

## **Homegrown terrorism in Germany: The case of Christian Ganczarski by Emerson Vermaat**

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Osama bin Laden called him his "German general," to other high level Al-Qaeda operatives he was known as "Ibrahim the German or "Abu Ibrahim." Christian Manfred Ganczarski, a Muslim convert from Germany, was one of bin Laden's personal couriers who had direct access to Al-Qaeda's top leadership. He passed messages from Khaled Sheikh Mohammed on to Osama bin Laden or visa versa. Khaled Sheikh Mohammed ("KSM") or "brother Mukhtar" was the high level Al-Qaeda operative in Pakistan who planned the 9/11 operation.

It was in April 2000 that Ganczarski gave a handwritten letter from brother Mukhtar to Osama bin Laden. The letter introduced and recommended an Australian convert named Jack Roche who had traveled with Ganczarski from Karachi, Pakistan, to Kandahar, Afghanistan. Jack Roche was to set up a terror cell in Sydney, Australia, with a view to planning terrorist attacks. But first, Mr. Roche needed to be trained in the use of explosives in one of Al-Qaeda's training camps. Bin Laden was friendly. The Al-Qaeda leader liked converts from Western countries and invited Christian en Jack to share a meal with him.[\[1\]](#) On his return to Australia in June 2000, Jack Roche or "Jihad Jack" planned to blow up the Israeli Embassy in Canberra. He was arrested in November 2002 and sentenced to nine years in June 2004.

Roche converted to Islam in 1992, and later met an operative from Jemaah Islamiyah in a Sydney mosque. Jemaah Islamiyah was Al-Qaeda's Southeast Asian branch. An Indonesian man named Encep Nurjaman or "Hambali" was the operations chief of Jemaah Islamiyah. Hambali closely cooperated with Khaled Sheikh Mohammed and he was also involved in the preparations of 9/11.[\[2\]](#)

When he met bin Laden in Kandahar in the Spring of 2000, Jack Roche hoped that Al-Qaeda would ask him to join to Taliban to fight in their ranks. Al-Qaeda had other plans for him. They wanted him to blow up the Israeli Embassy in Canberra and kill a Jewish businessman.[\[3\]](#)

### **Recruited in the radical Al-Taqwa Mosque in Duisburg**

Christian Ganczarski himself was also recruited after visiting a radical mosque in Germany. The inconspicuous Al-Taqwa Mosque in Duisburg was a meeting point for radical Islamists.[\[4\]](#)

Ganczarski was born in Gliwice, Poland, in October 1966. His devout Catholic parents were of German origin. The family moved to Germany in 1976. They settled in Müllheim in the industrial Ruhr valley region. As a teenager he lost his faith in the Catholic Church and got involved in petty crime. He found a job in the firm of Düwag in Krefelt where he met so-called "guest workers" from Muslim countries. One of his friends was a Tunisian

who encouraged him to read the Koran. It was in the Summer of 1986 that Ganczarski became a Muslim himself saying the "shahadah" (Muslim confession) in a mosque. He was also circumcised and became active in a local Müllheim mosque. The 19-year old Muslim convert adopted the name of "Ibrahim." He married another Muslim convert, Nicola ("Maymuna"). They had a daughter who suffered from diabetes. People in Müllheim told me they still remember the Ganczarskis: he had a heavy beard, was dressed like a Pakistani and his wife wore a niqab.

With the help of the Saudi gynecologist Dr. Nadeem Elyas from the Bilal Mosque in Aachen, Ganczarski received permission to study in Saudi Arabia in 1992. The Saudi royal family had asked Dr. Elyas to target German converts with a view to winning them over to "Wahhabism," the arch-conservative Saudi branch of Islam. (This was also done in other European countries.) Elyas had first contacted Ganczarski's imam in Müllheim asking him if he knew suitable candidates. The imam knew a good candidate and mentioned the name of Christian Ganczarski. The Saudi doctor was well connected: he also played a leading role in the *Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland* (ZMD), the Central Council of Muslims in Germany. Consequently, he was in a unique position to contact mosques and imams. Money was no problem. So Ganczarski's wife and daughter were able to join him one year later.

Due to insufficient knowledge of the Arab language Christian "Ibrahim" Ganczarski was unable to finish his studies. He returned to Germany in 1994 to live in the city of Duisburg. In the Al-Taqwa Mosque he met Mohamedou Ould Slahi, a Mauritanian who had just graduated from the local Gerhard-Mercator University with a degree in electronic engineering. Ould Slahi came to Germany in 1988. He became a student in Duisburg and through the internet he came into contact with radical Chechen groups. He joined the jihad in Bosnia.<sup>[5]</sup> He traveled to Afghanistan twice and received training from Al-Qaeda. His brother-in-law was Al-Qaeda financier Khaled Al-Shanquiti, also known as "Abu Hafs the Mauritanian." Al-Shanquiti was very close to Osama bin Laden. The 9/11 Commission Report refers to Ould Slahi as "a significant Al-Qaeda operative."<sup>[6]</sup> After graduation he set up an import and export firm in Duisburg ("Ould Slahi GmbH") which served as a cover for Al-Qaeda activities. He also claimed social security benefits to which he was not entitled at all. Huge sums of Al-Qaeda money were transferred through the account of his firm. Much of the money came from his brother-in-law Al-Shanquiti in Sudan who was involved in the preparations of the Al-Qaeda suicide bombings of the American Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998.

In Duisburg, Ould Slahi ("Abu Mus'ab") successfully recruited Christian Ganczarski and Karim Mehdi, a young and fanatical Moroccan. They often met in the Al-Taqwa Mosque in Duisburg and in another mosque in Müllheim.

