

What is behind terror scare in U.S.?

by Edward Spannaus

Over the Christmas and New Year's period, the United States was shaken by a series of arrests of Algerian nationals and others, which began when an Algerian exile living in Canada, Ahmed Ressam, was arrested on Dec. 14 in a remote corner of Washington State, while crossing the Canadian-U.S. border with powerful explosives and other bomb-making components in his vehicle.

U.S. officials have come to believe that at least three other Algerians were to meet Ressam in Seattle. According to court documents and other reports, Ressam was supposed to leave his vehicle with the explosives in a parking lot in Seattle, and then travel to Chicago, engage in unspecified "fundraising" activities, and then fly on to London.

The second incident which led U.S. officials to suspect a broader plot, was when a Canadian woman married to an Algerian, Lucia Garofalo, was arrested, along with another Algerian national, at a Vermont border crossing on Dec. 19. Prosecutors soon linked her to the Montreal group of which Ressam was a part, which had come to Canada from France following a series of bloody crimes and terrorist incidents in Paris and Lille in 1995-96. In particular, Federal prosecutors described various dealings Garofalo had with Karim Said Atmani, who was trained in Afghanistan, and who was a roommate of Ressam in Montreal and was later deported to Bosnia. French authorities want to question Ressam about a Paris subway bombing in 1995.

A third individual identified as part of the Lille-Montreal group, is Fateh Kamel, who was extradited from Jordan to France last year.

The network involved has been identified by law enforcement agencies of various countries as part of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), a terrorist group responsible for much bloodshed in Algeria and for terrorist incidents in France—but many questions are being raised about this assertion.

Following the Ressam arrest on Dec. 14, a broad sweep took place in the United States and abroad, with an unprecedented number of arrests and detentions in the Middle East and Europe of suspects linked to networks who could be planning attacks on Americans. Jordanian police arrested more than a dozen suspects on Dec. 15. On Dec. 19, Pakistan officials announced that they had arrested more than 200 people, mostly Afghan nationals. In the United States, there were reportedly as many as 15 arrests, some of which have still not been made public. In addition, on Dec. 30, FBI agents went

knocking on the doors of about 50 people around the country. "We're interviewing people across the country, dozens of people," an FBI official said. "They all have some connection with Ressam." The official said that the FBI had no information about specific threats or targets, so that people shouldn't get overly concerned. "But we're going to lock up all the people who were involved with Ressam," he added.

While many commentators were quick to assert that either the GIA, or the ubiquitous Osama bin Laden, were behind the Algerian network, U.S. law enforcement officials were more cautious, and have not yet accused the GIA of targeting the United States.

French authorities believe that the network of Algerians arrested in the United States are former GIA members who are no longer part of that organization, a well-informed French source told *EIR*. Of those under arrest in the United States, only Ressam is known to French authorities, the source said; two men identified as former associates of Ressam in Montreal, Fateh Kemal and Said Atmani, are also well-known to French officials as former GIA members involved in terrorist activities. The others under arrest in the United States are not known to be associated with the GIA, and they may not all be even linked to Ressam.

The French official also ridiculed the idea that all terrorism is linked to Osama bin Laden, and he does not believe that those arrested in the U.S. are tied to bin Laden. "There are lots of crazy people who believe *jihad* is a good thing, and who want to make some money at the same time," the source said—suggesting that money may be a primary motive for some of those involved.

A Brit admits it

The common denominator of almost every terrorist group operating in the world today is London, and most have grown out of the Afghanistan "freedom fighters" of the 1980s who were sponsored by British and U.S. intelligence. When the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in the late 1980s, this international band of "freedom fighters" emerged as a pool of trained terrorists—a sort of hiring hall—which the British and other Western powers can tap into and activate at will.

London is a primary center for such groups, and it appears that Canada is as well. Indeed, a Montreal police official was recently quoted as calling Canada a "Club Med for terrorists," because of its lax laws and enforcement.

"The fact is, that London has been the center of terrorist groups," a stalwart of the British establishment recently told *EIR*. He said that "much of the theory and planning for international terrorism is done in London," and that the top people of bin Laden "operate here quite openly." He added that "there is a great deal of hypocrisy on this whole matter of terrorism. The private thinking of governments, and not only the British government, is that tolerating terrorist groups gives a certain type of immunity from being attacked directly, so we turn a blind eye to what is going on."