exploit the full potential of the IED.

⁶ "Bomba contro una caserma a Milano Gravemente ferito l'attentatore libico," *La Stampa*, October 12, 2009.

⁷ "Bomba caserma, 40 kg nitrato ammonio," ANSA Press Agency, October 13, 2009; *Il Giornale*, October 15, 2009.

⁸ ANFO stands for ammonium nitrate-fuel oil and is a widely used explosive mixture.

As far as the tactical side is concerned, the Santa Barbara barracks attack diverges from terrorist actions carried out by Islamists on European soil. In Madrid in 2004 and in London in 2005, multiple attackers targeted public transportation systems. The tactical aim of these attacks was to cause as many dead and injured as possible among passengers, the strategic goal being to decisively weaken popular support for Western military operations in Muslim countries and instilling the perception of a constant asymmetrical threat to European cities. On the contrary, the Milan attack targeted a military facility, and its political message was directed at the Italian government and military.

Preliminary Results of Investigations

Strikingly, Italian Interior Minister Roberto Maroni declared immediately after the attack that the incident was caused by “a kamikaze.”⁹ Since Mohamed Game suffered a coma before police could interrogate him, it was not possible to ascertain whether his intention was to act as a suicide bomber. For example, it is possible that Game’s intent was to place his IED inside the barracks to be detonated remotely.¹⁰

While during the first two days of investigations the authorities issued regular statements, they have remained silent since October 14. Available open source information and early police declarations, however, enable analysts to piece together what has been discovered and to cautiously reason about further developments.

First, contrary to the initial official declarations, Mohamed Game is no longer considered a “lone wolf.” Instead, Game and his conspirators, Kol and Israfel, had apparently set up an operational group that utilized Israfel’s apartment in Milan as its base and laboratory to conceal documents

⁹ *Il Sole-24 Ore*, October 13, 2009. In Italy’s political discourse and press, the Japanese word kamikaze is employed as a synonym for “suicide bomber” even when referring to the Islamist concept of *shahid* (martyr), notwithstanding the considerable cultural differences between the Japanese-nationalist and Islamist traditions.

¹⁰ Paolo Colonnello, “Terroristi: ora spunta un timer,” *La Stampa*, October 15, 2009. One of the hypotheses currently considered by investigators is that Game and his accomplices may have worked on an IED that they could activate without sacrificing their lives.

and the material needed to prepare the explosive devices.¹¹

Second, the search of Israfel’s apartment uncovered documents of other suspects—which may enable the disruption of a wider network—a timer and some cellular phones that could be used to trigger an explosion, and around 40 kilograms of ammonium nitrate plus other chemical agents such as acetone and ammonia that are widely used to produce improvised bombs.¹² According to many reports, investigators also found evidence of a recent purchase of 120 kilograms of ammonium nitrate.¹³ This means that the police confiscated only 40 of the 120 kilograms, leaving room for conjecture about the actual fate of the remaining 80 kilograms.¹⁴ The authorities have been unforthcoming about the possibility that the rest of the nitrate may have been successfully secured by Kol and Israfel before the police stormed their logistical base. An alleged witness, a woman living near the apartment, told the police that the two accomplices hurriedly placed big sacks in their car immediately after the explosion in the barracks and that she believes that the sacks contained the remaining nitrate.¹⁵

Third, on October 13 Italian Interior Minister Roberto Maroni told the press after a meeting with the National Committee on Order and Security that the attackers had identified seven military targets including barracks and other facilities belonging to the Carabinieri, police and the army.¹⁶

¹¹ Davide Carlucci, “L’ombra della rete integralista,” *La Repubblica*, October 16, 2009.

¹² “Milano, processateli per terrorismo,” *La Repubblica*, October 14, 2009.

¹³ Mohamed Game purchased the nitrate in the shop of Consorzio Agrario di Corbetta, a consortium specializing in agricultural products. It is legal to sell such products in Italy since it is widely used in fertilizer. See Gabriele Moroni, “Kamikaze fai da te. ‘Vorrei del nitrato d’ammonio,’” *Il Giorno*, October 14, 2009.

¹⁴ The investigators confirmed to various sources that only 40 kilograms of nitrate were confiscated, but they specified that it is still impossible to say whether the remaining 80 kilograms were dissipated in various attempts to produce an IED.

¹⁵ Davide Carlucci and Sandro De Riccardis, “Attentato, spunta un testimone,” *La Repubblica*, October 17, 2009.

¹⁶ Davide Carlucci and Massimo Pisa, “Sette obiettivi per i kamikaze,” *La Repubblica*, October 14, 2009.

These findings show that what initially appeared to be the work of a lone wolf or of a totally independent cell may instead be the act of a small unit linked to a wider network, possibly with connections in Egypt.

Background: The Islamist Threat to Italy and Rome’s Countermeasures

Italy hosts an increasingly large community of Muslim immigrants. According to official statistics, there are almost one million Muslims living and working in Italy, and although these figures are lower than those of France or Britain, they are nonetheless significant. Contrary to France in 1986, Spain in 2004 and Britain in 2005, Italy has never experienced Islamist terrorist attacks, although a nationalist

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Palestinian group linked to al-Fatah struck Rome’s Fiumicino Airport in 1985. In recent years, however, tensions have grown between the Muslim community and Italy’s political and civil society. On the one hand, Italy is experiencing various difficulties in the attempt to integrate Muslims—and immigrants in general—into its labor market. On the other hand, requests by Muslim leaders for the construction of mosques and for the introduction of special jurisdiction for Muslims have created friction.

