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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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THE 2004 MADRID ATTACKS: LESSONS FOR COUNTERTERRORISM IN THE
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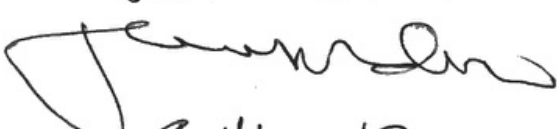
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Executive Summary

Title: The 2004 Madrid Attacks: Lessons for Counterterrorism in the European Union

Author: Major Sergio Oyón Sierra, Spain Marine Corps

Thesis: The EU must lead homeland anti-terrorist activities; in addition, Muslim countries must lead the fight in their own homelands, leaving the EU a supporting role only when needed. In both cases, information operations must occupy a preponderant role.

Discussion: In 1989, after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, al-Qaeda rose up as a global threat to Western countries. Its process of development on a global scale reached its highest success in the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York and against the Pentagon in Virginia. That event provoked the immediate invasion of Afghanistan and, two years later, the invasion of Iraq as part of the Global War on Terror (GWOt). Those wars, far from achieving al-Qaeda annihilation, added to the list of grievances that al-Qaeda and other groups would use to justify further attacks. The GWOt also implied a higher police pressure on terrorists in Western countries. Massive arrests took place and, as a consequence, the European Union (EU), which had been an Islamist terrorists' haven used to prepare attacks on other countries, became a high pay-off target to global radical Islamism. Due to its geographical location, the existence of a previous terrorist network, and the grievances related with the dismantling of one of the most important radical Islamist terrorist cells in the EU, Spain was the right place to perpetrate the first massive terrorist attack in the EU. Due to several circumstances, the attack was not ready until 2004. Eventually, the terrorists skilfully linked the attacks date to the presidential election in order to achieve an enhanced effect. Therefore, the terrorists carefully planned March 11 (M-11) 2004 attacks. A Spanish government's disastrous information policy collaborated in large part with the terrorists' purposes. In spite of the EU's improved security measures and additional support for the GWOt in Asia and Africa, major attacks have taken place in the UK, Germany and France since M11. Thus, Islamist terrorism still continues being one of the main concerns with the EU citizens, as radical Islamist terrorists have not lost the capacity to perform attacks in the EU territory. In addition, a great part of radical Islamist terrorists are European citizens or have lived in the EU for several years. This is due in some part to the EU's failure in the information war against radical Islamism. Antiterrorism activities in the EU and in other countries have proven more effective when every country leads the fight in its own territory.

Conclusion: The M-11 attacks in Spain were a big success for radical Islamism, but at the same time showed the importance of information policy as a security enabler. After several years of kinetic fight against radical Islamist terrorism, information war is still a key tool not only to prevent terrorist attacks, but also to achieve the final defeat of radical Islamist terrorism in the EU.

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Figure 1. *Suspect arrested for jihadist terrorism in the EU from 2011 to 2015*..... 20

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Preface

Radical Islamism represents a huge threat addressed in all Western National Security Strategies. In addition, most of the times this threat is linked to other serious threats such as transnational crime organizations, which makes this topic very important in terms of global security. That was the main reason because of I decided to write on this topic. This paper specifically analyses the European Union (EU) performance dealing with domestic radical Islamism terrorist attacks. For this purpose, I have chosen the case of March 11 (M-11), 2004 Madrid train bombings, which caused more deaths in the EU than any other attack since 9/11. That event is also of particular interest because most of the M-11 terrorists had lived in Spain for many years before the bombings and employed suicidal tactics; therefore, it is a remarkable example of domestic terrorism.

The EU did not take the right lessons from these bombings as during the following years other major attacks took place such as those in London and Paris. Nowadays, the threat is not eradicated, and the EU citizens still live under a massive attack threat.

I wish to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Dr. Douglas E. Streusand that has shed light on my way to this paper's elaboration.

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ABSTRACT (MAXIMUM 200 WORDS) Since 9/11 attacks, the EU countries contributed to develop series of United States-led counter-terrorism activities that implied the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. Unfortunately, none of those measures were enough to avoid M-11 attacks in Madrid. In spite of the lack of success, the military effort continued in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as important military involvement in other armed conflicts such as Libya, Mali, and Syria. Concurrently, Western governments took other measures related to homeland security, reinforcing the police and intelligence efforts. However, beyond achieving some political regime changes abroad, radical Islamist terrorism continued being one of the main threats in the EU. Attacks in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, followed the M-11 attacks and the lack of security is still a constant feeling within the European population. The fact of most of radical Islamist terrorists attacking EU countries are legal citizens in those countries, has awoken xenophobic feelings among the European population. This fact is posing a huge problem for European governments and the EU institutions. As long as military and police action have not been effective to eliminate or significantly reduce the radical Islamist threat, information has come up as a key issue in terrorism mitigation.			
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INTRODUCTION.

This document focuses on analysing the March 11 (M-11), 2004 Madrid attacks. That was the second time that a Muslim terrorist group attacked Spain.¹ However, the M-11 attacks were quite different from that in terms of tactics. The M-11 attacks consisted of a simultaneous bombing against several commuter trains. This terrorist attack may have seemed indiscriminate, but actually the target was well defined: it was the Spanish population. These attacks were not only important for their outcome, but also because they represented a big push to Al Qaeda's global strategic aims.² This paper will show lessons extracted from these attacks, useful for counterterrorism policy in the EU.³

The Islamic world, far from being monolithic, is divided into two main groups: Sunni and Shia. Islam also comprises a complex series of intertwined ideological discourses that make ideological differences among Muslims. Radical Islam is mainly based on three discourses: Islamism, Wahhabism and Salafism.⁴ Islamism has several schools of thought. Some of those, considered as moderate, defend political pluralism and democracy, while others adopt the most radical trends. Nevertheless, Islamism was not a homogenous discourse.

