"The Terrorism Industry": An Al-Qaeda Course in Security and Intelligence

Part One

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On July 24, 2007, Al-Fajr, the official media institution of Al-Qaeda, which is responsible for disseminating all official publications of Al-Qaeda and its affiliates, published the first installment of an audio course titled, "The Terrorism Industry", which covers "security and intelligence and their importance to Islam". This course, which is composed of some 35-40 segments, was compiled by Sheikh Abu Ubaydah Abdallah al-Adam, who was responsible for intelligence and security for Al-Qaeda until he was killed in a US drone strike in Waziristan in April 2013.[1] These segments shed light on the functioning and thought of global jihad strategists. The following is a summary of the first segment of this course.

Foreword

Part One of the course opens with praise for the martyr [shahid] Abu Dajaneh al-Kharasani, who carried out a suicide attack at the Chapman Military Base – CIA headquarters near Khost, in eastern Afghanistan – on September 30, 2009, killing seven CIA officers and one Jordanian intelligence officer.[2] One of the worst attacks ever suffered by the CIA, it was very sophisticated and complex to carry out from the standpoint of security and intelligence, and required the attacker to employ both deception and advanced breaking and entering skills. The success of the attack was also ascribed to Himam Khalil al-Balawi and those members of Al-Qaeda who provided logistical support. The attack was meant as retaliation for the mass killing of mujahideen in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and for Israeli aggression against Muslims in the Gaza Strip (al-Adam is apparently referring to Operation Cast Lead, which took place contemporaneously). The attack sent a message to the CIA and Jordanian intelligence: The arm of the mujhaideen is long, and can reach even the most carefully-guarded sites.

Jihad and martyrdom for Allah are paramount; indeed, they are the focus of the majority of mujahideen. However, one should remember that the ultimate goal is to follow and spread the commandments of Allah; one should strive not only to die as a martyr, but also to strengthen Islam to the utmost. In discussing suicide attacks, many sheikhs insist that the mujahid must accomplish certain things before martyring himself for Allah: The most must be made of a brother's abilities before his death, especially as mujahideen who are committed to Islam and to Allah's commandments are currently in short supply. The mujahid must therefore always be thinking how best to serve Islam.

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[1]http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-2-173336-Al-Qaeda-intelligence-chief-killed-in-Waziristan-drone-attack.
[2] http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/dec/31/taliban-cia-agents-killed-afghanistan.

The goal of this course is to help the mujahideen stay alive and out of infidel jails, so that they can fulfill their purpose. In addition, the course is meant to help mujahideen in various theaters of jihad to fight the enemy as effectively as possible.

In guerilla warfare, and especially during the first phase of fighting, the brothers must be careful lest the enemy identify them. Their motto must be to "fight to stay alive", for guerilla fighters are always in the minority, with the enemy outflanking them in numbers and might. Initially, it is crucial to stay alive so that jihad may continue and not abate. Consequently, this course has two mutually supportive goals: to teach the brothers how to stay alive, and to teach them how to approach the enemy by stealth, and thereby incur the smallest possible number of losses. The course is based in part on the teachings of Sheikh Saif al-Adel, formerly with the Egyptian Army and currently a leader of Al-Qaeda. According to the Americans, his article "Security and Intelligence" has served as a military training manual for the mujahideen. Security is of fundamental importance to Islamist groups; a lack of security has often affected these groups' functioning, and caused them to suffer heavy losses. Maintaining security is therefore crucial to the persistence of jihad and the integrity of the jihadist group.

The Value of Security

1. Security makes it possible to surprise the enemy. The element of surprise – in time and place – is basic; some say it brings us half the way to victory. For example, around the time of the attacks of September 11, 2001, the Americans thought Al-Qaeda would attack them outside the US; they therefore concentrated their forces at various US embassies, never thinking that an attack would take place inside the US. Even the perpetrators of the attack maintained secrecy: Almost none of them knew all of the details of the attack, but rather only the facts relevant to them. This was how Al-Qaeda succeeded in surprising them.
2. It is important to know the enemy and understand his military and material capabilities, his personnel, how his forces are organized, and what weapons and equipment he has. Such data are obtained by gathering information, and primarily by deploying spies.
3. Jihadist groups should institute a security apparatus to keep them on guard against an enemy attack or attempt to foil their plans.
4. Efficient security reduces the number of losses among the mujahideen. Conversely, insufficient security may cause operations to fail repeatedly, frustrating the mujahideen.

Security in Islam and Islamic Law [Shari'a]

Islam knows that every event has causes and consequences. If the right steps are taken, victory is achieved; this is true of Muslims and of infidels. It is therefore necessary to exercise caution, and to remember that today we fight wars of information and intelligence: Whoever is the first to obtain information, wins. The Americans use technology in their war on jihad; they use drones and spies to fight a war against an enemy that is, from their perspective, unknown, and who uses unfamiliar methods; this war is completely different from a war between states. The Americans have not succeeded in vanquishing the mujahideen by fighting clandestinely, waiting for the right moment to act, and operating "under the radar"; that is why they have realized that this is an intelligence war. It is imperative to maintain secrecy, and not discuss plans; any questions should be directed to the leader of the group, and should not be discussed by its members. This principle of secrecy guided the Prophet Muhammad when he fled from Mecca to Medina. Security is stressed in many stories about the Prophet and his companions. Even when it seems that the enemy is winning, remember that America stands to lose: Its economy has imploded (al-Adam is apparently referring to the 2009 financial crisis), its military has collapsed, and all that is left is Afghanistan. Soon America will leave Afghanistan and disappear from the earth.

Security Adapted for Role and Environment

Every member of a jihadist group has a role to play. Because each mujahid plays a different role, each one needs different information. For example, by virtue of his role, the emir must have more information than the simple mujahid. Those who have the most information must take the greatest security precautions. The environment also affects the cautions one must exercise. For example, someone who engages in da'wa [proselytizing] among the public works in a different environment than someone who carries out clandestine military actions. Each mujahid should suit his exposure to the environment to his role, and take the necessary personal and site-specific precautions.

Security: Between Exaggeration and Disregard

Neither overdo nor undervalue security. Rather, adjust security steps to circumstances. Security is too great when a mujahid takes so many personal precautions that he hems himself in and does himself no good, or even arouses suspicions that lead to his arrest. Disregard for security is demonstrated by a mujahid engaged in clandestine operations who talks about them carelessly enough for them to be detected, bringing harm to his brothers.

Secrecy must be maintained with regard to all military actions if they are to succeed. In general, a group's leadership should define the appropriate security guidelines for each group member.

Developing and Changing Security

Security has general principles, but no defined formulas. Good security relies on developments and innovations adapted to a given operation. The mujahid should always aspire to establish optimum security, by ceaselessly developing measures concomitant with the enemy's development of his capabilities, and by learning from experience. Technology is constantly evolving: For example, today's media are completely different from the media of a decade ago. The enemy's capabilities are also constantly evolving: Today, the enemy can locate people through their mobile phones. Therefore, the mujahideen must abandon this means of communication.