Ould Slahi was in touch with Marwan Al-Shehhi, Ziad Jarrah and Ramzi Binalshibh, three key members of the Hamburg 9/11 terror cell led by Mohammed Atta. He met them twice in his Duisburg apartment and advised them to travel to Pakistan and Afghanistan. After his arrest in 2002, Binalshibh was interrogated by U.S. intelligence officials.

*"Binalshibh said they were initially suspicious of Abu Mus'ab, but came to trust him as the meeting progressed. Abu Mus'ab told them that the first step was to get Pakistani visas, as Pakistan would serve as their point of entry for onward travel to Afghanistan. He instructed them to apply for the visas using their authentic passports and to return in a specific period of time. Binalshibh was unsure how much time passed between the first and second meetings, but estimated it was approximately two or three weeks.*

*Binalshibh said that, although Mohammed Atta (the lead hijacker) did not attend the meetings, he also decided to go to Afghanistan."*[\[7\]](#)

Mohammed Atta, Marwan Al-Shehhi, Ziad Jarrah and Ramzi Binalshibh became core members of the 9/11 plot – with Atta designed as its operational leader.[\[8\]](#) All of them met with Osama bin Laden and Khaled Sheikh Mohammed, Al-Qaeda's operational leader. It was during these meetings that the 9/11 plot began to take shape. The idea to use hijacked planes as bombs originated in the mind of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and bin Laden approved his proposal in April 1999. Within Al-Qaeda the plot was now referred to as the "planes operation."[\[9\]](#) There are no indications that Mohamedou Ould Slahi knew about the plot or recruited Binalshibh, Jarrah, Atta and Al-Shehhi into Al-Qaeda. This was done later after they arrived in Afghanistan at the end of 1999. But without Ould Slahi's advice the three 9/11 suicide pilots from Hamburg would never have considered going to Afghanistan. They originally planned to go to Chechnya. Bin Laden and his deputy Ayman Al-Zawahiri were agreeably surprised when they met these promising new recruits. They were the perfect candidates for the 9/11 suicide mission.

### **Ganczarski's trips to Afghanistan**

Ganczarski, too, traveled to Pakistan at the end of 1999. In the Pakistani town of Quetta he visited a guesthouse run by Al-Qaeda and/or the Taliban. He probably did so on the advice of his Duisburg friend Ould Slahi. The Mauritanian had similarly instructed Binalshibh, Atta and Jarrah to travel to Quetta first and visit the Taliban office.[\[10\]](#) From Quetta the Taliban escorted Ganczarski to Kandahar in Southern Afghanistan. He was then sent to the north to fight in the Taliban ranks against the Northern Alliance led by Ahmed Shah Massoud. This kind of action soon damped his initial enthusiasm and he went back to Kandahar's guesthouse number 2 and then decided to return to his family in Müllheim, Germany. He had three children now: one daughter and two sons. But he had promised the Al-Qaeda people in Kandahar that he would soon return to Afghanistan. Just before Christmas 1999 the whole Ganczarski family left Germany and traveled to Afghanistan. They were housed in Osama bin Laden's compound. Ganczarski, who happened to know a lot about computers, was working in the House of Logistics, the same place where the Al-Qaeda leadership and Western converts were staying.[\[11\]](#) Bin Laden obviously liked the new and promising Al-Qaeda recruit, "Ibrahim the German." Ibrahim's detailed knowledge of computers and telecommunication was very useful to Al-Qaeda and to Osama bin Laden personally.[\[12\]](#) He was employed in the propaganda and communication department and also served as a courier between Osama bin Laden and Khaled Sheikh Mohammed.

In August 2000, Ibrahim the German called his friend Karim Mehdi in Duisburg telling him he needed 4800 German Marks (2400 Euro). He also talked about a boat filled with explosives which was successfully tested on a lake near Kabul. "Using boats or remote control model airplanes in a strike against military bases, boats or embassies was an old plan of Al-Qaeda, and in particular of my friend Christian," Mehdi later said.[\[13\]](#)

Ganczarski's wife did not like Afghanistan and there also was no more insulin for her daughter. After eight harsh months in the land of the Taliban, she now wanted to go back to Germany. Abu Ibrahim's wife and the children settled in the town of Haan, he himself stayed with two German Muslim converts in Müllheim. One of them, Uwe D. ("Nadim"), traveled with Ganczarski to Afghanistan on August 8, 2001. (Ganczarski had also paid a two-week visit to Pakistan/Afghanistan in February 2001 and was arrested near the Georgian-Chechen border in March 2001 as he tried to travel to Chechnya.) Prior to his conversion to Islam, Uwe D. had been involved in petty crime and drug activities.[\[14\]](#) Both went to an Al-Qaeda training camp to be trained in the use of explosives and guerrilla warfare. Ganczarski returned to Germany just one week before the attacks of September 11, 2001. A few days after his return he claimed his passport had been lost. (During a house search after the Al-Qaeda attack on Djerba, Ganczarski's old passport was found and all the Pakistani stamps were there.) These kind of tactics were often followed by Al-Qaeda operatives who did not want to have passes with conspicuous Pakistani entry and exit stamps as they traveled to other countries.[\[15\]](#) Similarly, the three 9/11 suicide pilots Mohammed Atta, Ziad Jarrah and Marwan Al-Shehhi also quickly got new passports shortly after their visits to Pakistan/Afghanistan.[\[16\]](#) Ganczarski paid at least five visits to Pakistan and Afghanistan, so he must have had a lot of stamps in the summer of 2001. He also traveled between the two countries to pass on personal messages and secret letters from Osama bin Laden to Khaled Sheikh Mohammed in Karachi or vice versa.[\[17\]](#)

