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Doctrines for Jihadi Terrorist Training

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Based on an in-depth review of jihadi discourse on terrorist training and preparation, this article finds considerable differences between leading jihadi theorists on issues such as how training should be defined, its ultimate purpose, and where and how to prepare jihadi fighters. However, they all agree on the importance of training, and that ideological indoctrination and spiritual preparation should take precedence over physical and military training. The preparatory process must produce battle-hardened, martyrdom-seeking fighters, whose primary strength lies in their spiritual determination, their patience, and a willingness to employ savagery against the enemy.

Keywords al-Qaida, jihadi, terrorist training

Introduction

Training is perhaps the primary vehicle with which jihadi groups are able to translate their radical ideologies into violent action.¹ Despite the significant academic interest in al-Qaida and jihadism following the 9/11 events and the U.S.-led war on terror, little so far has been written in the scholarly genre about how jihadi groups train and indoctrinate their members.²

This article addresses this gap in the literature on jihadism by exploring selected works by leading jihadi theorists where the topic of training and preparation for jihad has been discussed in some depth. It seeks to answer the fundamental question: *how is training and preparation for violent action conceptualised* in the writings of the jihadi movement's leading theoreticians? This question can be broken down into a number of issues: how is training defined? What is its purpose? Where should the training take place, how should it be organised, and how should jihadi cadres train? What type of skills do jihadi fighters need the most? What is the role of training and preparation in the overall jihadi strategy?

This article argues that there is no overarching, well-defined training doctrine³ in the jihadi movement today. Leading jihadi theorists who have written on the subject differ considerably in terms of how training should be defined, its ultimate purpose, and, not least, where to prepare jihadi fighters. However, there is greater agreement

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that training and preparation is an integral part of jihad and therefore an individual religious duty. They further agree that ideological indoctrination and spiritual preparation takes precedence over physical and military training. Moreover, since jihad is such a painful and brutal process, the preparatory process must accustom the recruit to this reality: they must learn determination, patience, and self-sacrifice; they should learn to endure the brutality of war, but also to employ its savagery against Islam's enemies. Learning by doing is a point raised by all theorists: participation in active war-fighting and armed confrontations is the best way to learn jihad.

In comparison with the abundance of training manuals and handbooks on jihadi websites, there is a relative dearth of doctrinal texts on training and preparation.⁴ The absence of a well-defined and common training doctrine highlights the decentralised nature of the jihadi movement today. At the same time, there are clearly individuals who speak with far greater authority than others on issues related to strategy and training. This article discusses the contributions of four leading jihadi scholars: These are the founding father of the Arab-Afghan movement Abdallah Azzam, the ideologue of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ, *jama'at al-jihad bi-misr*) Sayyid Imam Abd al-Aziz Imam al-Sharif, the jihadi Internet scholar Abu Bakr Naji (a nickname), and the Syrian al-Qaida theorist Mustafa bin Abd al-Qadir Sethmariam Nasar (better known as Abu Musab al-Suri). The selection of these writers is justified by the fact that these authors write about principles for training and preparation in some depth. Furthermore, all of them are widely read by contemporary jihadi sympathisers and operatives. Their writings are extensively distributed at jihadi websites, and they often figure as recommended readings. Furthermore, works of these authors have also been found on computers confiscated from jihadi terrorist cells in Europe and elsewhere.⁵

Jihadi Terrorist Training Doctrines: Characteristics and Evolution

The jihadi discourse on training doctrines is very much a product of the particular challenges facing the jihadi current. Hence, this discourse has evolved considerably since the foundation of al-Qaida in the late 1980s, and the rise of the Arab-Afghan movement in the 1990s. In particular, the post-9/11 era when the freedom of operation for the jihadi current was severely circumscribed, has witnessed the emergence of a new type of discourse on jihadi training. Moreover, the different discourses also reflect important ideological cleavages within the jihadi movement, especially the conflict between Azzam who represented the classical jihad paradigm (i.e., the traditionalist defenders of Muslim land), on the one hand, and the revolutionary jihadi current represented by Sayyid Imam al-Sharif and his EIJ.

In the following, it will be seen how Abdallah Azzam's thinking on training and preparation was formed to meet the specific needs of the Arab-Afghan training bases in the Pakistani-Afghan border areas, where they benefitted from territorial control and well-defined frontlines during the 1980s. Having witnessed the inability of Arab volunteer fighters to match Afghan guerrillas physically and militarily, Azzam came to emphasize self-sacrifice as the key element in his training doctrine, emphasising martyrdom, emigration to the war zone, and a long preparatory process. As opposed to Azzam, the training doctrine advocated by the EIJ ideologue Sayyid Imam Sharif, who also lived in Peshawar during the late 1980s, was heavily coloured by the revolutionary jihadi current. Unlike Azzam, his main priority was to overthrow Arab regimes, first and foremost President Hosni Mubarak's regime in Cairo, not

to liberate Afghanistan. Hence, al-Sharif was dismissive of the need for emigration as a necessary prelude for training and preparation. Instead, ideological indoctrination, in particular the inoculation of obedience to the emir and the regulation of the emir's powers over group members, became cornerstones in al-Sharif's doctrine.

While the literature by Abdallah Azzam from the 1980s conceptualised training as a specific stage in the process of jihad, contemporary theorists of global jihad view training as an integral part and by-product of the ongoing process of jihadi war-fighting. They advocate innovative ways of training outside the confines of stationary training camps, in any place where the jihadis can organise training. Two post-9/11 writers who deal extensively with training doctrines are Abu Bakr Naji and Abu Mus'ab al-Suri. They both fully acknowledged the new reality, which the U.S.-led Global War on Terror has imposed on the jihadi current and consequently, the reduced opportunities for training and preparation. Here, in their writings, the notion of territorially confined training camps and frontlines has given way to more decentralised models, either in safe houses, small mobile camps, or on-the-job training at one of the new jihadi fronts. While they also highlight the pre-eminence of ideological indoctrination and spiritual strength, Naji also underlines the need to brutalize the recruits and accustom them to the savagery of contemporary warfare.

The Classical Jihad Paradigm: Abdallah Azzam

Abdallah Azzam is a towering figure in the jihad movement. He led the Arab-Afghan movement from its inception in the mid-1980s until his death in November 1989, and his writings and speeches are regarded as essential literature for jihadis today.⁶

The "Introduction to Emigration and Preparation" (*muqaddima fi'l-hijra wa'l-i'dad*) is a collection of Azzam's lectures, speeches, and sermons, collected, edited, and published by *Martyr Abdallah Azzam Media Center* in Peshawar, probably in the early or mid-1990s.⁷ The collection, which contains a three-part lecture series, appears to be among his most popular texts.⁸ Judging from their contents, these lectures were held in one of the training camps for Arab volunteers; the audience seems to have been mostly newly arrived volunteers.⁹

In these lectures, Azzam deals with the phases of jihad preceding the actual combat (*qital*), of which "emigration and preparation" are the most important ones. The importance of these preparatory stages is heavily underlined: the final stage, "combat," is merely the fruit of the preceding phases of jihad.¹⁰

Azzam divides jihad into four stages: emigration (*al-hijra*), preparation (*al-i'dad*), garrison (*al-rabat*), and combat (*al-qital*). All three preparatory stages are indispensable for the participation in combat. Together, the four stages encompass the jihad as understood by Azzam. Azzam's jihadi doctrine insists upon the duty of emigration (to the Arab-Afghan training camps) before the actual "preparation" (or education and training) begins. There are several important preconditions and implications of this sequential definition of jihad. First, territorial control where training camps can be established is a precondition for jihad. Second, and as a result of this territorial control, the insistence on "emigration" ensures that the recruits are relatively highly motivated and that their bonds and loyalties to other groups are weak. Third, the insistence on two additional preparatory stages (*al-i'dad* and *al-rabat*) before the actual combat ensues, makes it possible to devote much attention

to educating and indoctrinating the recruits under the firm control of jihadi leaders. Finally, the insistence on a garrison stage (*al-rabat*) ensures that the zeal and energies of jihadi recruits are channeled towards the nearby geographical frontlines (i.e., in Afghanistan), not somewhere else. Azzam's frequent usage of terms such as "Land of Jihad" (*ard al-jihad*) and "Defence of Muslim Land" (*al-difa 'an aradi al-muslimin*) also confirms that he did not foresee jihadi warfare on a global scale and outside territorial frontlines.

In Azzam's doctrine, the journey of jihad begins with "emigration," *al-hijra*, which has both physical and symbolic implications. When arriving in the "Land of Jihad," which is Afghanistan in this case, the recruit will earn the title "emigrant" (*muhajir*, pl. *muhajirun*), which is an honorific title in Qur'anic parlance, denoting those who came to Medina to join the Prophet Muhammad after he had established the first Islamic community there in 622.¹¹

The duty of "emigration" is not a temporary phenomenon in the life of Muslims, determined by world affairs such as the outbreak of Afghan liberation war: "Jihad will last until the Judgement Day," according to Azzam, and so will the duty of emigration and preparation for jihad.¹² Azzam refutes the interpretation that the duty of emigration and preparation is over after Muslim armies have conquered some areas (*la hijra ba'd al-fath*). In his words, "emigration" is an uninterrupted process like "jihad" and it continues until Judgement Day, or alternatively, "until the entire earth worships God."¹³ This everlasting duty means that a Muslim who chooses not to emigrate "will not be considered a sincere and complete Muslim, not a truly believing Muslim," according to Azzam.¹⁴

In Azzam's doctrine, the "emigration" is perhaps the most important stage for a jihadi recruit since it demonstrates his willingness to sacrifice. The willingness to give up every worldly pleasure, even life, lies at the core of Azzam's message, and already in the initial paragraph, this emphasis is very clear. "Emigration" implies leaving behind home, family, work, and disengaging from many of the daily bonds linking an individual to this world.