Islamism can be moderate or radical. Wahhabism and Salafism also have their own radical wings identified as Jihadi Wahhabism and neo-Salafism. In turn, Jihad does not necessarily imply the use of violence. Thus, the word Jihadism is a distorted use of the word Jihad, intended to give legitimacy to those radical groups that practise extreme violence. It is also important to know that Wahhabis consider themselves as Salafis, but not the opposite. Radical Islamists' political view is an Islamic state that being religious is legitimized in it.

Wahhabism pursues the search of real monotheism (*tawhid*). Under Wahhabists'

view this search must refuse any discipline or practices evolved from original Islam. Muhammad Bin Abd al-Wahhab, founder of Wahhabism, accused of unbelief (*takfir*) all those Muslims who did not follow his religious discourse. For this reason, most Muslim elders judged al-Wahhab as an apostate and declared invalid his *takfir*.

Salafism was initially a trend that adopted *al-salaf al-salih* as a tool to interpret Islam. *Al-salaf al-salih* means a view back to the pious predecessors. Today's Salafism consists only of adopting Islam's first century way of life. Islamic reformism uses *al-salaf al-salih* to deconstruct the concept of *takfir* that led Islam to adopt different schools from the very beginning. Salafism does not equal to Islamic reformism.⁵ The M-11 cell members were close to neo-Salafism.

Islamism is different from Salafism and Wahhabism; nevertheless radicals from all those groups fought together against the Soviets in Afghanistan. In 1992, after the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda appeared as a major output of such a combination.⁶ Later on, after 2003, some Wahhabis and Salafists joined again with radical Islamists and created neo-Salafism and *takfiri*-Jihadism.⁷

In spite of this merging, not all *takfiris* are Jihadists, and not all Salafists are Wahhabis. However, terrorist groups such as DAESH and al-Qaeda fight Western countries do not converge in the way of fighting Muslim infidel populations that they consider "fair targets."⁸ In light of the complexity of Muslim radical ideologies, the words "radical Islamists", "radical Islamism", and "Islamist terrorism", will be used throughout this document as comprehensive terms referring to all Islam's radical ideologies.

Islamist terrorism⁹ began in Africa and Asia and later crossed the Mediterranean into Europe. At first, the extremists limited their objectives to their home countries. In

this stage, Islamist terrorism affected the EU countries primarily through their interests abroad, especially in some of France and the United Kingdom's former colonies. This situation changed in the last decade of the past century. Islamist terrorism became a constant threat in the EU when the Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA) decided to export its terrorist activities to France in 1994.¹⁰

During the following years, terrorist activities spread quickly to other EU countries, reaching a peak on M-11. Since 2004, the EU has tried to cope with Islamist terrorism through kinetic and non-kinetic actions. Kinetic actions include domestic police work combined with military action abroad in cooperation with international law enforcement, in close collaboration with the United States of America (USA), which usually leads these activities. Non-kinetic activities involving information operations, especially in the cyber domain, have proven to be the most important effort fighting terrorism. In the realm of non-kinetic activities, diplomatic and financial actions play an important role by stabilizing countries in conflict that are well known sources of Islamic terrorism.

That said, there is no indication that that current measures will end the threat of terrorism. Since 2001, the EU has performed military actions abroad, usually as part of a USA-led coalition, to fight terrorism. Kinetic and non-kinetic actions have demonstrated the ability to mitigate Islamist terrorism. However, this mitigation has not prevented several major attacks in the EU. Bloody conflicts, such as those occurring in Syria, Iraq, Libya, or Afghanistan, in which EU countries and other nations participate, are still in progress. Radical Islamists oppose that participation and use it either to justify attacks or to reinforce the justification of attacks on the EU and other Western countries.

Through the years, Islamist terrorism has taken root, forming a global network. Continuing success in recruitment makes that network resilient. Otherwise, Western strategy has thus amounted to a war of attrition. It has degraded the terrorist network and interfered with its operations, but made little progress in ending the threat. The M-11 case is relevant today because, fundamentally, nothing has changed since 2004. As examination of the case will show, the EU states were engaged in military operations abroad and police operations domestically before the M-11, but these measures did not prevent the operation. That proposition applies to the 2015 and 2016 Paris and Brussels attacks. To gain the initiative, the EU needs to design a comprehensive approach that allows fighting domestic terrorism with international links. The EU must lead homeland anti-terrorist activities. Mainstream Muslim countries must lead the fight in their own homelands, leaving the EU a supporting role only when needed. In both cases, information operations must occupy a preponderant role.

Al Qaeda's contribution to M-11 attacks was ideological. As ideology played a significant role in M-11 attacks as well as in other Islamist attacks in the EU, this paper shows Al Qaeda's historical evolution preceded by an introduction on Muslim discourses. That background will give way to the evolution of M-11 cell in Spain and the reason why Al Qaeda supported attacks in that country. Finally, this paper addresses the M-11 attacks outcome and analyzes the usefulness of the EU response to radical Islamist terrorism.

BACKGROUND.

Since the late sixties, the EU countries had to deal with many domestic terrorist groups that committed attacks in their own countries. Those were the cases of the *Brigate Rosse* in Italy, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in the United Kingdom, *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA) in Spain, and the Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF) in Germany. Finally,

the police satisfactorily broke up all those terrorist groups and some others. This success in counterterrorism made the EU countries complacent. In 1994, the hijacking of Air France Flight 8969 by operatives of the Armed Islamic Group, which began in Algeria and ended in Marseilles, did not change that perception. Thus, France was the first country in the EU dealing with Islamist terrorism, which otherwise still had not a global character. In 1989, after the Soviet-Afghan war, Al Qaeda started to spread the concept of global terrorism, based on its interpretation of Islam as a totalitarian ideology.

On February 23, 1998, Osama Bin Laden announced the World Islamic Front's creation authorising Jihad against Jews and Crusaders.¹¹ For that purpose, attacks should take place not only within Islamic countries, but also in Western countries. This statement quickly spread through the Islamist network. Radical Islamist activism had its greatest success with the September 11, 2001 (9/11) attacks in the USA. These events led to a series of attacks in the EU against Spain, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Although those attacks followed the ideological example of Al Qaeda, radical Islamists attacking in the EU initially came from the Maghreb.