Ould Slahi fled to his home country Mauritania after German authorities discovered that he had wrongly claimed social benefits for years. Another reason for going back to Africa was the discovery that he had been involved in the so-called "millennium plot," a plan to blow up Los Angeles International Airport (LAX). He had traveled to Canada at the end of November 1999 to give instructions to Ahmed Ressay, an Algerian Al-Qaeda operative in Montreal who was to blow himself up in truck laden with explosives. The plot failed and Ould Slahi left Canada in January 2000 to open an internet café in Nouakchott, the capital of Mauritania. He was arrested in 2001 and later turned over to the Americans who eventually sent him to Guantanamo Bay.

In February 2001, Ganczarski mailed Ould Slahi that his friend "Mo(u)nir" was with him, probably a reference to Monir (or Mounir) Al-Motassadeq, a member of the Hamburg terror cell. In 2002, investigators would find a piece of paper in Ganczarski's apartment with the bank account of Motassadeq's Russian wife Maria Pavlova written on it. In Karim Mehdi's apartment they found a piece of paper with a telephone number which once belonged to Ramzi Binalshibh (who had left for Pakistan/Afghanistan shortly *before* 9/11).[\[18\]](#)

## **The attack on the Synagogue of Djerba**

It was probably in Montreal that Ould Slahi first met a young Tunisian national named Nizar Nawar.[\[19\]](#) Ganczarski also knew Nawar quite well. He had met him in Afghanistan in August 2001. Nizar Nawar, code named "Seif" (=Sword) was close to the Al-Qaeda leadership, especially to Khaled Sheikh Mohammed. After 9/11, Khaled Sheikh Mohammed instructed Nawar to blow up the ancient synagogue on the Tunisian tourist resort of Djerba. He returned to Tunisia to make the necessary preparations. The target was well chosen by Al-Qaeda. It would be the first major attack after 9/11 and it would also be a *Jewish* target. This fitted very well into bin Laden's evil, demonic and anti-Semitic diatribes against the Jews:

*"The hour will not come until the Muslims fight the Jews and kill them... And whoever claims there is permanent peace between us and the Jews has disbelieved what has been sent down through the prophet Muhammad; the battle is between us and the enemies of Islam, and it will go on until the Hour..."*[\[20\]](#)

The La Ghriba Synagogue in Djerba is the oldest synagogue in the world. It is here that one finds the oldest Jewish community in the Maghreb. It was as early as five centuries before Christ that Jews began to settle here. Local Berber tribes converted to Judaism, but later most of them converted to Islam. La Ghriba became a symbol of peace and reconciliation between Muslims and Jews. (No wonder Osama bin Laden ordered to bomb this wonderful place.)

After the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, most Tunisian Jews emigrated to the new Jewish state. The peace and quiet of Djerba and La Ghriba were disturbed in 1985 after the Israeli air force bombed the PLO headquarters in the Tunisian capital of Tunis. Some 150 people were praying in the synagogue when a policeman suddenly fired at random into the crowd. Three people died, one of them was a child. The action of the Israeli air force infuriated the policeman so much that he could no longer control himself and decided to pull the trigger, killing praying Jews whom he was supposed to protect.[\[21\]](#) After this tragic incident Tunisian authorities did everything they could to protect the Jews and their synagogue. But they could not foresee the Al-Qaeda attack which occurred in April 2002. For years nothing had happened and lots of tourists had visited La Ghriba and made their pictures. Many of these tourists came from Germany, Israel and the United States.

On Thursday morning April 11, 2002, a tourist bus full of German tourists arrived at the La Ghriba Synagogue. Forty five tourists got off the bus and entered the narrow street leading to the entrance of the synagogue. Some of them saw an old Iveco tanker truck just opposite the entrance. Most German tourists entered the synagogue, the men among them had to place a kippa on their head. Others were still near the entrance. There were also some French tourists. It was half past eleven in the morning and suddenly there was a flash of light followed by an explosion: the innocent looking truck turned out to be car bomb.[\[22\]](#) Its huge tank was filled with liquid propane. It was the 24-year old Al-Qaeda operative Nizar Ben Mohammed Nasr Nawar who had ignited the explosion killing 14

Germans, 2 French tourists and 5 Tunisians. Although a huge fire quickly destroyed the interior of the synagogue, most tourists managed to escape. Andrea Esper was one of the survivors. She saw how some local Tunisians raised their fists towards the survivors and laughed at them as if they rejoiced over what had happened.[\[23\]](#)

Tunisian authorities first claimed it was an accident. To admit that it were an act of terrorism, could deal a severe blow to the Tunisian tourist industry. German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (Green Party) initially tended to believe the Tunisian version (on Monday April 15) but Interior Minister Otto Schily (SPD) and Federal Prosecutor Kay Nehm had reason to believe it was a real terrorist attack targeting foreign tourists. Schily visited Tunisia on April 22, 2002, and laid flowers at the synagogue wall. He now officially confirmed that it had been a terrorist attack.[\[24\]](#) By that time the Tunisians, too, had to admit that this was the case.