Azzam's strong emphasis on self-sacrifice and martyrdom is also evident in his portrayal of "emigration" as the path to paradise (*tariq al-janna*). The mere intention to emigrate and the most miniscule preparatory step to emigrate will ensure the recruit ready access to heaven if he should die in the process of his emigration:

You are a martyr by only entering the aircraft leaving your country, or even when you step out of the car at the airport after having left your village behind. . . . The further away you travel away ?????????? from your home country as an emigrant, the more your status and reward in paradise will increase.¹⁵

If the rewards in the afterlife are high, the demands in this life of a jihadi are tough: "Jihad is difficult and hard: I have never seen anything more difficult and harder than jihad."¹⁶ Hence, Azzam underlines that "emigration" must be based upon "patience and trust in God" (*al-sabr wa al-tawakkul*): "Be patient during the torments and pains of the path ahead."¹⁷ Azzam's heavy emphasis on patience, endurance, and steadfastness permeates his speeches:

Emigration is no small thing. It demands patience: Patience to endure cold, to endure separation from family, to abstain from worldly

yearnings, and from sweet things to eat. Patience to live without nice furniture, opulence and wealth, not having the cars you used to ride. Patience to obey your emir, to wake up at four-thirty in the morning, and to undergo physical exercise in the morning, and to endure the food . . . patience for everything! Without this you will not be able to continue along the path [of jihad].¹⁸

At the same time, emigration also provides freedom in this life: freedom from worldly restrictions, domestic duties, and political oppression:

Emigration destroys shackles. Emigration is to get rid of this world's mud. Emigration is a general declaration of faith in God and trust in him. Emigration is a slogan that God is the creator and the provider, not a ruler, named so and so.¹⁹

To undertake "emigration" also provides a sense of being selected by God for jihad. Azzam elaborated on this particular blessing: "What blessing can be greater than the fact that God has selected only you from the entire university! . . . From among a hundred thousand students, He chose you!"²⁰

As a further argument for making the emigration to jihad, Azzam argues that it is impossible to live as a true Muslim in Western countries or under secular dictatorships in the Arab world.²¹ From this follows Azzam's categorisation of "emigration." The first type is "emigration" from the "Abode of the Infidels" (*dar al-kufr*) to the "Abode of Islam" (*dar al-islam*).²² This emigration is obligatory for every Muslim, unless Muslims enjoy freedoms in the Lands of the Infidels, to worship God and live as Muslims. The second type is "emigration" from the "Abode of Immorality and Sinfulness" (*dar al-fujur wa'l-fasq*), where Islam cannot be truly practiced. (In this context, Azzam refers mostly to countries such as Syria, Libya, and Egypt, by name, but implicitly, he includes many other Muslim states as well. He frankly states that "nearly the entire world should be considered not to be part of Abode of Islam."²³)

Azzam discusses the various preconditions for "emigration." Sometimes, emigration to Western countries, the "Abode of the Infidels," is legitimate, according to Azzam, if this means that one is emigrating from an "Abode of Immorality and Sinfulness" to a place where there is less sinfulness (*dar aqall fasaqan*) and more freedom to practice religion.²⁴ However, Azzam describes at length the precautions Muslims had to take before emigrating to the West. He especially cautions against studying Islam at Western universities and against the "orientalists" (*mustashriqun*), Western scholars teaching Islamic studies. To study natural sciences, medicine, engineering, etc., at Western universities was acceptable, but "as for going there to study Islam, my God, that is a catastrophe!"²⁵ Azzam does not portray the Western world as an arena for armed jihad. The emigration to the West is merely a last resort for Muslims who were unable to practice their religion at home.

The second stage in jihad after emigration is "preparation" (*al-i'dad*). Azzam likens the relationship between the stage of "preparation" and the stage of armed "jihad" to that of ablution before prayer: "There is no prayer without ablution, and there is no jihad without preparation."²⁶ Preparation is not only ordained by God and therefore a duty. It is also indispensable in order to ensure military victory. Azzam employs examples from the battles fought by the Prophet Muhammad to

demonstrate this point: At the Battle of Khaybar in 629, the Prophet defeated the Jews even though he used very few men against an army that was ten times larger. This and later victories fully demonstrated the results of “the jihadi education which the Prophet had provided to the Muslim community and which reached its apex with the Battle of Badr.”²⁷

Similar to the undertaking of “emigration,” the engagement in “preparation” is a sign of determination to perform the duty of jihad.²⁸ Azzam also emphasizes the importance of patience when preparing for jihad. The Afghan jihad needed well-trained fighters, not simply because of the rugged terrain in Afghanistan, the thin air in the mountainous regions, the lack of roads, the heavy equipment the mujahidin carried along, and the long distances they walked. Azzam also insisted that he only wants “fighters who cause vexation to the enemy and whose hands God uses to humiliate the infidels . . . we do not want to present people who are killed without any benefit.”²⁹ Hence, Azzam praises patience as an indispensable quality for the jihadi recruit during the stage of preparation. It was a sign of determination, while hastiness was not:

Do not rush if you are serious! If you are determined to continue this blessed path, prolong your stay here [at the training camp] until you have trained properly. Jaji [at the Afghan frontline]³⁰ won't flee from its place. . . . With every day that you spend in the training camp, you add something to the Afghan jihad.³¹

Those who come to Sada [training camp] for two days and then go on to Jaji, they do not want jihad. They do not want jihad. They lack the determination to continue.³²

Azzam describes “preparation” as a multi-faceted concept: “Preparation means force. Preparation is shooting. Preparation is raising horses. Preparation is physical exercise also. Preparation is spiritual and ideological preparation.”³³ The mental and ideological indoctrination is no less important than military preparation, since participation in jihad is so demanding: “one needs souls who can endure it, and whatever that can make you endure it . . . to endure the bitterness on the way ahead, endure the agony, endure the hellishness of war.”³⁴

In Azzam's doctrine, practicing the worship of God in various forms, from praying and ritual recitations (*dhikr*) to fasting and meditation, helps the recruit to refine his soul and prepare himself mentally for the enormity of the challenge of jihad:

This will help you enjoy the sweetness of agony in God's path. The harshness becomes sweet. You will learn to find pleasure in the torments and pains on the road of jihad. You will become unable to part from this atmosphere [of jihad]. Why? Because God the Almighty has prepared your souls so that you will love faith.³⁵

This brings us closer to Azzam's perhaps most important contribution to jihadi ideology, the introduction of martyrdom as a pillar in the practice of jihad. Azzam spent much time preaching the virtues of self-sacrifice, martyrdom, and death. To inoculate a love for death and the aftermath among his recruits was a pillar in his training doctrine. He spoke at length about the heavenly rewards for jihad, the vanity of worldly pleasures, and the risks of dying as a non-martyr. Azzam emphasized the need to overcome the fear of death, by actively seeking death and martyrdom.³⁶

So Jihad is what we see as the only solution for this disease . . . disease of the notion of fear of the [secret police] agents, fear of the appointed time (death), fear of the loss of provisions. The most valuable thing which a human possesses, is the soul . . . and when you place your soul in your palm, begging God to take it, day and night—to purify it if He accepts it . . . becoming sad if the Lord of the Worlds does not choose it: Then after that, what could you ever fear, other than God?³⁷

While Azzam tended to focus on overall principles of jihadi training and preparation, he also paid attention to more mundane issues in the training camps, such as the problems of integrating newcomers at the camps. He clearly understood the importance of a successful socialization of new recruits into the group. As part of the preparation efforts, Azzam appears to have devoted much time to addressing the problem of homesickness among the newly arrived recruits. Severing all bonds with their former lives was very hard on the youth who arrived in Peshawar. In his lectures, Azzam frequently addressed the issue of how to overcome the nostalgia and longing for home:

A person will suffer from homesickness in the beginning until his heart replaces this feeling with new bonds. When one becomes familiar with a new place and new people, one will find new brothers, new uncles, one will get new friends instead of the old ones, a new father will take the place of his father, a new brother will take the place of his brother. . . . And as one gets more familiar with the new environment, the feeling of homesickness will gradually disappear.³⁸

To ease the process of integrating new recruits, Azzam recommended a smooth transitional period during which newly arrived recruits were introduced to a fixed program together with other recruits with similar cultural and language backgrounds.