Radical Islamism already existed in the Maghreb many years before 2001, but had regional rather than global objectives. This fact did not mean that the EU was going to be out of the attacks' scope, but the objectives should provide those groups with regional benefits. That was the case for the GIA; its successor, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC); and the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM). In 1995-1995 the GIA developed a bombing campaign in the EU.¹² It was not until 2003, when the GSPC pledged loyalty to Al Qaeda, adding a global dimension to its regional goals.

Radical Islamist groups rebalanced their terrorist activities, and plots per year progressively increased in the EU within the period 2000-2003.¹³ That trend had a peak

after a Western, US-led coalition unleashed Operation Iraqi Freedom, invading Iraq in March 2003. Until that time, the most important jihadist goal in any Muslim territory was to expel Western armed forces from Afghanistan. After 2001, a meaningful Sunni-Islamist movement, named Ansar al-Islam, emerged controlling a small area in northern Iraq, near Iran's border. This organization was close to Al Qaeda, and had Abu Musab al-Zarqawi as one of its most prominent members, confronted major Kurdish organizations such as the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

Eventually, Ansar al-Islam lost control of that part of its territory. In 2003, after the invasion of Iraq, Jayysh Ansar al-Sunnah followed Ansar al-Islam, leading attacks on Western troops in Iraq.¹⁴ These groups had links with Al Qaeda leadership, which saw the Iraq invasion as an opportunity to encourage the so-called global Jihad. In order to take advantage of the situation, Al Qaeda set two goals: the first one was attracting foreign fighters to join the Iraqi insurgency, and the second one was managing to plot against any members of the invading coalition. Al Qaeda's global objective was to expel Western countries not only from Iraq but also from any other Muslim country. Achieving its first objective in Iraq would ensure Al Qaeda's global leadership. Not all the EU countries supported the Iraq invasion and Al Qaeda's leadership saw in it a weak point of the Western coalition in Iraq.¹⁵ Therefore, Western Europe became a high priority objective. The next step was to choose what was going to be the high pay-off target. The answer was going to be Spain.

SPAIN AS A JIHADIST OBJECTIVE

Spain participated in the struggle against radical Islamist terrorism from the very first moment, mainly through police action. In 2001, Spain joined the coalition that

invaded Afghanistan as a response to the 9/11 attacks. In 2003, Spain did not send combat units to join Iraq's invasion, but Spain's president committed to actively support the coalition during the Azores Summit on March 16, 2003.¹⁶ On those years, terrorists used Spain as a haven where they could organize their actions against any other EU country. After 9/11, however, police action toughened in the EU and as a result led to arrest of radical Islamists "as it happened" in Spain.¹⁷

Radical Islamists in Spain with links to Al Qaeda could find in Spain an opportunity that would fit its goals for several reasons. First, before 2003 there was a radical Islamist network in progress that was not totally broken up. Subsequently, radical Islamists interpreted arrests as a grievance that motivated them to attack in Spain as retaliation. Second, even after the 9/11 attacks, the Spanish police focused their main effort on the separatist terrorist organization Basque Country and Freedom (ETA). Spanish institutions, infrastructure, and security forces were some of ETA's objectives, but its procedures and ideology were far from that of radical Islamism. Last, Spain is a country quite near to Morocco and Algeria, where several Islamist groups such as the GSPC and GICM had been operating for many years.

SPAIN'S ISLAMIST NETWORK DEVELOPMENT

The magnitude of the M-11 attack was so important that it looked evident that a solid network should exist in order to organize as well as support the entire operation. Al Qaeda did not only give specific directions on what type of target and in which city the attacks should happen, but it also helped to reactivate the Spanish network. Bin Laden created Al Qaeda in 1988 as a movement that transitioned to a formal structure around 1992.¹⁸ Soon after, in 1994, Al Qaeda helped to build a Spanish network. This network's aim was to provide logistic support to other cells' operations in the Western countries. In

those years, the Spanish police did not report significant events related to pursuing radical Islamists. After 9/11 attacks and the beginning of the GWoT, the spotlight would progressively move to the Islamist threat. The Spanish National Police Corps developed several operations between November 2001 and September 2003, detaining and breaking up the so-called Abu Dahdah cell, which was the main Al Qaeda cell in Spain. Since 1990, the Syrian Imad Edin Barakat Yarkas (also known as Abu Dahdah) had a direct relationship with Mohammed Atta, the 9/11-cell's leader.¹⁹ In addition to Abu Dahdah, the police arrested twenty-four suspects between 2001 and 2003. All of them were sent to trial and eighteen were sentenced to jail, including Abu Dahdah, due to their belonging to a terrorist organization. Twelve of those sentenced were born in Syria, five in Morocco, and one in Spain.²⁰

These facts confirmed that Al Qaeda had a deeply rooted network in Spain that had links to countries such as Syria and Afghanistan. All of those arrested between 2001 and 2003 in Spain were being prosecuted when the M-11 attacks happened. The judge did not pronounce their sentence until September 2005.²¹ The trial established a link between those detainees and the 9/11 attacks. The judge condemned all of them for being part of or collaborating with a terrorist organization. The sentence stated that three of those condemned were direct collaborators with the 9/11 Al Qaeda cell. Spain would no longer be a peaceful haven for radical Islamist terrorists. However, the police did not entirely disrupt the Abu Dahdah cell. It is remarkable to know that former members of that cell maintained links with one of the then most important Maghreb terrorist groups, the GICM. The importance of this link will be discussed in the following section.

When Al Qaeda decided to attack in Spain, the required network was not fully developed. The police operations in Spain had weakened the Islamist network in such a

way that in 2002 the new cell still needed additional time to be fully operational. After 9/11, the police pressure in the Western countries and Afghanistan military operations were so successful as to preclude extremists' free movement from Europe to the Far East. Thus, the most important training camps in Afghanistan disappeared, leaving some remaining training areas within the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Maghreb's radical Islamists started to train only in regions under their control or influence. As a result, since 2001, and in order to attack Western European countries, Al Qaeda leadership had to rely heavily on Maghreb's local radical Islamist groups. The vicinity to North Africa facilitated a strong presence of GICM and GSPC in Spain. Thus, Moroccans followed by Algerians were the most common nationalities within the M-11 cell.