After 9/11 terrorism was one of Schily's main priorities as Interior Minister. He immediately pressed for tougher anti-terror laws but the leftist Greens staunchly opposed his proposals. After the attack on Djerba they finally accepted that a long overdue article on membership of a terrorist association (Article 129b) be inserted in the German penal code. Recruiting others for a domestic or foreign terrorist organization, however, was not made punishable, due to strong opposition by the Green coalition party.[\[25\]](#)

In an important speech on February 4, 2003, in Washington, Mr. Schily, issued a strong warning against "cells of North African terrorists with links to Al-Qaeda," and said:

*"Islamist-extremist terrorism, like that practiced by Al-Qaeda, wants above all to destabilize Western societies and terrify their citizens.*

*Such terrorism consciously chooses so-called 'soft targets': tourists vacationing in Bali and Djerba and working fathers and mothers, nearly 3000 of them killed in the World Trade Center. It's about terror for terror's sake. And that means: If we allow ourselves to give in to panic, the terrorists will already have won...*

*We are currently conducting two major criminal trials against suspected Islamist terrorists. One involves the Meliani group, accused of planning a bomb attack on the Christmas market in the French city of Strasbourg. This group was made up of five North African Muslims who trained as terrorists in Afghanistan and had access to Osama bin Laden's logistical network. But German police investigations uncovered the planned attack in time, already in late 2000 – and thus before the September 11th attacks – resulting in the arrest of those now on trial.*

*The other trial involves Mounir El Motassadeq accused of aiding Mohammed Atta and belonging to the same terrorist cell. This trial is the first in the world in connection with the September 11 attacks."[\[26\]](#)*

## **The Djerba Synagogue attack and Al-Qaeda**

Nizar Nawar, the man who carried out the attack on the La Ghriba Synagogue in Djerba, was one of those North African terrorists linked to Al-Qaeda. Three hours before the attack, Nawar phoned Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Klaus Ulrich Kersten, Director of Germany's federal anticrime agency (BKA) told *The New York Times* in August 2002. "There are indications that this attack in Djerba was perpetrated with the blessing or approval of Al-Qaeda," he said.[\[27\]](#)

A few hours before the attack Nawar also called Christian Ganczarski in Duisburg. It was a rather strange call:

*Nawar: "I am Seif."*

*Ganczarski: "Who?"*

*Nawar: "Seif, Seif!"*

*Ganczarski: "I see, welcome. How are you doing?"*

*Nawar: "How are you doing? Are you okay?"*

*Ganczarski: "I am fine, praise be to God. Praise be to God, everything is okay. May God reward you. How are you doing?"*

*Nawar: "Don't forget it..."*

*Ganczarski: "No."*

*Nawar: "Praise be to God."*

*Ganczarski: "Praise be to God. Praise be to God."*

*Nawar: "Don't forget. Don't forget to include me in your prayers, to mention me in your prayers, if God wants it."*

*Ganczarski: "If God wants it, how are you doing? Fine?"*

*Nawar: "Fine, fine, if God wants it."*

*Ganczarski: "Praise be to God, where are you? Are you here?"*

*Nawar: "No, I am outside."*

*Ganczarski: "Oh yes, if God wants it, do you need anything?"*

*Nawar: "No, thank you. I called you. I only need Dawa (=God's blessing)."*

*Ganczarski: "If God wants it."*

*Nawar: "Thank you."*

*Ganczarski: "Okay?"*

*Nawar: "Good bye. Go in peace."*

*Ganczarski: "Go in peace. May God's grace and blessing be with you."[\[28\]](#)*

It was clear that Nawar wanted to get the green light for the Djerba bombing. His phone call to Ganczarski was tapped by the German security service BfV (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*). But Nizar Nawar placed another phone call to Pakistan, to one of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed's many cellphones.[\[29\]](#) This phone call was intercepted by the National Security Agency (NSA) which passed the information on to the CIA. Ganczarski himself had also made a phone call to Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. It was a short and silent call which lasted less than a minute. The two men did not speak. It was this call which would later betray KSM's whereabouts. The British newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* revealed in March 2004 that Swiss cellphone chips are popular with Al-Qaeda operatives. The chips also helped to pin down KSM:

*"Through electronic surveillance German authorities traced the call to Mohammed's Swisscom mobile phone although they did not at first know that it belonged to him. Two weeks later they searched Ganczarski's house and found a list of Swisscom numbers, which they passed on to the Swiss for further investigation.*

*By checking their records the Swiss realized that other Al-Qaeda suspects used Swisscom chips. Liaising with American and Pakistani intelligence they monitored cellphone traffic and were able to confirm that Mohammed was among the Swisscom users.*

*It took months to find him 'because he wasn't always using that phone, he had many other phones,' one official told the newspaper.*

*He was finally caught in a joined CIA and Pakistani operation.*

*The Swisscom investigation also led to the capture of a top Saudi-born Al-Qaeda suspect, Abdullah Oweis, in Qatar last July. One official said: 'They'd would switch phones but use the same cards. It was a very good thing for us.'[\[30\]](#)*

It was clear that "KSM" was the chief planner of the Djerba operation, he and Al-Qaeda were deeply involved.[\[31\]](#) Ganczarski was also involved. He was arrested on April 15, 2002, but immediately denied everything, saying he had no links whatsoever to a terror network. He was released one day later due to lack of evidence.[\[32\]](#) German anti-terror laws were not tough enough to detain him for a longer period.