Azzam also paid attention to the importance of getting to know the people, culture, and tradition of the country in question, i.e., Afghanistan: “You have to live with people and make their traditions your own, understand their language like your own.”³⁹ However, Azzam admitted that the cultural differences and language barriers between the Arab “emigrants” and the Afghan population were so significant that he did not send the Arab volunteers to join the Afghan mujahidin units. Furthermore, the Afghan resistance was divided into competing factions, which made it hard to remain neutral in the factional infighting. For these reasons, Azzam had to organize separate units for the Arab volunteers: “The Arabs did not stand up to the task of fighting in Afghanistan until we began these units,” Azzam conceded.⁴⁰

Yet the Arab participation at the front was not significant and it appears that “preparation” in practice proceeded somewhat unconnected with the actual requirements at the Afghan frontlines, assuming its own internal momentum. In a sense, “preparation” in the sense of military training and ideological indoctrination became a goal in its own right in the Arab-Afghan training camps. Still, battlefield experience and military confrontation played a key role in Azzam’s training doctrine as well as in later training doctrines by jihadi theorists. Azzam was quoted as saying that the Prophet “taught us that this *tawheed* [i.e. God’s unity] cannot be learned

by study lessons. . . . No, it can only be brought up and raised (through *Tarbiyyah*) in the souls, through confrontations in battles.”⁴¹ Despite his insistence that “preparation” was a necessary stage one had to pass through before moving to the battlefield, Azzam also emphasized that nothing surpassed the benefits gained from participation in actual war-fighting.

The Socio-Revolutionary Paradigm: Sayyid Imam al-Sharif

The Pillar in the Preparation of Jihad in the Way of God was written by a leading religious and political figure in the EIJ in the late 1980s. The 450-page treatise was published for the first time in Peshawar at the end of the 1980s.⁴² Its author, Shaykh Sayyid Imam Abd al-Aziz Imam al-Sharif, also known as Doctor Fadl or Abd al-Qadir bin Abd al-Aziz, was considered the supreme religious scholar for the EIJ, and perhaps also its leading theoretician.⁴³ Born in Bani Suweif in August 1950, he graduated in medicine, and worked at the prestigious Qasr al-Ayini Hospital in Central Cairo. In the massive sweeps following al-Sadat’s assassination in 1981, he was detained, but managed later to flee Egypt. He traveled to Peshawar where he reportedly became director of the Kuwaiti Crescent Hospital in the city. Together with Ayman al-Zawahiri and a few others, he became the most influential voice in the new jihadi trend in Peshawar at the end of the 1980s. Al-Sharif was the author of several jihadi classics, the most important of which were *The Pillar in the Preparation of Jihad* and *Compilation for Seeking Religious Knowledge* (al-jami’ fi talb al-‘ilm al-sharif). Al-Sharif fled from Peshawar to Sudan during the campaigns against foreign militants in 1993. He later settled in Yemen, where a number of EIJ militants sought refuge. In 1999 he was sentenced to life imprisonment in absentia by an Egyptian military court in the so-called “Returnees from Albania”-case. In October 2001, he was arrested by Yemeni authorities, and in late February 2004, he was extradited to Egypt where he remains incarcerated.⁴⁴

The Pillar in the Preparation of Jihad was written in response to the need for a legal-religious basis for the organization of the military camps for the Arab-Afghan fighters, especially with regards to regulating the relationships between individual members and between the emir and rank-and-file members.⁴⁵ Al-Sharif’s treatise is strong in terms of providing a solid legal-religious foundation for the importance of, and the religious duty of, training and preparation in Islam, and he appears more confident in religious exegesis than many other jihadi theorists. Not surprisingly, the book still figures prominently in the jihadi curriculum.⁴⁶ Electronic copies of the book, or excerpts of it, have frequently been discovered in the possession of militant Islamists and suspected jihadi terrorists in Spain, Italy, Germany, and elsewhere.⁴⁷

Even if Sayyid al-Sharif lived in Peshawar at the time of Abdallah Azzam and was a prominent figure in the Arab-Afghan movement, his concepts of jihad were very different from those of Azzam in several important respects. True, al-Sharif also highlighted the centrality of qualities such as patience, perseverance, and mental-spiritual strength as the jihadis’ primary weapon against a militarily superior enemy. Still, al-Sharif’s group, the EIJ, was a socio-revolutionary group formed to overturn the Egyptian government and establish an Islamic state in its place, not to liberate Afghanistan. Hence, when discussing preparation for jihad, al-Sharif focused on

“the apostates,” not “the infidels.” Furthermore, al-Sharif was rather dismissive of Azzam’s emphasis on “emigration” (*al-hijra*) as the starting point of jihad:

So preparing for jihad against those apostates is among the most obligatory religious duties for Muslims today. Even more so because there is no country worthy of emigrating to (*la tujad al-dar al-saliha lil-hijra*). Moreover, “emigration” is not possible for most Muslims, due to their individual circumstances, the situation in their countries, and the regimes ruling these countries.⁴⁸

In principle, al-Sharif agrees with Azzam that “emigration” is “like a prelude to jihad.”⁴⁹ However, al-Sharif defines the purposes of “emigration” differently: “either for the purpose of assisting in the victory of Muslims fighting in another country, or for the purpose of preparing themselves and gathering supporters so that they can return to jihad in their own country.”⁵⁰

Al-Sharif’s conceptualisation of “preparation for jihad” is different from Azzam’s in several other respects as well. While Azzam portrayed jihad as a four-phased process which began with the decision to “emigrate” and then “prepare” for jihad, in al-Sharif’s thinking, the starting point is the formation of a group of believers:

Preparation for jihad begins with the formation of a Muslim group (*al-jama'a al-muslima*)... And the path to jihad begins with the formation of a group of believers who believe in the duty of jihad, call upon others to undertake this duty, “Rouse the Believers to the fight” [from *Surat al-Anfal* 65], and who prepare themselves and their resources for that purpose with the best of their ability.⁵¹

In al-Sharif’s thinking, the “preparation” for jihad begins in principle from the moment a group is formed; there is no initial stage of “emigration,” when the recruit may contemplate his choice before he reaches the training camp. This also means that it is not necessary to undertake a geographical displacement before the onset of the preparatory process for jihad. Hence, concepts such as “Land of Jihad” and “Land of the Battle,” which Abdallah Azzam and later jihadi writers such as Yusuf al-Ayiri, the first leader of al-Qaida on the Arab Peninsula, used frequently, are not central to al-Sharif’s thinking. In fact, they are not mentioned at all in *The Pillar in the Preparation of Jihad*.

This does not mean that al-Sharif completely dismisses the importance of the training camps in Afghanistan. In fact, he describes the training camps and the arenas of jihad as “the best place to educate men and discover in them their true nature and behaviour.”⁵² Furthermore, he saw the training camps as “miniature models of the collective Islamic activism; and what is applied in these camps in terms of religious rulings can be applied in any Islamic society.”⁵³ However, the ultimate aim of training in these camps went far beyond the borders of Afghanistan.

In al-Sharif’s doctrine, the training process is very much in the hands of an “emir,” ruling over a small group of believers. Finding a legal-religious basis for exercising power in such groups presented a problem, since Muslims are only legally obliged to obey God and the Caliph. Hence, most of al-Sharif’s treatise deals with “refuting doubts” that mainstream clerics had raised about the principles of

allegiance and leadership (*bay'a wa imara*) in groups such as the EIJs. Notably, it is also these sections of his treatise which have been translated into English, and which seem to have great relevance even today.⁵⁴

When introducing the concept of “preparation for jihad,” al-Sharif offers an interesting categorisation of the concept. Preparation has two dimensions or “axes”: The first is “horizontal” and “quantitative” and the second is “vertical” and “qualitative.” The quantitative dimension of preparation is the “material preparation” (*al-i'dad al-maddi*), and it is subdivided into two types: the administrative-organisational dimension, which is about formulating policies and regulating relationships inside the group; and the military dimension. Interestingly, al-Sharif clearly gives lowest priority to the military dimension, which he mentions only in passing.⁵⁵ The most important part of jihadi preparation is what al-Sharif termed “belief preparation” (*al-i'dad al-imani*). This is about how to base the group on true legal-religious precepts and ways of preparing the individual jihadis' faith.⁵⁶

In al-Sharif's thinking, the ideological indoctrination “compensates for numerical inferiority and lack of resources,” and it “closes the ranks.”⁵⁷ In other words, it provides the jihadi movement with a “qualitative” edge vis-à-vis its enemies. By stressing the ideological dimension so heavily, al-Sharif is in line with later jihadi theorists such as al-Suri, who caution against military training before a sound ideological conviction is truly in place (see below). Al-Sharif's book, *The Pillar in the Preparation of Jihad*, was a source of great inspiration for Abu Mus'ab al-Suri and several other contemporary theorists of the global jihadi trend.

The Global Jihadi Paradigm I: Abu Bakr Naji

The book *Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage through Which the Ummah Will Pass*, was published by the *markaz al-buhuth wa al-dirasat al-islamiyya* [Center of Islamic Studies and Research], widely considered as an important, semi-official al-Qaida mouthpiece. It was released on jihadi websites for the first time in 2004, and attracted much attention.⁵⁸ It was distributed, discussed, and recommended on a number of key jihadi web-forums and websites (*alfirdaws*, *alansar*, *tajdeed*, *muslm.net*, *qa3edoon.com*, etc.).⁵⁹ The fact that the U.S. Administration and the U.S. media took great interest in the book has also been noted on the Jihadi web. Little is known about the author of the book, Abu Bakr Naji, apart from the fact that he was a contributor to the *Voice of Jihad* magazine, the mouthpiece of *al-Qaida on the Arab Peninsula*. His publications are also posted on *minbar al-tawhid wa'l-jihad*, a well-known online library for salafi-jihadi literature.