ATTACKS PRE-M-11

While radical Islamists were shaping their network in Spain, Al Qaeda decided to use Morocco as a suitable country to perform several attacks against Western objectives. Radical Islamist terrorism was a serious problem in Algeria, but not in Morocco. At the beginning of the new millennium, Moroccan authorities did not see radical Islamism as a main threat, and therefore Al Qaeda took advantage of that situation. Casablanca, the largest Moroccan city and formerly part of the French Protectorate was the best choice to find the appropriate targets. The GICM, as the radical Islamist backbone in Morocco, was responsible for the multiple suicide attacks that took place on May 16, 2003.²²

In August 2001, Osama Bin Laden approved GICM activities in Morocco as a base for further global Jihad operations. After 9/11, al-Qaeda directed GICM to attack specific objectives in Morocco and Spain as part of its global campaign. The Casablanca plot consisted of multiple, coordinated attacks against five different targets. As many as

fourteen suicide terrorists participated in the attacks. The multiple blasts killed thirty-three people as well as twelve terrorists. The radical Islamist group targeted a Jewish social center as well as a Jewish restaurant. The most relevant action in relationship with the M-11 attacks was that the terrorists also attacked a hotel and a Spanish social center named *Casa de España*.²³ Four Spaniards died during the bombings, but the fact of attacking the *Casa de España* was actually the effect sought. Although there were not known direct links between Casablanca's GICM cell and M-11 cell, this attacks were a sort of indication on what was going to happen some months later in Spain as part of the global jihad.

From the point of view of Al Qaeda, Spain was one of those countries where a "covenant of security" was in force.²⁴ This covenant permitted a Muslim to stay and even settle in unbelievers' countries like Spain. This unilateral contract implied that neither the host country nor the Islamists living there would harm each other in any way. The Islamists could unilaterally break the contract if they would consider that the host country was breaching the covenant for whatever reasons. Therefore, Spain inadvertently broke that covenant through the police actions taken since 2001. It was the case of most European countries where other cells were activated. This meant that Al Qaeda started to encourage major attacks in Western Europe as early as 2001.

Al Qaeda's further moves needed detailed planning to achieve a dramatic effect in Western Europe. The plot had to involve the identification of Western Europe's center of gravity and of targets that would affect it. As long as terrorism closely relates to sending political messages, the center of gravity was public opinion.²⁵ Unfortunately, the only way that terrorist groups communicate those political messages is through violence.²⁶

To send a strong message would imply that Al Qaeda had an extensive network available within the targeted country. In order to influence the European population, one of the most profitable actions could be attacking the government institutions as planned in 9/11 against the Pentagon and the Capitol. Such a strike would be quite useful to drive extremist political reactions in some European countries oriented to try to destabilize the EU institutions. As this was quite difficult to carry out, the best choice was to continue attacking soft targets. In this manner, the terrorists would use a direct approach, transmitting the terror message right into the audience. Western Europe was about to suffer the consequences of a chain of indiscriminate attacks that are still ongoing. European airports, train stations, malls, or any human gathering became Al Qaeda's high pay-off target list.

FORMING THE M-11 CELL

Al Qaeda agreed the creation of the M-11 cell even before knowing the target and date of attack. The Spanish police knew well about the links between radical Islamists settled in Spain and Al Qaeda. As said before, some of the former Abu Dahdah cell's members comprised the cell's core. In 2001, the Spanish Police arrested Algerian Allekema Lamari, a former Armed Islamic Group (GIA) member. In 2002, as soon as he got out of jail due to a judicial procedure mistake, he established contacts with the GIA's successor group, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), and with the M-11 cell.

The GICM's cells in Belgium and France also supported the M-11 cell construction in Spain. Youssef Belhadj, who had been arrested in Belgium some months after the M-11 attacks, and Hassan el Haski (also known as Abu Hamza) acted as the node link between the M-11 cell, the GICM, and Al Qaeda. In spite of the GICM used

suicide tactics, as happened during Casablanca attacks, those tactics did not make an influence on the M-11 cell's modus operandi.

In order to determine the aim of M-11 attacks, it is important to know that the terrorists configured the M-11 cell between 2002 and 2003, before the Spanish participation in the Iraq War. It is remarkable to know that the Tabligh Jamaat (TJ), a peaceful Islamic international organization, played an important role as an ideological gateway to the radicalization of some of the main M-11 cell members.²⁷ Initially, the M-11 cell intended to attack objectives in Spain as retaliation to the Spanish police pressure on Islamist groups after 9/11. Therefore, the terrorists established the target and the attack's purpose before Iraq's invasion. Either way, Al Qaeda added the Spanish support to the Iraq War coalition in 2003 to the grievances claimed to justify the global Jihad in Europe. Spain became a target of opportunity because the cell's local objectives and AQ's global interests coincided. In other words, Al Qaeda took profit of an ongoing plan to attack in Spain.