Five days after the Djerba attack, the "Islamic Army for the Liberation of the Holy Sites" claimed it was responsible. This was just another name for Al-Qaeda. In 1998, the same "Islamic Army" had claimed responsibility for the Al-Qaeda attacks on the American embassies in Tanzania and Kenya.[\[33\]](#)

On April 16, 2002, the London based Arab newspaper *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* published a message from the "Islamic Army" saying the Djerba attack had been "a response to Israeli crimes against the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza." The suicide action "was a response to the refusal of governments to allow their peoples to start a jihad against the Jews." The statement also praised "the heroic martyr Nizar Ben Mohammed, also known as Saif Eddine Tounsi," who carried out the attack." "He received his orders from the leadership of the Islamic Army for the Liberation of the Holy Sites." He operated on his own, he did all the necessary reconnaissance work, making photos of the target. A testament written by Nawar was added saying that he sacrificed his life on the road to Allah. He also appealed to his parents, brothers and sisters to join him and struggle on the road to Allah.[\[34\]](#)

One month later, the attack on the La Ghriba Synagogue in Djerba was claimed by Abdel Azeem Al-Muhajir, a senior military leader in the Pakistani-Afghan border area. He told the London-based Arab newspaper *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* that the attack "was carried out by brothers in the Al-Qaeda network." He also said Al-Qaeda had regrouped since the Taliban ouster, it now planned to give Americans " a more painful hit" than the Tunisian attack. "Our network is not confined to a single spot on this earth. We are scattered all over the globe."[\[35\]](#) Al-Qaeda's official spokesman Suleiman Abu Ghayth also warned the United States "to fasten its seatbelt " in preparation for more attacks. He said the Djerba operation "was undertaken by a young man from the Al-Qaeda organization who couldn't bear to see his brothers in Palestine being killed while Jews walk around enjoying themselves and freely carrying out their rituals."[\[36\]](#)

The family of suicide bomber Nizar Nawar lives in the French city of Lyon, a hotbed of Islamic radicalism. Nizar also lived in Lyon and it is likely he was recruited in one of the city's radical "Salafist" mosques. There are large numbers of disaffected, unemployed and frustrated North Africans in the suburbs of Lyon. They were and are easy targets for firebrand clerics who want to recruit them for the jihad. One of the most notorious firebrand clerics is Abdelkader Bouziane, also known as the "Sheikh of Vénissieux" (a suburb of Lyon). He believes that wife beating is perfectly alright. He believes in polygamy and is married to two wives and has 16 children. He wants to establish "an Islamic Republic in France." Claiming to be against terrorism he refuses to condemn Osama bin Laden, "because there is no proof bin Laden organized the attacks in New York and Madrid."[\[37\]](#) Sheikh Bouziane arrived in France in the early 1990s. Before his arrival in Lyon in 2003, there were other firebrand clerics who preached jihad, praised suicide bombers and sympathized with Al-Qaeda. One of them could have recruited Nizar Nawar.

Nizar's brother Walid was arrested in November 2002. He bought the satellite telephone used by Nizar when he made his phone calls to Pakistan and Germany.[\[38\]](#) Walid

claimed he did know anything about his brother's terrorist connections. He said his brother was not a practicing Muslim.[\[39\]](#) But Walid happened to have the telephone number of a Spanish national named Enrique Cerda Ibanez whose bank account was used by Al-Qaeda to finance the Djerba operation. Walid also possessed a letter from Essa Ismail Muhammad ("Isaac de Karachi"), a Karachi based Al-Qaeda operative. This letter was addressed to Walid's brother Nizar, the Djerba suicide bomber, asking him to get 5000 euros from Enrique Cerda. Walid traveled to Spain himself to get the money from Cerda and then sent it to his brother in Tunisia.[\[40\]](#)

Enrique Cerda was jailed in March 2003 along with Ahmed Rukhsar, a Pakistani national operating in northern Spain who was also suspected of collaborating with Al-Qaeda. Two years later, the Spanish police rounded up a criminal Pakistani network involved in Islamic or "Hawala" banking. The Spanish police believed the network was also used by terrorists to finance their operations.[\[41\]](#) Similar Pakistani networks operate in other countries.

In April and July 2007, several criminal Hawala networks were dismantled. They operated in Holland, the United States, Spain and Australia. One of the accused was involved in money laundering on behalf of Al-Qaeda. Among those who were arrested in July were the Pakistani citizens Mohammad Ahsan and Abdul Rehman who operated in Amsterdam.[\[42\]](#)

If one takes into account the dubious nature of many of these Hawala networks, it is rather strange that Dutch Finance Minister Wouter Bos, a Social-Democrat, said in July 2007 that he wanted the Netherlands to develop into a center of Islamic banking. London, in his view, is a good example.[\[43\]](#) But dubious Pakistani Hawala networks in Britain, with its huge Pakistani immigrant community, should not be a model to follow.

One explanation for the fact that the Dutch Finance Minister expressed such controversial views may be that his party, the PvdA, strongly depends on Muslim immigrant votes. Leading party members espouse the ideology of "multiculturalism."

### **France arrests Ganczarski**

German investigators and prosecutors knew that Christian Ganczarski was an Al-Qaeda operative having access to the highest leadership echelons,[\[44\]](#) yet they claimed they could not detain or charge him with any crime. Much needed tougher German anti-terror laws were not in place yet. Ganczarski knew, of course, that he was being investigated in Germany and decided to travel to Saudi in November 2002. He was accompanied by his wife and children. All of them had a pilgrim visa. The Germans alerted the Saudis that Mr. Ganczarski was the subject of a terror investigation.