Training, education, and preparation occupy a prominent position in Naji's work, even though his primary aim is to devise an overall comprehensive strategy for defeating the United States and its allies. *Management of Savagery* has both a general educational purpose, as well as a specific section on educational methods to be used by the jihadi movement. The broader educational message that arises from this work is borrowed from the Western strategic studies genre, the “know-your-enemy” approach. *Management of Savagery* outlines long-term overall strategies for defeating the United States and its allies.⁶⁰ However, as opposed to much of the propagandistic rhetoric on how to defeat America that fills jihadi websites, Naji's work urges his readers to study Western works on organisational theories, military strategy, political science, and sociology, and to learn from this literature how to tackle the numerous challenges facing the jihadi movement.

For example, Western works on asymmetrical warfare will help the jihadis understand weaknesses to be exploited in military confrontations with Western forces. The Western political science literature will help the jihadis identify ways to exploit inherent vulnerabilities in Western democracies and to find ways to divide the United States and its allies. Western books on imperial overreach will also be helpful in devising strategies on how to provoke the United States into military occupation of Muslim countries.⁶¹

While these themes have also been raised by other works in the genre of “jihadi strategic studies,”⁶² what sets Naji’s apart from earlier works is his focus on creating areas of political chaos and strategies for how the jihadi movement should organise and manage its resources in order to consolidate territorial control in these areas as a prelude to establishing an Islamic state. The title *Management of Savagery* is illustrative: Naji envisions the coming phase for the Islamic Nation as being the most critical one since a number of regions will fall into chaos (or “savagery”) after government control has been weakened and displaced. This stage will emerge in a number of areas as a result of “vexation and exhaustion”—operations carried out by the jihadi movement against the United States and its local allies.

Naji recommends a multi-pronged jihadi strategy for weakening governmental control in the Islamic world, describing it as a continuation of what al-Qaida started with the East African bombings in 1998 and the September 11th attacks. The jihadi movement should focus on weakening the authority of, and respect for, the United States in the Islamic world and strengthening the self-confidence of Muslims. This should be done by challenging the deceptive Western media, by forcing the United States to “abandon its war against Islam by proxy” and entering into direct military combat in the Islamic world. By dragging the U.S. into direct military confrontation, everyone, even the United States itself, will realize that it is too weak and too remote from the Islamic world to prevent the emergence of zones of chaos and savagery. Second, recruitment to the jihadi movement should be boosted by carrying out spectacular and “dazzling” attacks against the United States and through growing popular resentment against U.S. military interference in the Islamic world.

Naji’s important contribution to the genre of jihadi strategic studies focuses more clearly on the post-combat phase than other jihadi strategies. As opposed to Abu Mus’ab al-Suri (see below), who believes that any attempts at territorial consolidation in the near-term are futile, Abu Bakr Naji thinks that territorial bases can be created and defended if the jihadi movement is able to create a sufficiently strong deterrent force. Naji cites al-Suri’s works and is clearly inspired by al-Suri’s numerous studies.⁶³ But he is clearly more optimistic about the potential for creating independent territorial zones (“Islamic Emirates”) than al-Suri.

Even though he acknowledges “the problem of aerial attacks by the enemy,” Naji believes in the possibility of devising a deterrent strategy against such attacks.⁶⁴ The jihadi movement should mobilize its active units throughout the world whenever such attacks occur. Repeated terrorist attacks anywhere in the world, even if they take place a long time after the enemy attack, will establish the principle of “paying the price” and will gradually become an effective deterrent against Crusader attempts to destroy or recapture jihadi strongholds and bases.⁶⁵

Integral parts of his strategic vision are Naji’s strategies for educating and training new jihadi cadres. In fact, when listing the key requirements for “managing savagery” in areas where jihadis gain territorial control, he specifically emphasises the aim of “raising the level of belief and combat efficiency during the training of

the youth of the region of savagery and establishing a fighting society at all levels and among all individuals.”⁶⁶

Naji elaborates more on this in chapter 10 of his book, entitled “Mastering Education during military operations just as it was in the first age of Islam.” How to provide training and education in the course of an ongoing war, or “between the events,” as Naji puts it, is a challenge that several contemporary jihadi strategists have struggled with (see section on al-Suri below).⁶⁷

Perhaps more than other al-Qaida theorists, Naji strongly emphasises the purifying effect of war, and insists that active participation in action and warfare is the best way to educate jihadi cadres. As with all other jihadi writers on the topic, the jihadi training is primarily about a mental process, and less about acquiring physical skills or specific knowledge. Naji in particular highlights the importance of the jihadi recruits becoming accustomed to the brutality of war (see below). Furthermore, by omitting any reference to Azzam’s four stages definition of jihad (emigration, preparation, garrison, and combat), and focusing on the educating effect of combat, Naji in effect sharply cuts down the geographical and social distance separating the recruitment arena from the actual battlefield. For Naji, jihadi training takes place on the battlefield, not before, and jihadi warfare can in principle be waged across the globe. Still, as opposed to al-Suri’s training doctrines, which are based on a completely de-territorialized jihadi warfare concept, Naji’s strategy is still determined by the jihadi movement’s territorial ambitions. He advocates the training of the youth in specific geographical zones, and the formation of “a fighting society” in these zones. Even though he underlines the importance of “small bands” operating as “separate, disparate organizations,” especially in “vexation and exhaustion” operations against the enemy,⁶⁸ the contrast to al-Suri’s strategic vision of a completely decentralised mode of warfare, relying on “individual terrorism,” is nevertheless striking. Furthermore, as a consequence of his belief in the viability of jihadi mini-states, Naji also addresses the needs for training cadres in non-military functions, especially in managerial skills: “We will mix with hundreds of thousands of people and they will require the administration of regions from us as diminished governments.”⁶⁹

Naji begins his discussion on jihadi education and training by reviewing traditional methods of education in Islam:

1. “Education by exhortation” (*tarbiya bil-mawī’za*), where the students were exhorted to abide by Quranic injunctions. Furthermore, one should also recount stories and proverbs related by the Prophet to his Companions, and exhort them to follow the virtuous examples from the Prophetic Traditions and the Quran.
2. “Education by habit” (*tarbiya bil-‘ada*), familiarizing and gradually habituating the individual to the behaviour you want to train them in.
3. “Education by pious deeds” (*tarbiya bi al-ta’at*), which is to perform prayer, fasting, giving alms, etc. In addition to being a duty of every Muslim, such acts also have an educational effect; they “advance the human soul.”⁷⁰
4. “Education by example or model” (*tarbiya bil-quḍwa*). This method is in Naji’s view one of the two most important and effective methods, and he devotes ample space to elaborating on this method. Seeing someone else sacrifice his most valuable things in the path of God will have a strong inspirational effect on the individual. While the examples of the Prophet and his Companions were “dazzling, living examples, models, and exemplars for the masses,” also today,

people can be inspired by virtuous fellow Muslims: “when there are men in our ranks who sacrifice expensive and valuable things in response to the commands of God – all of the commands of God – they will be the best means of edifying the ranks of the believing movements in Islamic activism, especially the young.”⁷¹

“Martyrdom” or suicide operations clearly fall into this category, although Naji does not explicitly elaborate on that issue.

5. “Education by momentous events” (*tarbiya bil-ahdath*). Together with the preceding method, Naji considers this method the most effective one. Naji believes that “terrible events” which capture the minds of the people, which the jihadi movement is a part of, have a much greater learning effect than “a hundred years of peaceful education.”⁷² This is especially so in conjunction with the preceding method since such “momentous events” produce heroes on both sides. They give ample opportunity to demonstrate “steadfastness in the face of the horrors resulting from these events.”⁷³

Naji’s action-oriented educational program is naturally dismissive of the traditional methods of “merely reciting the Holy Quran, teaching the laws and extracting the moral lessons [from it].”⁷⁴ For Naji, jihadi training and education can only be truly effective during action and in the battlefield: “Therefore, we should teach the people during action or military operations, and exploit every momentous event as a means of connecting them to servitude, obedience, and seeking refuge with God.”⁷⁵

The verses from the Holy Quran were sent down to the Prophet and his Companions at the time of battles with their enemies, Naji writes, and hence they were understood and interpreted in the context of battle. Naji cites Sayyid Qutb on this point: “Verily, this Quran does not reveal its secrets save to those who rush into battles with the Quran at their side.”⁷⁶ He also cites an Egyptian cleric, Muhammad Amin al-Misri (about whom he also offers a long biography, since al-Misri is clearly not as well-known to his readers as Sayyid Qutb), who wrote that “the greatest field for education is the field of battle” and “active jihad (*al-jihad al-‘amali*) is the greatest meaning of educating the Muslims and establishing the heavenly meanings and exalted standards in their souls.”⁷⁷ Being mostly concerned with general principles for jihadi education, Naji does not offer any comprehensive curriculum to his readers, apart from recommending the works of Shaykh Muhammad Amin al-Misri, Sayyid Qutb, and Abdallah Azzam.