Most of all, however, Italy’s security services have been increasingly concerned by the spread of Islamist militant ideology by some local imams, especially in Lombardy and other northern regions (where the Muslim presence is stronger), particularly after September 11, 2001 and Italy’s subsequent involvement in stabilization missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Italy, therefore, established a program to constantly monitor mosques, imams, and congregations linked to some of the religious centers.

Despite the lack of Islamist terrorist attacks in Italy, there have been a number of disrupted plots. On December 2, 2008, Italy's Division of General Investigations and Special Operations (DIGOS)¹⁷ arrested two Moroccan immigrants, Rachid Ilhami and Gafir Abdelkader,¹⁸ both working in Italy and with clean criminal records. Ilhami was a preacher in a cultural circle called "Pace" (Peace) in Macherio, near Milan. According to DIGOS, the arrested

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were trying to recruit other militants to stage suicide bombings in northern Italy.¹⁹ DIGOS proceeded to arrest the two men after investigators discovered that they had already singled out several targets, both military, such as police and Carabinieri barracks, and civilian, such as the Esselunga supermarket near Milan.²⁰ Ilhami and Abdelkader reportedly trained other militants through instructional tapes and had already conducted hostile reconnaissance activities to prepare the attacks.

Wiretaps revealed that the two militants considered themselves agents of al-Qa`ida; however, no real links have emerged between the two Moroccans and established organizations, including al-Qa`ida, outside Italy.²¹

Italy's security agencies and analysts have found it particularly worrying that Ilhami and Abdelkader appeared to be well integrated into Italian society, and that their radicalization during

the last few years occurred mainly through the internet, which provided ideological propaganda and operational training, and a small cultural center outside Milan.²² Therefore, widely spread sociological theories about terrorism being linked to poverty and social exclusion did not apply in this case, whereas the internal dynamics of Islamist radicalization provided a better framework to understand the rise of a new kind of terrorist.

Although the December 2008 plot was the most serious, there have been other terrorist threats to Italy as well. On February 19, 2002, four Moroccan citizens were arrested in Rome after police found them in possession of a cyanide compound, allegedly destined to be released in the aqueducts running near the U.S. Embassy.²³ In January 2006, the Parliamentary Committee for Oversight of Secret Services (COPACO) stated that there was "concrete evidence" of Islamist terrorist threats against Turin in northwest Italy as the town hosted the 2006 Winter Olympic Games, as well as to other cities before the 2006 general elections.²⁴ Nevertheless, it was not before the December 2, 2008 arrests that DIGOS dismantled an actual terrorist cell on Italian soil.

Implications

Sources from Italy's domestic intelligence service, AISI, stressed that the profiles of the three men arrested for the October 2009 barracks attack force analysts to rethink the general characteristics of the European-based jihadist.²⁵ Those characteristics currently include: 1) the militant may have been indoctrinated and trained on the battlefields of Iraq or Afghanistan; 2) the militant may become a "homegrown terrorist" after intensive religious indoctrination by local imams; 3) the militant can be "infected" by extremist ideologies while in jail. Game, Kol and Israfil have a seemingly very different profile: they were only moderately involved in local

religious activities.²⁶ Furthermore, they have no experience fighting in wars, and they do not have criminal records. As in the case of the two Moroccans arrested in December 2008, the three men had formed a terrorist cell independently without logistical support of established organizations. According to some sources, Kol may be linked to Egyptian militants, but this remains unproven.

A possible conclusion is that a new type of terrorist model is taking shape in Europe. It is in the form of several small, independent cells whose main "fuel" is a militant ideology spread mainly through the internet, which try to target a variety of civilian and military sites, apparently without an overall strategy and unified command.

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¹⁷ DIGOS is a law enforcement agency that investigates terrorism, the mafia, organized crime, and political and soccer-related violent groups.

¹⁸ "Progettavano attentati, due in manette," *Il Corriere della Sera*, December 3, 2008.

¹⁹ "Milano, in manette i due terroristi. Maroni: tensione altissima," *Il Sole-24 Ore*, December 2, 2008.

²⁰ *Il Corriere della Sera*, December 3, 2008.

²¹ See "Operazione Shamal" in Bruno Megale, *Terrorismo Internazionale. Indagini*, report by the Italian police, available online at http://appinter.csm.it/incontri/vis_relaz_inc.php?&ri=MTc4MjQ%3D.

²² Biagio Marsiglia, "Allarme attentati islamici a Milano Maroni: carcere duro per i terroristi," *Il Corriere della Sera*, December 4, 2008.

²³ Federico Bordonaro, "Italian Security and Potential Terrorist Targets," *Terrorism Monitor* 3:18 (2005).

²⁴ Federico Bordonaro, "Italy: The Threat to the General Elections," *Terrorism Monitor* 4:4 (2006).

²⁵ *La Repubblica*, October 14, 2009.

²⁶ *Ibid.*; Some reports, however, say that Game used to pray in front of an image of al-Qa`ida leader Usama bin Ladin.