Meanwhile, Ganczarski and his Moroccan friend Karim Mehdi were planning a terrorist attack on the French island of La Réunion in the Indian Ocean. A well-known tourist resort with fine beaches, not very far from Mauritius and Madagascar. Mehdi first planned to make a reconnaissance visit to La Réunion. In May 2003, Mehdi, who only

received social security benefits, booked himself an expensive 14-day visit to the island. One month earlier German investigators discovered that Mehdi was collecting information on remote control systems. The German security service BfV alerted the French. Mehdi was arrested near Paris on June 1, 2003 as he planned to fly to La Reunion.[\[45\]](#) He was then interrogated by the well known French anti-terrorist judge Jean-Louis Brugière and quickly admitted that a group of bin Laden sympathizers in Germany planned an attack on La Réunion. The idea was to bring a model boat laden with explosives near a beach promenade, the bomb was to be exploded by remote control. The conspirators also wanted a suicide bomber to detonate a car bomb near a tourist hotel. They felt inspired by what happened in October 2002 when Al-Qaeda suicide bombers killed 202 Western tourists in the peaceful Indonesian island of Bali.[\[46\]](#) The sadistic mind of these killers enjoyed seeing people dying and burning in the flames, they hoped that many of the survivors would suffer from burn injuries for the rest of their lives. This is what happened in Bali and Djerba.

During the interrogations in Paris, Mehdi mentioned the names of two German converts: Christian Ganczarski and Uwe D. The former was to contact Al-Qaeda and secure adequate funding for the operation. The latter was to travel to Kenya to contact the suicide bombers. Explosives were to be smuggled from Madagascar to La Réunion in a boat. There are Al-Qaeda terror cells operating both in Kenya and Madagascar. Mehdi claimed he had discussed the Réunion plan with Ganczarski already in November 2002, before the latter left for Saudi Arabia.

The Saudis knew perfectly well who Ganczarski was and they wanted to send him back to Germany. He had also overstayed his visa. They put him under house arrest in April 2003 and contacted the Germans. The problem, however, was that German Federal Prosecutor Kay Nehm did not believe he could successfully prosecute Ganczarski under existing German laws. Interior Minister Schily had pressed Nehm for one year now to take action. The French were also upset: French Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy fully agreed with his German colleague Schily that Ganczarski was a dangerous high level Al-Qaeda operative who should have been behind bars long ago. The French had their own reasons to be interested in Ganczarski: two French citizens had died in Djerba and there were strong indications that this man was involved in the attack. As French anti-terror laws are much tougher, the French would not hesitate to prosecute Ganczarski.

So the Germans asked the Saudis to put this embarrassing German citizen and his family on an Air France flight to Paris. From Paris the Ganczarskis were then supposed to fly on to Frankfurt in a Lufthansa Plane. But when the Air France Plane from Riyadh landed in Paris on June 3, 2003, the French arrest team was already waiting for Christian Ganczarski. His wife and children were allowed to travel to Frankfurt. French Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy told parliament that Ganczarski was an "information and telecommunications specialist" and a "senior leader of Al-Qaeda who was in personal contact with Osama bin Laden."[\[47\]](#)

A Paris court convicted 37-year old Karim Mehdi in October 2006 to nine years in prison for plotting a terrorist attack on the island of La Réunion and membership of a terrorist

organization (Al-Qaeda). French prosecutor Patrick Laberche pointed out that Mehdi had already purchased materials in preparation of the attacks. He also mentioned Mehdi's highly interesting jihadist trips to Bosnia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Mauritania. Another indication for Mr. Mehdi's links to Al-Qaeda is the fact he possessed the telephone numbers and addresses of Ramzi Binalshibh, one of the 9/11 planners, and of Ziad Jarrah, one of the 9/11 suicide pilots. "In this case we are as close as it gets to the core of Al-Qaeda operations," the prosecutor said and he demanded a 10-year prison sentence.[\[48\]](#)

### **Some homegrown terrorists visit terrorist training camps**

Christian Ganczarski was both a homegrown terrorist and an Al-Qaeda operative. Homegrown terrorists do not necessarily stay in their own countries. In a number of cases they visit training camps in Pakistan or Afghanistan. Jason Walters and Ismail Akhnikh, two prominent members of the Dutch homegrown terror network "The Hofstad Group" also visited training camps in Pakistan in 2003.[\[49\]](#)

Ganczarski and Jason Walters are converts. So are Fritz Gelowicz and his friend Daniel Martin Schneider who planned a series of spectacular terrorist attacks in Germany but were arrested in September 2007. Fritz Gelowicz, too, was trained in one of those Pakistani training camps.[\[50\]](#) "Recent converts to Islam are particularly vulnerable," says the New York Police report on *Radicalization in the West*.[\[51\]](#) Pakistan is still very important: two of the 7/7 London suicide bombers received training there. Shehzad Tanweer and Mohammed Siddique Khan were not converts but homegrown terrorists.

In the tribal areas of Waziristan there were, and possibly still are, at least 15 Al-Qaeda camps.[\[52\]](#) German investigators suspect that Aleem Nasir, a Pakistani "businessman" living in Germany, has also been in one of these training camps. What else does a man like Nasir have to seek in South Waziristan where the real power lies in the hands of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda? Nasir's arrest in Pakistan in July 2007 did cause concern among German investigators who feared that the Al-Qaeda threat in their country is not waning. There is no evidence yet that Nasir is a real terrorist or a terrorist recruiter. But if he is, there is reason to worry.