Taking cue from these and other militant clerics, Naji argues that only this educational method, “on account of the hardship and horrors that pervade it,” can bring forth the type of capable cadres that the jihadi movement needs. For jihadi theorists like Naji and others, agony, pain, suffering, and horror are all necessary milestones in the educational process of the jihadis, which make them stronger and more faithful.⁷⁸ In this context, battlefield experiences play an indispensable role in educating and training jihadis, physically as well as spiritually. Such experiences also forge bonds between the jihadi cadres in a way that no other educational methods do. Naji cites Muhammad Amin al-Misri on this:

The spirit of fortitude in the face of hardships and constancy in the face of adversities; the spirit of trusting God and having faith in Him and devotion to Him and awaiting His rescue; and the spirit of cooperation and mutual assistance all appear in the arenas of jihad and among the

ranks of the believers . . . The life of battle is that life in which the believer attains good qualities.⁷⁹

In Naji's doctrine, the education and training of jihadi cadres is very much a mental process, produced by extraordinary experiences of the horrors of war, or as Naji puts it: "a journey of blood, severed limbs, and skulls."⁸⁰ The jihadis need to accustom themselves to the brutality of war, and the following anecdote told by Naji is illustrative:

In one of the battles of Afghanistan in opposition to the Russians, the men gathered the women, the elderly, and the children in a mosque in order to minimize the damage of the bombing. Bombs fell upon the mosque and killed all those who were in it except for a little girl who remained in the lap of her grandmother whose head had been split open and its contents dangled down in front of her granddaughter. One of the Arab mujahids began to calm the child who was raving out of fright. The mujahid was crying and one of the Afghani said to him: "What is making you cry?" The Arab said to him: "Have you no feelings? They are your people and your relatives." The Afghani said: "This is war, and you and I will die like them some day."⁸¹

In addition to learning to endure the savagery of war, jihadi recruits must also be trained to be brutal themselves whenever savagery is required:

Whoever has practiced jihad knows that it is naught but violence, crudeness, terrorism, making people homeless, and massacring them . . . It is impossible for the jihadi to continue to fight and move from one stage to another unless he from the very beginning is involved in massacring the enemy and making him homeless . . . He cannot continue the jihad with softness.⁸²

Naji flatly rejects jihadi recruits who are unwilling to strip themselves of any signs of softness in their character: "It is better for those who have the intention to begin a jihadi action and are also soft, to sit in their homes. If not, failure will be their lot and they will suffer shock afterwards."⁸³

Even though this point is also made in the writings of other jihadi scholars, Naji's doctrine distinguishes itself by the strong emphasis on active participation in warfare as an indispensable part of jihadi training and as the only way to raise capable leaders and cadres. Naji furthermore believes that the current climate created by the U.S. global war on terror has produced ample opportunities for such training as well as for recruitment: "Just as the heat of a momentous event is the most favourable environment for education, it also prompts troops of youth to join the legions of jihad day after day."⁸⁴

From Naji's writings, it seems clear that, in his view, two key factors will provide the best possible context for successful jihadi terrorist training: spectacular terrorist operations and ongoing civil wars in which U.S.-led coalitions participate militarily. Independent territorial zones are not seen as an unqualified asset from a training perspective, even though Naji clearly advocates their establishment. True, jihadi mini-states provide ample opportunities for the formation of "fighting societies"

where the youth can be trained. However, the formation and administration of such mini-states will be very resource intensive, and will require many types of non-military skills that the jihadi current does not possess.

The Global Jihadi Paradigm II: Abu Musab al-Suri

The evolution towards smaller, more autonomous and decentralised organisational structures has been identified as a key trend in jihadi terrorism over the past few years.⁸⁵ Among the new literature on decentralised jihadi war-fighting strategies, the writings of the Syrian-born al-Qaida veteran Mustafa bin Abd al-Qadir Sethmariam Nasar have received the most attention, both in jihadi circles and in Western media and scholarship.⁸⁶ Using his most common pen names—Abu Musab al-Suri/Umar Abd al-Hakim—he has written a 1,600-page treatise, *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*, which is among the most frequently mentioned jihadi strategy books.⁸⁷ It has featured on numerous jihadi websites since its release in January 2005. The core ideas of this voluminous work are presented in chapter 8, in particular the section on “military theories” and the subsequent two sections on “organisational theories” and “training theories.”

How to train and prepare recruits for armed jihad is a topic that has preoccupied al-Suri throughout his entire jihadi career. During his participation in the Islamist uprising against the Syrian regime in the early 1980s, Abu Musab al-Suri received significant military and security training. He quickly rose to become a military instructor in the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood’s camps in Iraq and at the organisation’s safe houses in Jordan. Combining his newly acquired military skills with his previous training in mechanical engineering at the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Aleppo, he co-authored a handbook in explosive engineering, which was then his speciality. Al-Suri claims that this handbook, which became known as “The Syrian Memorandum,” was later used in the Arab-Afghan camps in Afghanistan. In July 1987, al-Suri met with Abdallah Azzam, the godfather of the Arab volunteers in Afghanistan, and was quickly enlisted as a military instructor. However, his intellectual ambitions were greater than teaching explosive engineering and basic guerrilla warfare principles. Following the publication of his 900-page treatise *The Islamic Jihadi Revolution in Syria*, published in Peshawar in May 1991, he gradually emerged as a jihadi writer and theoretician of some stature.⁸⁸

As opposed to many other jihadi writers, al-Suri always strived to maintain a practical and operative perspective, emphasising the need to learn from past mistakes and devise new practical “operative theories” (*nazariyat al-‘amal*) for future jihadi campaigns.⁸⁹ In his most important works, he focuses on explaining how jihadi groups should operate in order to survive in the new post-Cold War context characterised by enhanced international antiterrorism cooperation and the progressive elimination of terrorist sanctuaries and safe havens. The *tanzim* model—the centralised hierarchical and regional secret jihadi organization—has outlived its role, according to al-Suri. Their Achilles heel was their hierarchical structure, which meant that if one member is caught, the whole organisation is at peril. Furthermore, the progressive Western “occupation and usurpation of Muslim land” (Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Iraq, etc.) obligates a reorientation: the current war must be aimed at “repelling the invading intruders and assailants” from Muslim lands. The traditional goal of attaining an Islamic revolution in one country or one geographical area has to be postponed. Al-Suri therefore recommends that future

jihadi warfare should be concentrated around other forms, namely, the “jihad of individual terrorism,” practiced by self-contained autonomous cells in combination with jihadi participation on “Open Fronts,” wherever such fronts are possible. In al-Suri’s parlance, this term refers to conflict areas with an overt presence of Mujahidun, permanent bases, open battle lines, or guerilla war from those fixed positions.⁹⁰ Given the difficulty of opening such fronts, al-Suri concludes that “the jihad of individual terrorism” becomes, in reality, the only option for most jihadis.

Introducing the slogan *nizam, la tanzim*, “System, not Organisation,” al-Suri advocated “an operative system” or template, available anywhere for anybody. Leadership should only be exercised through “general guidance” and operative leaders should exist only at the level of small cells. The glue in this highly decentralised movement is nothing else than “a common aim, a common doctrinal program and a comprehensive (self-) educational program.”⁹²

The same goal of decentralisation is applied in al-Suri’s training doctrines; training should be moved to “every house, every quarter and every village of the Muslim countries.”⁹³ Al-Suri caricatures the jihadi training doctrine of the past as not much more than an invitation to Afghanistan: “calling the Islamic Nation to the camps.” His answer is to do the opposite; one should strive to “plant training camps across the Islamic Nation, in all her houses and quarters.”⁹⁴ For al-Suri, the issue is not only that of decentralisation, but also of transforming the jihadi cause into a mass phenomenon. One of al-Suri’s oft repeated slogans is that “The resistance is the Islamic Nation’s struggle and not a struggle by the Elite.”⁹⁵

Like most jihadi theoreticians, al-Suri sees the moral motivation and the desire to fight as decisive factors for success in jihadi training, not knowledge in the use of arms. If the ideological program is not fully digested and the mental preparation is absent, weapons training is of no use. In fact, if the ideological platform is not fully embraced by the jihadi recruits, military training could easily become a double-edged sword. In an audiotaped interview in the late 1990s, al-Suri recalled how he had second thoughts about training many Arab volunteers in Peshawar and in Afghanistan, especially those hailing from the Gulf countries, since they more often than not failed to share his radical ideological platform:

I am not prepared to train [people] in shooting practices because I think they will fire back at us justifying this by the fatwas of the Muslim Brothers and the Azhar clerics . . . People come to us with empty heads and leave us with empty heads . . . They have done nothing for Islam. This is because they have not received any ideological or doctrinal training.⁹⁶

Partly based on this experience, al-Suri therefore came to insist that purely military disciplines should never form the dominant part of jihadi training.