According to the verdict of the M-11 trial, thirty-one individuals participated in the plot, of whom seven committed suicide to avoid arrest and one escaped. Thus, the judge found guilty the following individuals as part of the M-11 network: as perpetrators and part of the radical Islamist cell, Jamal Zougam and Othman El Gnaoui; as part of the radical Islamist cell, Hassan el Haski, Rachid Aglif, Hamid Ahmidan, Mohamed Larbi Ben Sellam, Youssef Belhadj, Mohamed Belhadj, Mouhannad Almallah Dabas, Fouad El Morabit Anghar, Basel Ghalyoun, Saed El Harrak, Mohamed Bouharrat, and Abdelmajid Bouchar; as collaborators on other logistic issues, but not part of the radical Islamist cell, Abdelilah El Fadoual El Akil, Nasreddine Bousbaa, and Mahmoud Sleiman Aoun; and as collaborators, providing the explosives for the bombing, but not part of the radical

Islamist cell, José Emilio Suárez Trashorras, Raúl González Peláez, Sergio Álvarez Sánchez, Antonio Iván Reis Palicio, and Rafá Zouhier.²⁸ In addition to those condemned in the M-11 trial, other eight terrorists were part of the cell, but seven of them committed suicide and one more managed to escape from being arrested. These members of the M-11 cell who committed suicide during the police siege in Leganés after the attack did so to avoid arrest, as they had planned, not as part of the attack. Their names were Serhane Ben Abdelmajid Fakheth (also known as The Tunisian), Allekema Lamari, Said Berraj, Jamal Ahmidan, Rachid Oulad Akcha, Mohamed Oulad Akcha, and Abdenabi Kounjaa.²⁹

A detail to take into account is that some Spaniards got involved in the stolen explosives management. None of them were Muslims, and they were not radicalized. Their goal was just to get money from illegal trade. All of them were condemned for explosives illegal traffic as their links to radical Islamists were only to get money.³⁰ In fact, José Emilio Suárez, the Spaniards group leader, was condemned in 2007 because of committing same type of crime in 2001.³¹ Apart from those, the attacks' perpetrators were from the Maghreb, mainly from Morocco and Algeria, and one from Tunisia. Some of them were brothers, and most of them were well integrated in the Western society. At first sight they were not different from other Muslims. They were middle-aged people and, in general terms, they belonged to the working class. Nevertheless, it is better to be cautious before coming to conclusions on the social class, due to social standards in Europe are quite different from Muslim countries. When studying the M-11 cell members' social profile it is more relevant to take in account their legal situation as Western citizens. In order to complete the social context of M-11 cell terrorists, it is also remarkable to know that several terrorists were married and even some of those had

children. Thus, being single was not a required situation to become a terrorist and putting in risk his or her live.³²

The M-11 cell radicalization means are not precisely documented. Nevertheless, mosques, jails, and other meeting places were the main ways to acquire the radical Islamist education and links to other radicalized people. Strict observance of orthodox Islam was a primary sign of their future radicalization. Some of the M-11 cell members were previously radicalized as they had taken part on Abu Dahdah's cell. The fact that most of the M-11 cell terrorists were Moroccan made easier their attempts to establish links with the GICM when some of those travelled to Morocco.

Al Qaeda, and more recently DAESH, use local networks in Western countries to plot, attack, and provide coverage to perpetrators. This modus operandi has come as a result from the US reaction to 9/11 attacks. Bush's administration decision of invading Afghanistan precluded Al Qaeda of having available a haven from where it could lead a centralized war against Western countries.³³ The resulting decentralization meant to leverage local networks in Western countries with a high level of freedom of action. Thus, most of the terrorists belonging to those local networks are not coming from far countries to commit their attacks and then flee. Al Qaeda states the global guidelines to all those local networks, trying to fuel radicalization in Western countries through a skilled use of the Internet and other information means.³⁴ It can be said that it is Al Qaeda's version of Western armies' "mission command" concept.

M-11 OUTCOME

Did the terrorists reach their local and global goals? In relation to the local goal it can be said that the M-11 cell achieved the planned end state. The cell certainly achieved the local goal of retaliating against Spanish efforts to eliminate it. The attacks had a

dramatic effect not only because of the massive casualties but also extended disruption of Madrid's transit systems and the collapse of the overwhelmed hospital system.³⁵

Assessing whether al-Qaeda achieved its goal requires analysis of the Spanish government's reaction.

The M-11 attacks took place three days before Spain's presidential election. The opposition Spanish Workers Socialist Party (PSOE) had made Spanish participation in the Iraq War a major issue. Opposition to that participation had sparked mass protests. Given that circumstance, it is not surprising that President José María Aznar, of the conservative People's Party, chose to attribute the attacks to the Basque terrorist organization ETA. At first, no organization claimed responsibility for the attack and ETA had been committed most previous terrorist attacks in Spain. An ETA attack would not have put the Aznar government's Iraq policy into question. Clues found the same day of the attacks pointed to Islamists.³⁶ The government ignored evidence to the contrary and even instructed Spanish embassies and distributed information to the main news agencies in Spain in order to blame ETA for the bombings. Three days after the M-11, the PSOE won the presidential elections. The PP, after ceasing to blame ETA as the main suspect, maintained that the Islamist terrorists sought to force a change in governments that finally happened. Despite this, it was not so clear that the terrorists' aim was just to achieve that change.

The change did occur, although there is no definitive evidence that the terrorists had that goal in mind. José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, the PSOE candidate, had promised to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq during the campaign. He took office on April 17, 2004, and announced the immediate withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq two days later.³⁷ It is unclear that the M-11 attacks caused Zapatero's victory, but they certainly

contributed to it. Presumably, al-Qaeda would have wanted Spain to withdraw from Afghanistan as well as Iraq, perhaps triggering a domino effect on other EU countries.

Zapatero made no commitment to withdraw Spanish troops from Afghanistan before he took office. Presumably the M-11 cell sought to trigger such a reaction with its unsuccessful bombing attack on a high-speed train on 2 April. The police activity was quite intense and the armed forces were collaborating giving continuous security to key infrastructures all over the country, but unfortunately the threat was still active. The circle around the perpetrators was closing until they were localized and sieged in a flat located in Leganés (within Madrid province). In April 3, 2004, after verifying that there was no way to escape, seven Islamist terrorists decided to commit suicide, trying at the same time to kill as many police officers as they could. Finally they managed to kill a special operations police officer. On those days, it was clear that an Islamist cell had perpetrated the attacks, but still it was not so clear what were the motivations to attack.