In its *Annual Report 2006*, the Dutch Security and Intelligence Service points to "the *growing* influence of foreign jihadists on local autonomous networks."[\[53\]](#) Homegrown terrorists do not operate in a vacuum, they are not detached from what happens elsewhere, on the contrary. The internet and itinerant preachers play a vital role in the radicalization of young European Muslims.[\[54\]](#) But these radical websites and preachers invariably focus on the suffering of Muslim brothers and sisters elsewhere. It is what happens in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan or Chechnya that makes these young European Muslims so angry. Samir Azzouz, another leading member of the Hofstad Group, is a case in point. He radicalized after 9/11 when "Sheikh" Osama bin Laden became his big hero. He radicalized even further after visiting radical websites and participating in anti-Israel and anti-American demonstrations in Amsterdam. This fanatic teenager tried to travel to Chechnya in January 2003 but was stopped at the Ukrainian-Russian border. And then he tried to make a bomb but failed because he had never been trained to do so.

He wanted to become the first suicide bomber in the Netherlands and praised bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri in his testament.

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Notes

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[1] Uli Rauss and Oliver Schröm, *Osamas Deutscher General. Wie Christian G. aus Duisburg zum Top-Terroristen wurde*, in: *Stern*, August 4, 2005, p. 38-50. Part of the information on Ganczarski is based on this article and also on research by the author in Müllheim, Duisburg and Essen.

[2] Maria A. Ressa, *Seeds of Terror. An Eyewitness Account of Al-Qaeda's Newest Center of Operations in Southeast Asia* (New York: Free Press, 2003), p. 71.

[3] *BBC News*, 1 June 2004 ("Jack Roche: The Naive Militant").

[4] Especially the mosque's "Gemeinnützliche Verein Internationale Treff, e.V." was a meeting point for young Muslim radicals. The author visited this location. The Ganczarski case shows that radical mosques, apart from the internet, play an important role in recruiting jihadists. This was also the case in the Netherlands (Eindhoven). Northern Italy (Milan) and England (London).

[5] Emerson Vermaat, *De Dodelijke Planning van Al-Qaida* (Soesterberg: Uitgeverij Aspekt, 2005), p. 196.

[6] *The 9/11 Commission Report. Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), p. 165.

[7] Peter L. Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know. An Oral History of al Qaeda's leader* (New York: Free Press, 2006), p. 309.

[8] *The 9/11 Commission Report, op. cit.*, p. 166.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 154. As early as May 1995, Philippine and U.S. investigators discovered an important plot. Project Bojinka "was a plan to blow up 11 U.S. airliners over the Pacific in a day of rage against the United States." According to investigators, it called for five Muslim terrorists to plant virtually undetectable bombs aboard the planes, all jumbo jets, in an intricately synchronized plan that had the bombers changing planes as many as four times a day." *The Sun*, May 28, 1995 ("Terrorists plotted to blow up 11 U.S. jumbo jets").

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 166.

[11] Uli Rauss and Oliver Schröm, *op. cit.*, p. 44, 46.

[12] "Ohne ihm, so die Erkenntnisse von Polizei und Geheimdiensten, könne Osama bin Laden wieder telefonieren noch ins Internet." (According to the findings of the police and secret services, bin Laden does not have access to telephone and internet without Ganczarski's assistance.") ([http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benutzer:Kyber/Christian\\_Ganczarski](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benutzer:Kyber/Christian_Ganczarski)).

[13] Uli Rauss and Oliver Schröm, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

[14] *Focus*, April 22, 2002, p. 25 ("Jetzt hat die Angst Saison").

[15] *Der Spiegel*, April 22, 2002, p. 114 ("So Gott Will").

[16] Der Generalbundesanwalt beim Bundesgerichtshof, *Anklageschrift gegen den Studenten Mounir El Motassadeq*, p. 65, 66.

[17] *Der Spiegel*, 16 June 2003, p. 42 ("Zugriff in Paris").

[18] *Der Spiegel*, 22 April 2002, p. 108, 109.

[19] Emerson Vermaat, *op. cit.*, p. 197. Because of his connections with Osama bin Laden, Ould Slahi was regarded as a "sheikh" (kind of leader) by radical Muslims in Canada.

[20] Bruce Lawrence, *Messages to the World. The Statements of Osama bin Laden* (London/New York, Verso, 2005), p. 125 (Osama bin Laden in an interview with *Al-Jazeera* bureau chief Taysir Alluni, broadcast on October 21, 2001).

[21] *La Synagogue de Djerba est la plus Ancienne du Monde* [www.nouvelles.com/dossier/Djerba](http://www.nouvelles.com/dossier/Djerba), November 11, 2004. Excellent essay on the history of the beautiful La Ghriba Synagogue, a Jewish holy site, a cultural monument and a tourist attraction.

[22] *Focus*, April 22, 2002, p. 16 ("Aus unsere Serie 'Schräge Dementis'").

[23] *Ibid.* p. 22 ("Sie lachten uns aus").

[24] *Die Welt* (internet), April 22, 2002, 16:12 Uhr ("Bundesregierung hat Beweise für Terrorakt auf Djerba").

[25] *Der Spiegel*, April 22, 2002, p. 24-26 ("Die Stauffenberg-Lücke").

[26] Speech by Otto Schily, Federal Minister of the Interior, at the closing session of the American-German Workshop on Cooperation in Combating Chemical and Biological

Terrorism, Washington February 4, 2003: "What can and must Germans and Americans do to fight terrorism?"

[www.germany-info.org/relaunch/politics/speeches/020403.htm](http://www.germany-info.org/relaunch/politics/speeches/020403.htm). Otto Schily is a remarkable figure in German politics. In the 1970s he was one of the defense attorneys of the notorious Baader-Meinhof gang, a leftist terror network. He later joined the Green Party, after that he became a Member of Parliament for the Social-Democratic Party (SPD) and finally Interior Minister in the Schröder-Fischer coalition. From a devoted leftist in the 1970s, Schily later moved to the center and even began to espouse conservative positions after 1999.