Al-Suri finds the religious foundation for jihadi training in two Quranic verses, namely verse 60 of *Surat al-Anfal* and verse 46 of *Surat al-Tawbah*. The former is perhaps the most frequently cited Quranic verse among jihadis. It contains an injunction to prepare for “striking terror in the hearts of the enemies.”⁹⁷ It has therefore been a point of departure for a considerable number of jihadi writings on the legitimacy of “terrorism” in Islam.⁹⁸ Verse 46 of *Surat al-Tawbah*, “And if they had wished to go forth they would assuredly have made ready some equipment, but Allah was averse to their being sent forth and held them back and it was said (unto them): Sit ye with the sedentary,” demonstrates, according to al-Suri, God’s

disgrace over the hypocrites who fail to prepare for war.⁹⁹ He concludes from reading these two verses that there are three stages in the performance of jihad: “will . . . preparation . . . launch.” In other words, preparation cannot come without sincere will and firm determination, and an armed campaign cannot be launched without thorough preparation. Significantly, al-Suri does not mention “emigration” (*al-hijra*) as a necessary part of jihad, and he compresses the process of jihad compared to Azzam’s four-stage conceptualisation of jihad (see above).

More than most other jihadi writers, al-Suri acknowledges that the training of jihadi recruits in the post-9/11 world is increasingly about finding a safe place where training is possible rather than discussing curricula, facilities, selection of recruits and instructors, etc. In his voluminous treatise, *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*, he examines five different methods for jihadi training, based on past jihadi practices:¹⁰⁰

- 1 – Secret training in safe houses
- 2 – Training in small secret camps in the area of operations
- 3 – Overt training under the auspices of states providing safe havens
- 4 – Overt training in the camps of the Open Fronts
- 5 – Semi-overt training in areas of chaos and no [governmental] control

Secret training in safe houses has been extremely important in terrorist training in all jihadi experiences, according to al-Suri. He considers this method “the very foundation” in preparing jihadi cadres, even though it only allows for live training in the use of light weapons and some lessons in the use of explosives.¹⁰¹ Al-Suri himself had hands-on experience with this type of training in Jordan from the early 1980s, and he emphasized in particular successes in educating cadres “in doctrinal and ideological courses” using this method.¹⁰²

Training in small, secret mobile camps has also been frequently used by jihadi groups over the past decades. This type of training may take place in remote regions in mountains, forests, and in distant rural areas, and the number of persons involved should be in the range of 5 to 12. Slightly more advanced training, such as setting up ambushes and organising assassinations, is possible in such camps. Al-Suri suggests that live training in the use of explosives can be practiced inside caves or near places where the sound of explosions would not attract attention, such as in the proximity of stone quarries, fishing areas, etc.

Although al-Suri acknowledges that jihadi organisations in the past have derived great short-term benefits from establishing overt training camps in states providing safe havens, he finds that the results have ultimately been mostly disastrous: “Experience has proven that this is strategically a mortal trap.”¹⁰³ Safe haven states tend to constrain, exploit, and may eventually sacrifice the jihadi organisations to further their own interests.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, after 9/11 “it is no longer possible for countries to open safe havens or camps for the Islamists and the jihadis.”¹⁰⁵

Al-Suri is more positive about overt training in the camps of the “Open Fronts,” based mainly on the Afghan and Bosnian experience. The comprehensiveness of the training opportunities at these fronts, and the absence of “political and ideological constraints,” makes this a better option.¹⁰⁶ He nevertheless cautions that training on the “Open Fronts” is not always effective, partly because of the presence of many competing jihadi and Islamist groups. The conditions do not allow for the kind of tight ideological indoctrination which is possible in safe houses. Furthermore, the economic costs involved in dispatching volunteers to camps in distant countries

are also very high. More importantly, crossing many national borders to reach the areas of the “Open Fronts” involves too many security risks.¹⁰⁷

As for semi-overt training in areas of chaos and where there is no governmental control, al-Suri points out its benefits in the past: in locations such as the tribal areas in Yemen, Somalia, the Horn of Africa, the tribal areas in the border regions of Pakistan, and the Great Saharan countries in Africa, both local and non-local jihadi groups have been able to set up semi-overt camps. The low costs of weapons, ammunition, and space in these regions is an advantage.¹⁰⁸ However, he finds that the prospect for exploiting these black holes is rapidly declining as a result of the U.S.-led war on terror and the new geopolitical situation:

The areas of chaos are on the verge of coming under American control and being closed . . . the only [training] methods which remain possible for us now, in the world of American aggression and international coordination to combat terrorism, are the methods of secret training in houses and mobile training camps.¹⁰⁹

In other words, only the two first models are viable options in the post-9/11 era. Al-Suri clearly believed that the formation of large-scale overt camps similar to the al-Qaida camps in Afghanistan must be postponed until some point in the distant future.¹¹⁰

Al-Suri’s training doctrine is heavily informed by his acute awareness of the military weakness of the jihadi movement. The current situation in which the enemy “is dominating air, ground and sea” imposes very strict security precautions on jihadi training opportunities.¹¹¹ From this point of departure, al-Suri offers five building blocs for jihadi training:

- 1 – mental and ideological preparation, and developing the desire to fight and moral strength;
- 2 – jihadi guerrilla warfare theory;
- 3 – spreading the ideological, theoretical, and military training programmes across the Islamic Nation by various means;
- 4 – secret training in houses and in limited, mobile training camps;
- 5 – developing fighting competence through jihadi action and through participation in battle.¹¹²

Not surprisingly, ideological indoctrination comes first, but no less important is the emphasis on studying guerrilla warfare theory adapted to the jihadi struggle. This has been a topic of intense study by al-Suri. In fact, three of al-Suri’s most well-known audiotaped lecture series deal specifically with this topic. One of them was held in Khowst in 1998 and consists of 32 audiotapes in which he reads and comments on *War of the Oppressed*, an American book on guerrilla warfare that has been translated into Arabic. Al-Suri strived to modify and adapt leftist guerrilla warfare literature to the Islamic context, and planned to turn these lectures into a book entitled “The Basis for Jihadi Guerrilla Warfare in Light of the Contemporary American Campaigns.”¹¹³ Finding very few works in the Arab library on jihadi guerrilla warfare, al-Suri called upon his followers to transcribe his lectures in order to make them available to the broadest possible audience, and in September 2006, his request was apparently heeded, as several of these lectures appeared on jihadi websites in Arabic pdf-filed transcripts.¹¹⁴

The widest possible distribution of jihadi training materials is clearly a cornerstone of al-Suri's training doctrine. One needs the "spread of culture of preparation and training . . . by all methods, especially the Internet."¹¹⁵ This recommendation has been followed up by jihadis over the past years. Not only have numerous comprehensive training manuals and encyclopedias such as the 700MB-size "Encyclopedia of Preparation for Jihad" (*mawsu'at al-i'dad*), been made available online in text and picture formats, but sleek professional video-formatted instructional material detailing various explosive manufacturing recipes have also begun to circulate widely over the past years, and several dozen separate audio-visual jihadi instruction manuals are now in circulation on the web. Furthermore, 29 wmv-files of al-Suri's videotaped lectures recorded in August 2000 at his own training camp, called *mu'askar al-ghuraba* (The Strangers' Camp), in Kargha near Kabul, have been available for downloading from multiple sites since January 2005.

The last building block in al-Suri's training doctrine, namely training through action and fighting, is derived directly from his experience of the Syrian Islamist uprising in 1980–1982. Al-Suri did not intend to allow untrained recruits to undertake complicated operations, which would contradict his principle of sequence "will . . . preparation . . . launch." Rather, he describes how a gradual introduction of untrained recruits into an operative role can take place to allow "expertise [to] develop through battle."¹¹⁶ Recruits should first participate in action only as bystanders or witnesses. Later, they will serve in a minor auxiliary function without directly intervening. Finally, when deemed qualified, they will operate directly in main operations under the command of senior members.¹¹⁷

Although al-Suri does not go deeply into the nitty gritty of jihadi training, he presents what he terms "a light programme which can be implemented by the simplest cells . . . operating under the most difficult circumstances of security and secrecy."¹¹⁸ The programme is characterised by training activities which do not involve serious security risks, but are still relevant to a jihadi. The elements of the programme range from physical exercise and studies of explosive manuals, to practicing explosive manufacturing using dummies, shooting practice with compressed air guns, practising procedures for secure communication, and studies of all kinds of relevant military and weapons-related handbooks. Only when the time is right should the group proceed to find a proper secret location to undertake live practice in shooting and the use of explosives.

The danger of al-Suri's training doctrine lies in its very realistic assumptions about the jihadis' military weakness. His doctrine seems to be neatly and pragmatically tailored to the security situation in the Western world in the post-9/11 era. It emphasises training and fighting at home or in the country of residence (which for many al-Qaida sympathisers means the Western world), not overseas, using whatever means are available, and always maintaining security precautions as the number one priority. This hard-hitting realism differs greatly from much of the jihadi literature. Even though al-Suri stands out as one of the sharpest theoreticians in the jihadi movement, he is rarely quoted in the wider and more religiously oriented salafi-jihadi literature.¹¹⁹ Lacking the stature of a religious scholar, his writings probably have a limited, but important, audience among the more intellectually oriented jihadis. Al-Suri is emblematic of the rise of a new generation of jihadi strategic study writers, who are still a tiny minority, but whose writings are informed by pragmatism, a rational-secular style, and a willingness to put political effectiveness before religious dogmas.¹²⁰

Conclusion

This review of jihadi discourse on terrorist training and preparation offers interesting insight into the evolution of jihadi strategies since the Afghan liberation war in the late 1980s. Such strategies obviously exist and are acted upon, even though in the aftermath of 9/11, it was commonplace to assert that al-Qaida pursued no underlying strategic plan.¹²¹ The fact that one finds opposing views between leading jihadi theorists on issues such as how training should be defined, its ultimate purpose, and where and how to prepare jihadi fighters, seems to confirm the opposite. The observed differences in jihadi discourse on training and preparation from the late 1980s until today highlight that al-Qaida, and the global jihadi movement, are actively adapting their concepts and doctrines to the changing environment facing them. This also shows that training doctrines are far from irrelevant to the jihadis. Key ideological differences result in very different conceptualisation of the framework of training and its key purpose, as was demonstrated in the comparison between Azzam and al-Sharif's discourse on this subject. Also, the new deterritorialised modes of training, most explicitly articulated in al-Suri's training theories, illustrate how the jihadi current strives to cope with the new geopolitical order of the post-9/11 era, where the formation of long-term safe havens is no longer possible.