COUNTERING THE THREAT

From the national security point of view, the M-11 attacks produced a series of immediate, reactive responses. The radical Islamists' modus operandi was quite dissimilar from ETA's. The possibility of using suicide tactics to attack indiscriminate targets at any place within the country made a big difference. It was not, however, the first time that Spain faced the terrorism threat. Thus, the government did not make substantial changes on its anti-terrorist measures and the main response came from the activation of the so-called "Operational Plan on Fight against Terrorism." This plan generated automatic orders not only to the police and the *Guardia Civil* (hybrid police-military security unit), but also to the armed forces. Spanish armed forces participated reinforcing the security of strategic installations, including nuclear facilities.³⁸ The plan

even included a civil-military response against a nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) terrorist attack.

Spain faced particular problems with border control. Since Spain, Portugal, and France are all part of the Schengen Area, there were and are no controls on those borders.³⁹ The existence of the Spanish North-African cities of Ceuta and Melilla and the proximity to the Maghreb coasts, which facilitates illegal immigration, was also a great challenge for the Spanish authorities. The Spanish government's actions made clear that the initiative was in the terrorists' side. Spain was just reacting, as well as had happened with the US reaction to 9/11 attacks, or as it happened later on in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. The immediate challenge was to find and arrest the perpetrators as they were posing an immediate threat. The most important task, however, was, and still is, to destroy, or at least disrupt, radicalization and recruitment mechanisms in order to prevent future attacks.

Police in Spain and other countries had dismantled al-Qaeda networks before the M-11 attacks, but not prevented them. Western military actions in Afghanistan had none done so either. The GWoT achieved limited objectives such as overthrowing the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq. On the contrary, the GWoT was not successful breaking the links between Al Qaeda leadership and radical Islamist cells in Western countries. That statement remains as true today, thirteen years after M-11, as it was at that time, except that DAESH, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and other organizations have joined the al-Qaeda core on the scene.

Since 2001, Western countries have deployed an overwhelming military power that has precluded radical Islamists from ruling Iraq and Afghanistan. An intense effort on ground and mainly air attacks against radical Islamists' key leaders have obtained

some degree of success, breaking up Al Qaeda and DAESH's leadership several times. Iraq and Afghanistan governments still share a common unresolved matter, such as gaining their local people's "hearts and minds." Western countries have supported those governments and others to achieve that objective as part of information operations, not only on the ground, but also within cyberspace. After more than fifteen years, the huge military effort made in several countries has not been an effective counter-terrorism strategy to the West. Radical Islamism has regenerated its leadership once and again, and radical Islamists' recruitment network still works. Far from winning "hearts and minds", West participation in conflicts such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Libya, has facilitated recruitment in Muslim countries as well as in Western countries.

In spite of several arrests taking place every year, many youngsters still get radicalized, victims of radical Islamism's message. Since M-11 attacks, it is quite usual to find that Muslim European citizens are behind most of the attacks in the EU since 2003. The recruitment and radicalization process in Europe looks like an unstoppable and endless process. Preachers such as Qatada, Hamza, Bakri, and their close followers have served as a virtual link with conflict zones to encourage followers joining the jihad.⁴⁰ Radical Islamist's networks facilitate recruited people transfers from the EU to conflict zones where they fall under control of terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, DAESH, or any other radical Islamic group that has pledged loyalty to those groups.⁴¹ More often those unexperienced recruits become fighters, suicide bombers and, in the case of women, they are even obliged to marry to unknown men.⁴²

Radical Islamist's networks are also in charge of transferring back to the EU countries some of those individuals who have acquired combat experience. Returned former combatants pose an extra threat to domestic radical Islamism as they contribute to

active cells with expertise managing explosives or any other weapons used for terrorist attacks.⁴³ The radical Islamist networks may use the tremendous immigrant influx from Asia and North Africa to infiltrate those returning potential terrorists, but there is no evidence of it.⁴⁴ This threat has caused widespread concern in the EU and caused extreme right-wing parties to agitate for restrictions on immigration that would violate the EU policy on asylum.⁴⁵

The M-11 attacks brought attention to the threat of terrorism from both citizens and recent immigrants, but the countermeasures since 2004 have not succeeded in reducing the threat. As Figure 1 shows, arrests for jihadist terrorism have increased steadily since 2009.

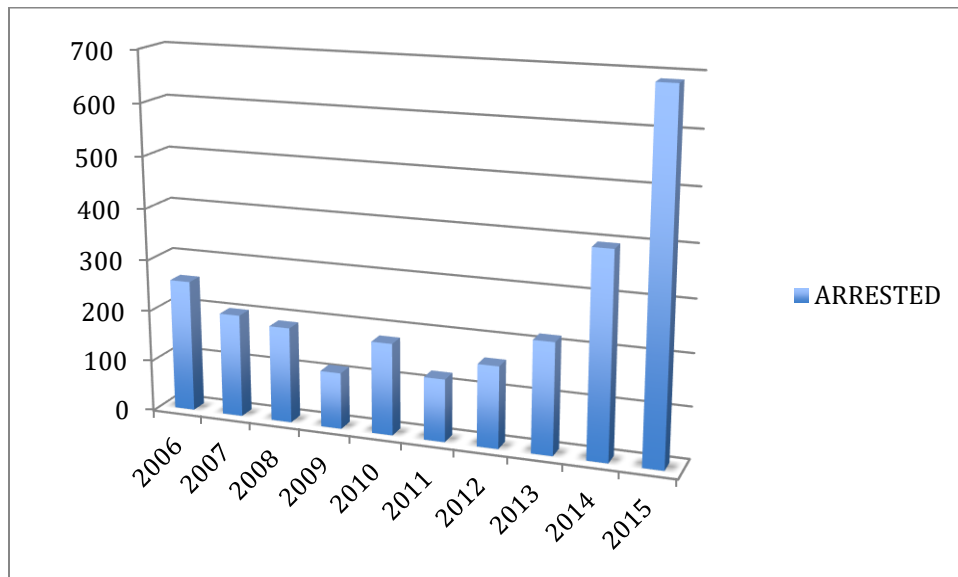


Figure 1

Suspects arrested for jihadist terrorism in the EU from 2006 to 2015⁴⁶

Source: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports>

Most of those arrested are first or second generation immigrants. 687 arrested out of a population of around 30 million Muslims in the EU represents hardly a 0.0023 per cent.⁴⁷ This does not mean that the threat should be minimized, but it is good to know the real data before championing any measure. Data management is one of the most important aspects of anti-terrorism activities.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION WAR