The author interviewed Schily twice for Dutch television, the first time when he was still in the Green Party, the second time when he was a member of Parliament for the SPD. The second interview was about Iran's role in the assassination of a political opponent in Berlin, Germany.

[27] *The New York Times*, August 24, 2002, p. 1 ("Germans lay out early Qaeda ties to 9/11 hijackers").

[28] *Der Spiegel*, April 22, 2002, p. 113 ("So Gott Will").

[29] *The New York Times*, August 24, 2002, p. 1.

[30] *Telegraph.co.uk*, March 5, 2004 ("Phone call helped to smash Al-Qaeda web").

[31] *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2002* (Cologne: Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 2003), p. 175: "Er war nach bisherigen Ermittlungen auch in den Anschlag auf Djerba eingebunden."

[32] Hans Leyendecker, *Handy-Spur ins Ruhr Gebiet*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, April 17, 2002, p. 2.

[33] *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, April 17, 2002, p. 1 ("Die Hinweise verdichten sich: Es war ein Terroranschlag").

[34] *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, April 16, 2002, p. 1 (author's file on Djerba).

[35] *Yahoo!news*, May 18, 2002 ("Report: Al-Qaida commander says the group carried out the Tunisian synagogue attack, will strike U.S. shortly"); *BBC News*, May 18, 2002 ("Al-Qaeda 'responsible' for Tunisia blast"). Abdel-Bari Atwan, editor-in-chief of *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, said in August 2002 that Al-Qaeda associates recently told him the network regained confidence after facing intense U.S. bombing. "Now they said he (bin Laden) is fully in command again and they have regrouped and are organized again." He was told bin Laden was in good health and safe and was planning new attacks on the United States. (*Reuters.com*, August 27, 2002: "Bin Laden Reportedly Back at Helm of Al-Qaeda").

[36] *Al-Jazeera*, June 23, 2002; *Theage.com*, June 24, 2002 ("Al-Qaeda Spokesman says bin Laden is alive").

[37] *Proche-orient.info*, April 19, 2004 ("Les Imprécations du Cheikh de Vénissieux). Interview with Abdelkader Bouziane.

[38] *Fidesjournal.com*, November 12, 2002 ("Attentat de Djerba: L'état se referme auteur de Walid").

[39] *Fides.com*, November 7, 2002 ("Walid Nawar dans le collimateur de la DST").

[40] *Elmostrador.cl*, March 12, 2003 ("España: Encarcelan a dos presuntos financistas de Al-Qaeda"); Ministerio del Interior (Madrid), March 7, 2003 ("Detenidas cinco personas en Valencia y Logrono por su presunta vinculación con la trama financiera de Al Qaeda"); *Elmundo.es*, March 11, 2003 ("La Audiencia Nacional amplía la investigación sobre la red financiera de Al Qaeda en España"; author's sources.

[41] Author's sources.

[42] *De Telegraaf*, July 23, 2007, p. 7 ("Ondergrondse bankiers opgepakt in Amsterdam").

[43] *NRC Handelsblad*, July 16, 2007, p. 16 ("Minister Bos: Nederland moet spil van islamitisch bankieren worden"); *NRC Handelsblad*, 18 July 2007, p. 1 ("Londen pionier islamitisch bankieren").

[44] *Panorama* (ARD TV, Germany), October 17, 2002: Generalbundesanwalt (Federal Prosecutor) Kay Nehm "hält es für möglich, dass der zum Islam konvertierte Christian G. aus Müllheim 'Zugang zum ersten Führungszirkel von Al Qaida hatte.'"

[45] Uli Rauss and Oliver Schröm, *op. cit.*, p. 50; *Der Spiegel*, June 16, 2003, p. 40, 42 ("Zugriff in Paris").

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

[47] Assemblée Nationale, *Débats Parlementaires*, Première Séance (First Session), June 11, 2003, p. 4995: "Ganczarski... un haut responsable d'Al Qaida, en contact avec Oussama Ben Laden lui même, ayant été en Afghanistan et en Bosnie."

[48] *AFP*, October 26, 2006 ("Attentats des 11 septembre: K. Mehdi condamné à 9 ans de prison"); *International Herald Tribune*, September 29, 2006 ("French prosecutor seeks 10-year prison sentence for Moroccan suspect of Sept. 11 ties").

[49] Emerson Vermaat, *Nederlandse Jihad. Het proces tegen de Hofstadgroep* (Soesterberg: Aspekt Publishers, 2006), p. 31, 133, 134, 275.

[50] *Der Spiegel*, September 17, 2007, p. 140 ("Wo der Terror wohnt"). One reads the following words on the cover of this issue of the German magazine *Der Spiegel*: "Terror-Basis Pakistan: Bin Laden's deutsche Jünger" (Terror-basis Pakistan: Bin Laden's German Followers).

[51] Police Department City of New York, *Radicalization in the West. The Homegrown Threat*, p. 23 (New York: NYPD, 2007).

[52] Zahid Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan. The Struggle with Militant Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 144.

[53] General Security and Intelligence Service (AIVD), *Annual Report 2006* (Leidschendam: General Intelligence and Security Service, 2007), p. 20.

[54] General Security and Intelligence Service (AIVD), *From Dawa to Jihad. Current Trends in the Islamist Terrorist Threat* (Leidschendam: AIVD, 2006), p. 18.

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