The commonalities between the four training doctrines reviewed here also highlight several core aspects of contemporary jihadism. When preparing recruits for waging a terrorist campaign or participating in a protracted guerrilla war, the jihadi theorists unanimously agree that ideological indoctrination and spiritual preparation should take precedence over physical and military training. In order to produce the kind of battle-hardened, martyrdom-seeking fighters that have filled the ranks of jihadi groups in the past, the jihadi theorists devote extraordinary attention to spiritual training. However, such training will only produce maximum results if the recruits also obtain warfighting experience in civil wars where the jihadi movement is represented at the frontlines. But again, practical military skills are still less crucial than the inoculation of a self-sacrificing spirit and a willingness to employ savagery against the enemy.

The need for self-sacrifice and a martyrdom culture is perhaps most articulately formulated in Azzam's lectures, while the contemporary theorists (Naji and al-Suri) have added willingness to commit savagery and mass casualty terrorism as integral features of jihadi warfare.¹²² While Azzam and his cohorts were able to command relatively firm control over the training practices at their camps in the Afghan-Pakistani border areas, the shift towards more decentralised modes of organising jihadi training as advocated by Naji and al-Suri inevitably run the risk of unleashing waves of excessive violence, not condoned by al-Qaida's leadership. This is all the more so when the employment of savagery and mass casualty terrorism are advocated as core principles. Excessive violence will easily prove counterproductive to the jihadi current. There is little doubt that jihadi zealots that jihadi zealots remain a problem for the al-Qaida leadership, most vividly exemplified by al-Qaida's criticism in 2005 of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's excesses in Iraq.¹²³ One may therefore expect that future jihadi training doctrines will pay more attention to raising disciplined cadres who are skilled in employing violence in a manner which is consistent with the leadership's priorities. This is also partly what al-Sharif advocates in his famous treatise from the late 1990s, which will ensure the continued relevance of his *The Pillar in the Preparation of Jihad*, despite the fact that the author himself has publicly reneged on the jihadi current.¹²⁴

Notes

1. The author would like to thank his colleagues Petter Nesser, Thomas Hegghammer, and Anne Stenersen at the Norwegian Defense Research Establishment (FFI), as well as the *TPV*'s anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and constructive critiques on earlier versions of this article.

2. The literature on terrorist training includes James J. F. Forest, *Teaching Terror: Strategic and Tactical Learning in the Terrorist World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); James J. F. Forest, ed., *The Making of a Terrorist: Recruitment, Training and Root Causes Volume II: Training* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006); Brian A. Jackson, *Aptitude for Destruction, Volume 1: Organizational Learning in Terrorist Groups and Its Implications for Combating Terrorism* and *Volume 2: Case Studies of Organizational Learning in Five Terrorist Groups* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2005); and Calvert Jones, "Al-Qaeda's innovative improvisers: Learning in a diffuse transnational network," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 19, no. 4 (December 2006): 555–569.

3. According to Merriam-Webster's dictionary, the term doctrine has different meanings, such as "something that is taught," "a principle or position or the body of principles in a branch of knowledge or system of belief." In military and foreign policy domains, the term has other meanings. In this article, the term is used about the corpus of principles and strategies guiding jihadi action within the domain of training, educating, and preparation recruits for participation in political violence.

4. Searches at the largest online library of salafi-jihadi literature, the *minbar al-tawhid wa'l-jihad* [The Pulpit of Monotheism and Jihad], <http://www.tawhed.ws>, yield only a dozen or so books on the topic.

5. See for example the list of documents found on the computers of the prime suspects behind the Madrid train bombings published in Audiencia Nacional Madrid, Juzgado Central de Instrucción no. 6, Sumario no. 20/2004, [the 11-M Indictment], Madrid, 10 April 2006, 468, 490.

6. See for example the list of recommended literature in Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Salim, *39 Ways to Serve Jihad and the Mujahidin in the Path of God*, 36–42. The booklet is dated 19/5/1424h or 19 July 2003, and was published by *markaz al-buhuth wa al-dirasat al-islamiyya* [Centre for Islamic Research and Studies], a key al-Qaida media outlet. It has circulated extensively on jihadi websites. See also biography of Abdallah Azzam, published by *minbar al-tawhid wa'l-jihad*, www.tawhed.ws/a?i=77, accessed May 2007.

7. The 84-page word document containing the text Abdallah Azzam, "Introduction to Emigration and Preparation" [in Arabic] was placed in a zip-file in mid-1997. Other Abdallah Azzam lectures transcribed and published by the Martyr Abdallah Azzam Media Center, such as "Jihadi Education for the Islamic Nation" [in Arabic], are dated 1992 and published in Peshawar. See "The Abdallah Azzam File" [in Arabic], *minbar al-tawhid wa'l-jihad*, <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?i=77>, accessed May 2007.

8. Judging by the number of times it has been downloaded from *minbar al-tawhid wa'l-jihad*, the collection is one of Azzam's most popular texts. By early May 2007, it had been downloaded 12,181 times. See "The Abdallah Azzam File."

9. Azzam, "Introduction to Emigration and Preparation" (see note 7 above), 29.

10. *Ibid.*, 1.

11. Azzam recalled that the Afghans insisted on calling the Arab volunteer fighters "emigrants" (*muhajirun*), not refugees. *Ibid.*, 21.

12. *Ibid.*, 13.

13. *Ibid.*, 16.

14. *Ibid.*, 18.

15. *Ibid.*, 13.

16. *Ibid.*, 22.

17. *Ibid.*, 17.

18. *Ibid.*, 20.

19. *Ibid.*, 17.

20. *Ibid.*, 20.

21. *Ibid.*, 16, 18.

22. *Ibid.*, 16.

23. Ibid., 26.
24. Ibid., 28.
25. Ibid., 28.
26. Ibid., 21.
27. Azzam, "Jihadi Education for the Islamic Nation" (see note 7 above), 50.
28. Azzam, "Introduction to Emigration and Preparation" (see note 7 above), 21.
29. Ibid., 25.
30. A famous area at the Afghan frontline where the Arab-Afghan volunteers fought at the end of the Afghan liberation war.
31. Azzam, "Introduction to Emigration and Preparation" (see note 7 above), 25.
32. Ibid., 29.
33. Ibid., 21.
34. Ibid., 22.
35. Ibid.
36. See for example Azzam's speeches in the film "The Lovers of Martyrdom," FFI Database on Jihadi Videos, and Abdallah Azzam, "The Tawheed of Action: The First Series of Treatises Breezes from the Gardens of Firdaws" (Al-Tibyan Publications, undated), 6–9.
37. Ibid., 9. The quotation has been slightly modified to conform to the orthography and syntax in the rest of this paper.
38. Azzam, "Introduction to Emigration and Preparation" (see note 7 above), 30.
39. Ibid., 29.
40. Ibid., 30.
41. Cited in Azzam, "The Tawheed of Action" (see note 36 above), 4.
42. Abd al-Qadir bin Abd al-Aziz, *The Pillar in the Preparation of Jihad* [in Arabic] (Peshawar: Publisher unknown, undated, ca. 1987). (Arabic title: *risalat al-'umda fi i'dad al-'uddah lil-jihad fi sabil allah*). According to Spanish authorities, the first edition of the book was dated 1408h, which corresponds to 26 Aug. 1987–13 Aug. 1988. See Ministracion de Justicia, Juzgado Central de Instruccion no. 005, Sumario (Proc.Ordinario) 0000035/2001 E, Madrid, 17 Sep. 2003, [indictment against the Abu Dahdah network], 172.
43. For a brief biography of al-Sharif and a list of his most important publications, see "The Abd al-Qadir bin Abd al-Aziz file" [in Arabic], *minbar al-tawhid wa'l-jihad*, www.tawhed.ws/a?i=6, accessed May 2007.
44. Ibid.
45. bin Abd al-Aziz, *The Pillar in the Preparation of Jihad* (see note 42 above), 5.
46. Doctor Fadl is profiled in the important online library of salafi-jihadi literature, *minbar al-tawhid wa'l-jihad*, and his most important works are available there, including *The Pillar in the Preparation of Jihad*, which has been downloaded more than 24,000 times. Excerpts of the book have also been translated into English by the prominent jihadi media outlet *Al-Tibyan Publications*, which further suggests the centrality of his writings for contemporary jihadis. See "The Abd al-Qadir bin Abd al-Aziz file" (see note 43 above); and Shaykh 'Abdul Qadir Ibn Abdil-'Aziz, "The Refutation of the Doubts Concerning Bay'ah wa Imara" (Al-Tibyan Publications, undated), 4.
47. See for example Ministracion de Justicia (see note 42 above), 172; Audiencia Nacional (see note 5 above); and "Ideologisches Handbuch für die Mudjahidin-Ausbildung in Stuttgart beschlagnahmt," *Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz (Baden-Württemberg) website*, March 2005, www.verfassungsschutz-bw.de/kgi/files/kgi_arab_2005-03.htm, accessed April 2007.
48. bin Abd al-Aziz, *The Pillar in the Preparation of Jihad* (see note 42 above), 92.
49. Ibid., 312.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid., 5, 442.
52. Ibid., 23, 216.
53. Ibid., 5.
54. Ibn Abdil-'Aziz, "The Refutation of the Doubts Concerning Bay'ah wa Imara" (see note 46 above).
55. bin Abd al-Aziz, *The Pillar in the Preparation of Jihad* (see note 42 above), 5.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid., 229.