The combination of military and law enforcement means has not eliminated the threat, so that the West must look to other means, most importantly information, and must consider the informational consequences of its military and law enforcement measures. As in the information world words matter, in 2013, President Obama stated that the GWoT concept was not in force anymore.⁴⁸ The efforts to defeat Al Qaeda and DAESH still continued, but it was not going to be called a global war. Most EU countries followed the United States and military contributions to anti-terrorism and counter-terrorism operations in Iraq and Afghanistan started to fall, at least nominally, into the category of stabilization operations.

The importance of information is particularly relevant not only for Western countries' operations, but also to Al Qaeda. Al Qaeda central leadership's member Ayman al-Zawahiri advised Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, then Al Qaeda in Iraq's leader, to moderate his attacks on Iraqi Shiites and to stop beheading hostages. That was not good propaganda from Zawahiri's point of view: "We are in a battle, and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media."⁴⁹ Disregarding Zawahiri-Zarqawi's disputes both agreed on the importance of information management. Any type of violence may be used as part of the information war. In terms of maintaining a good recruiting rhythm, Al Qaeda and DAESH have developed a successful information campaign.

Although Zarqawi died and Zawahiri has become Al Qaeda's leader, things have not changed and battlefield of the media is still the basis of radical Islamism resilience.

Western countries are fighting an information war in the physical dimension, as in jails, mosques, or any other gathering place, and also in the cyberspace that mass media use thoroughly. The cyber war has not been effective for the West countering the radical Islamism threat. In fact Western media has been the best way of disseminating radical Islamists' successes after every attack. As long as the information objective-audience is Muslims, non-Muslims are not likely the best source to fight the media warfare. Following the same reasoning, even Muslims using Western media are suspect to spread biased information. Therefore, Muslims within Muslim countries are the best broadcasters of a believable message that must counter the radical Islamists' propaganda on Muslim population all over the world.

The West should consider its use of military force in the Islamic world in the overall context of the information conflict. Actions speak louder than words and the West must avoid a say-do-gap in the information realm. Having soldiers arrayed during a limited time, in a country where they do not have any type of ethnological and religious relationship with the local population is a great handicap. Radical Islamists usually have that factor on their side, as quite often they are part of the population that the West wants to dominate.

Western governments have judged the legitimacy of their military actions by the votes of their own legislatures, the sentiments of their populations, and the resolutions of international organizations. They have all too rarely considered the views of the people most affected by their interventions, the citizens of the countries involved. Western

actions in Islamic countries should have the lowest possible profile, and, to the extent possible, confine themselves to supporting roles.

The reality is that Western countries' kinetic actions on conflict zones have not had the expected effect on domestic terrorism. Therefore, the EU must reinforce homeland police activities on law enforcement, boundaries control, financial support, cyberspace control, and intelligence sharing on terrorism with other friendly countries. EU countries' armed forces also play an important role on critical infrastructure, territorial seas, and airspace surveillance and control. These activities must be coordinated with multilateral efforts coming from other friendly countries, agencies, and governmental and non-governmental organizations.

CONCLUSION.

Islamist terrorism has taken root in the EU because some citizens of the EU have accepted the jihadism. Although it stems from an alien ideology, it is a domestic problem. The terrorists come from the society that they attack. Although it is a domestic problem, it has an international aspect that the EU countries cannot ignore. They should, however, focus on non-kinetic, primarily informational, activities on the global stage, in order to target jihadist recruitment. Intrastate conflicts where radical Islamism is the main issue have strong ideological links with terrorism in the EU. As long as those conflicts persist, the threat of terrorism within EU countries will be present. Despite sometimes attrition is the only way to solve some specific situations, the EU must take in account that stabilize does not mean that kinetic measures such as air strikes or putting boots in the ground are the solution. The EU is already fighting terrorism from a comprehensive approach that includes the participation of different agencies, organizations, and non-EU countries. The non-kinetic aspect must be paramount while fighting this war. Given that total security is

a utopia, the EU must pursue a reasonable degree of security, eradicating the existence of extensive organized radical groups. With a feasible objective the EU will won this long war.

Notes

¹ On April 12, 1985, a bomb exploded in Madrid in a restaurant near Torrejón Air Base, killing eighteen people and leaving more than 80 wounded. The so-called Islamic Jihad claimed this attack, which actual objective was the US Air Force unit assigned to that base.

http://elpais.com/diario/1985/04/14/espana/482277616_850215.html

² Petter Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe. A History*, 54.

³ For the purpose of this document, all the EU countries, and any other non-EU European countries west of Russia are within the concept of Western Europe. In general terms, Western countries will include those of Western Europe plus the USA, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia.

⁴ Beacham Publishing's TRAC (Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium); *Ideological Sources of Radical Islam - Religious (Islamic)*; Introduction: Islamism, Salafism, and Wahhabism; <http://www.trackingterrorism.org.lomc.idm.oclc.org/article/ideological-sources-radical-islam-religious-islamic/introduction-islamism-salafism-and-wahha>; (accessed Wednesday, February 15th, 2017), 1-2.

⁵ *Ibid*, 37-38.

⁶ *Ibid*, 1-2.

⁷ *Ibid*, 3.

⁸ Jeffery B. Cozzens, "Al-Takfir wa'l Hijra: Unpacking an Enigma." *Studies In Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 6 (June 2009): 438-439. *TOPICsearch*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 8, 2017)

⁹ Applying US Code definition, terrorism means "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents." US Code. Title 22, Chapter 38, Section 2656f. <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/22/2656f>

¹⁰ Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe. A History*, 67.

¹¹ FBI's Report. Compilation of Osama Bin Ladin Statements. 1994-January 2004, 56. <https://fas.org/irp/world/para/ubl-fbis.pdf>

¹² Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe. A History*, 54.

¹³ *Ibid*, 55.

¹⁴ Nozar Alaolmolki, *Militant Islamists*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2009), http://psi.praeger.com.lomc.idm.oclc.org/doc.aspx?q=ansar&imageField.x=10&imageField.y=6&newsearch=1&c=Monograph&p=0&s=&newindex=1&orig_search=ansar&adv_search=1&num=0&freeform=&term_0=ansar&index_0=words&d=/books/gpg/C37221/C37221-575.xml&i=0

¹⁵ France and Germany did not support Iraq invasion in 2003.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2683409.stm>

¹⁶ Ralph D. Berenger, ed., *Cybermedia go to War*, (Spokane, Washington: Marquette Books, 2006), 133.

¹⁷ http://www.interior.gob.es/web/interior/noticias/detalle/-/journal_content/56_INSTANCE_1YSSI3xiWuPH/10180/1191909/?redirect=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.interior.gob.es%2Fprensa%2Fnoticias%3Fp_p_id%3D101_INSTANCE_GHU8Ap6ztgsg%26p_p_lifecycle%3D0%26p_p_state%3Dnormal%26p_p_mode%3Dview%26p_p_col_id%3Dcolumn-2%26p_p_col_count%3D1%26_101_INSTANCE_GHU8Ap6ztgsg_advancedSearch%3Dfalse%26_101_INSTANCE_GHU8Ap6ztgsg_keywords%3D%26_101_INSTANCE_GHU8Ap6ztgsg_delta%3D10%26p_r_p_564233524_resetCur%3Dfalse%26_101_INSTANCE_GHU8Ap6ztgsg_cur%3D1913%26_101_INSTANCE_GHU8Ap6ztgsg_andOperator%3Dtrue

¹⁸ Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, (Philadelphia, US: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 38.

¹⁹ Verdict 36/2005, Audiencia Nacional. Sala de lo Penal. Sección Tercera, 95-97. Last accessed December 30, 2016, <http://estaticos.elmundo.es/documentos/2005/09/26/sentencia.pdf>

²⁰ Fernando Reinares, *¡Matadlos! Quién Estuvo Detrás del 11-M y Por Qué se Atentó en España*, (Barcelona, Spain: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2014), position 99 out of 4721.

²¹ *Ibid*, 1.

²² *US Adds Moroccan Group to Terrorism List*. 2005. Lanham: Federal Information & News Dispatch, Inc. <https://search-proquest-com.lomc.idm.oclc.org/docview/190509528?accountid=14746>.

²³ Nozar Alaolmolki, *Militant Islamists: Terrorists Without Frontiers*. (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2009), <http://psi.praeger.com.lomc.idm.oclc.org/doc.aspx?q=casablanca+bombings&imageField.x=0&imageField.y=0>

y=0&newsearch=&c=Monograph&p=0&s=&newindex=1&orig_search=&adv_search=1&num=0&freeform=&term_0=casablanca+bombings&index_0=words&d=/books/gpg/C37221/C37221-444.xml&i=2#txmlhit

²⁴ Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe. A History*, 47.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 54.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 60.

²⁷ Reinares, *¡Matadlos! Quién Estuvo Detrás del 11-M y Por Qué se Atentó en España*, position 468 out of 4721.

²⁸ *Verdict 65/2007, Audiencia Nacional. Sala de lo Penal. Sección Tercera*, 715-721. Last accessed December 30, 2016,

http://estaticos.elmundo.es/documentos/2007/10/31/11m_03_fundamentosyfallo.pdf

²⁹ *Verdict 503/2008, Audiencia Nacional. Sala de lo Penal. Sección Tercera*, last accessed December 30, 2016, 5-6.

http://www.belt.es/jurisprudencia/anterior/seg_pub_y_prot_civil/seg_pub/pdf/sent_503_08.pdf

³⁰ *Verdict 65/2007*, 715-721.

³¹ <http://www.europapress.es/nacional/noticia-pipol-supremo-confirma-condenas-trafico-explosivos-contra-suarez-trashorras-ex-cunado-antonio-toro-20080716153229.html>

³² Bruce Hoffman and Fernando Reinares. *The Evolution of the Global Terrorist Threat*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 40. Accessed February 6, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central.

³³ Sageman. *Understanding Terror Networks*, 51-52.

³⁴ *Verdict 36/2005*, 349-350.

³⁵ <http://www.elmundo.es/documentos/2004/03/espana/atentados11m/hechos.html>

³⁶ Sumario 11-M. Tomo 4, 840. <https://es.scribd.com/document/16626440/Sumario-11-M-Tomo4>

³⁷ Last accessed January 2, 2017,

<http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2004/04/18/espana/1082303152.html>

³⁸ Last accessed January 2, 2017,

http://psi.praeger.com.lomc.idm.oclc.org/doc.aspx?d=/books/gpg/A4446C/A4446C-chap18.xml#A4446C_EN18_29

³⁹ Since 1995, the Schengen Area allows any person to travel between Schengen countries without any border control. Border control is in force whenever a citizen wants to ingress or egress the Schengen Area. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/schengen_en

⁴⁰ Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe. A History*, 44-45.

⁴¹ <http://www.cnn.com/interactive/2014/09/syria-foreign-jihadis/>

⁴² *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report. TE-SAT 2016*, 26.

<https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2016>

⁴³ Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe. A History*, 285-289.

⁴⁴ *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report. TE-SAT 2016*, 28-29.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 7-8.

⁴⁶ <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports>

⁴⁷ <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projection-table/2050/number/Europe/>

⁴⁸ <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2013/05/23/obama-global-war-on-terror-is-over>

⁴⁹ Lawrence Wright, *The Master Plan; Annals of Terrorism*, (New York: The New Yorker, September 11, 2006), 6. <https://search-proquest-com.lomc.idm.oclc.org/docview/233129135?accountid=14746>.

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