58. The book has been translated into English by Will McCants at the U.S. Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point, see “The Management of Savagery,” by Abu Bakr Naji. Translated by William McCants, *CTC website*, www.ctc.usma.edu/naji.asp, accessed April 2007. This article has borrowed heavily from McCants’ translation.

59. See for example “al-Qaida between a past phase and a new phase which has been announced by the al-Muhajir” [in Arabic], *muntadayat al-firdaws al-jihadiyya*, 30 Nov. 2006, <http://www.alfirdaws.org/vb//showthread.php?t=21245>, accessed April 2007.

60. For a good analysis of the book, see Jarret M. Brachman and William F. McCants, “Stealing Al-Qa’ida’s Playbook,” *CTC Report* (Feb. 2006), www.ctc.usma.edu/Stealing%20Al-Qai%27da%27s%20Playbook%20-%20CTC.pdf, accessed April 2007.

61. This summary of Naji’s thinking is borrowed from *ibid.*, 6–7.

62. See Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer, “Jihadi Strategic Studies: The Alleged Al Qaida Policy Study Preceding the Madrid Bombings,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27, no. 5 (Sep.–Oct. 2004): 355–375.

63. Abu Bakr Naji, *Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage through Which the Ummah Will Pass* [in Arabic], (Place unknown: markaz al-buhuth wa al-dirasat al-islamiyya [Center of Islamic Studies and Research], undated), 15–16.

64. *Ibid.*, 32.

65. *Ibid.*, 32.

66. *Ibid.*, 11.

67. *Ibid.*, 54.

68. *Ibid.*, 12, 19.

69. *Ibid.*, 23.

70. *Ibid.*, 54.

71. *Ibid.*, 55.

72. *Ibid.*, 56.

73. *Ibid.*

74. *Ibid.*

75. *Ibid.*

76. *Ibid.*

77. *Ibid.*, 56–57.

78. *Ibid.*, 58.

79. Muhammad Amin al-Misri, “Methods of Islamic Proselytising,” cited in Naji (see note 63 above), 58.

80. Naji (see note 63 above), 59.

81. *Ibid.*

82. *Ibid.*, 31.

83. *Ibid.*

84. *Ibid.*, 59.

85. The following section borrows heavily from Brynjar Lia, “Al-Suri’s Doctrines for Decentralised Jihadi Training: Part 1 and 2,” *Terrorism Monitor* (Jamestown Foundation) 5, nos. 1, 2 (18 January and 1 February 2007).

86. Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus’ab Al-Suri* (London & New York: Hurst & Columbia University Press, 2007).

87. The full title of the book is Umar Abd al-Hakim (Abu Mus’ab al-Suri), *The Global Islamic Resistance Call. Part I: The Roots, History, and Experiences, Part II: The Call, Program and Method* [in Arabic] (Place and publisher unknown, Dec. 2004). Hereafter cited as *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*. All page references here are to the pdf-version of the document.

88. The full title of the two-volume book is Umar Abd al-Hakim, *The Islamic Jihadi Revolution in Syria. Part I. The Experience and Lessons (Hopes and Pains). Part II. Ideology and Program (Research and Foundation in the Way of Armed Revolutionary Jihad)* [in Arabic]. (Peshawar: unknown publisher, May 1991).

89. al-Hakim, *The Islamic Jihadi Revolution in Syria. Part I* (see note 88 above), 9.

90. As examples of such “Open Fronts,” al-Suri refers to: “The First Afghani Jihad, Bosnia, Chechnya, and The Second Afghani Jihad in the Era of Taleban.” Cited in al-Suri, *The Global Islamic Resistance Call* (see note 87 above), 1361.

91. The term is introduced by al-Suri in Chapter 8.4 and 8.5 in his *The Global Islamic Resistance Call* (see note 87 above), 1379, 1395 and 1405. The importance of this concept was pointed out by Jeffrey Cozzens in an article on *Counterterrorism Blog*, 21 April 2006, http://counterterrorismblog.org/2006/04/post_1.php

92. Al-Suri, *The Global Islamic Resistance Call* (see note 87 above), 1407. For more on this, see Brynjar Lia, "Abu Mus'ab al-Suri: Profile of a Jihadist Leader," Paper given at the King's College Conference *The Changing Faces of Jihadism*, London, 28 April 2006, see www.mil.no/multimedia/archive/00080/Abu_Musab_al-Suri_80483a.pdf

93. The "training theory" is presented in chapter 8.6 in al-Suri, *The Global Islamic Resistance Call* (see note 87 above), 1414–1428.

94. *Ibid.*, 1425.

95. *Ibid.*

96. Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad* (see note 86 above), 106.

97. Translation from Pickthal, via *Search Truth: Search in the Quran and Hadith* website, www.searchtruth.com/.

98. See for example, a booklet by the now deceased Shaykh Hamud bin 'Uqla al-Shu'aybi, perhaps the most prominent Saudi Salafi-jihadi ideologue in which he argues that there is a kind of terrorism which "is legitimate, sanctioned and ordered by God, which is to prepare strength and be mobilised for resisting the enemies of God and his prophets." Cited in "The Meaning and Truth of Terrorism" [in Arabic], *minbar al-tawhid wa'l-jihad*, 5/9/1422h or 20 Nov. 2001.

99. Translation from Pickthal (see note 97 above).

100. When al-Suri discusses the training options, especially the last three models, he appears slightly ambiguous and self-contradictory, although his conclusion is clear. This probably reflects the fact that *The Global Islamic Resistance Call* was written over a long period of time. After the U.S. announced the \$5 million bounty on his head, the book was hastily released before he had time to double-check and finalize the manuscript.

101. Al-Suri, *The Global Islamic Resistance Call* (see note 87 above), 1414.

102. *Ibid.*, 1417.

103. *Ibid.*

104. *Ibid.*, 1416.

105. *Ibid.*, 1419.

106. *Ibid.*, 1416.

107. *Ibid.*, 1418.

108. *Ibid.*, 1416.

109. *Ibid.*, 1419.

110. *Ibid.*, 1424.

111. *Ibid.*, 1423.

112. Cited in *ibid.*, 1423.

113. *Ibid.*, 1424.

114. These lectures were "The Management and Organisation of Guerrilla Warfare," Khowst, 1998; "Explanation of the Book 'War of the Oppressed,'" Khowst, 1998; and "Lessons in Guerrilla Warfare Theories," Jalalabad, 1999. See posting on *muntadayat al-firdaws al-jihadiyya*, 21 September 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/showthread.php?t=16892&highlight=%E3%D5%DA%C8+%C7%E1%D3%E6%D1%ED, accessed Oct. 2006. Document on file with author. For details on al-Suri's lecture series in Afghanistan, see Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad*, (see note 86 above), 259–264.

115. Al-Suri, *The Global Islamic Resistance* (see note 87 above), 1424.

116. *Ibid.*, 1426.

117. *Ibid.*, 1424.

118. *Ibid.*, 1427.

119. See William McCants, ed., *The Militant Ideology Atlas* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2006), www.ctc.usma.edu/atlas/Atlas-ResearchCompendium.pdf

120. Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad* (see note 86 above), 27.

121. The argument has been made that the obsessive fanaticism of jihadi terrorists, their religious dogmas, their pursuit of martyrdom, and visceral hatred for the West made them blind, and their behaviour was not rooted in any kind of rational strategy. While this school of thought still has numerous protagonists, a growing number of studies have already begun to

debunk the myth of a non-existent al-Qaida strategy. See for example Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005); Lia and Hegghammer (see note 62 above); Brachman and McCants (see note 60 above); and Stephen Ulph, "Al-Qaeda's Strategy Until 2020," *Terrorism Focus* (Jamestown Foundation), 2 no. 6 (17 March 2005).

122. See in particular lecture by al-Suri cited in Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad* (see note 86 above), 310.

123. Susan B. Glasser and Walter Pincus, "Seized Letter Outlines Al Qaeda Goals in Iraq," *Washington Post*, 12 Oct. 2005, A13.

124. Jarret Brachman, "Leading Egyptian Jihadist Sayyid Imam Renounces Violence," *CTC Sentinel* 1, no.1 (Dec 2007): 12–14.