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The Internet: A Virtual Training Camp?

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This study aims to investigate how Al Qaeda uses the Internet for military training and preparation. What kind of training material is available on jihadi webpages, who produces it, and for what purpose? The article argues that in spite of a vast amount of training-related literature online, there have been few organized efforts by Al Qaeda to train their followers by way of the Internet. The Internet is per today not a “virtual training camp” organized from above, but rather a resource bank maintained and accessed largely by self-radicalized sympathizers.

Keywords Al Qaeda, internet, terrorist training, virtual training

Introduction

Few comprehensive studies have been undertaken on how Al Qaeda uses the Internet for training.¹ However, the topic is often mentioned in more general studies and articles about Al Qaeda and the Internet.² According to these studies, the Internet serves as a library, not only for religious and ideological-political literature, but also for detailed instruction manuals and videos on technical and tactical subjects, such as explosives making, guerrilla warfare, hostage taking, and operational and field security. The Internet is also described as an interactive arena where potential terrorists can follow courses on bomb-making and other topics, as well as submitting their questions to online “trainers.” In a 2006 study, Weimann noted that the Internet has become an “online terrorism university” for self-taught terrorists.³

Weimann's study identifies a number of ways in which militant Islamists use the Internet for training, preparation, and planning for operations. Yet many of these findings are not very surprising, as they in principle reflect how people generally use the Internet: to send e-mails, to find and share information, to meet and discuss with like-minded people, etc. To use the Internet to spread illegal literature, or to prepare for criminal or terrorist acts, is not a new phenomenon either. Paramilitary literature and “explosives cookbooks” have circulated online for years, and a brief glance at American right-wing extremist pages reveal similar structures of discussion

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forums dedicated to weapons and training.⁴ While there is little doubt that training is facilitated on many Al Qaeda affiliated websites, a far more interesting question is whether Al Qaeda or other militant Islamist groups are, in fact, making an organized effort to train their followers on the Internet. If yes, then we can start talking about the Internet as a “virtual training camp.” However, to date there has been a large research gap in this field.

This study aims to investigate how Al Qaeda uses the Internet for training and preparation for militant activities. The study focuses on military and tactical training, and not so much on ideological indoctrination, although this aspect also forms an integral part of the preparation process. Related topics such as how the Internet is used for propaganda, recruitment, radicalisation, and “hacktivism”⁵ were also considered to be beyond the scope of this study. “Al Qaeda” is used both to refer to the “traditional” or “core” Al Qaeda (Osama bin Laden and his close circle of associates, hereafter referred to as Al Qaeda central), as well as on affiliated groups, such as Al Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula. I have used the word “jihadi” to describe people, things, or phenomena pertaining to the Al Qaeda network, since this is a term commonly used by Al Qaeda members themselves.

In this study I argue that Al Qaeda is, in fact, not making an organized effort to train its followers online. Although Al Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (QAP) has made a limited effort in this direction, the overall impression is that Al Qaeda has still not utilized the Internet’s full potential in terms of virtual training. As of today, the Internet is not a “virtual training camp” organized from above, but rather a resource bank maintained and accessed largely by self-radicalized sympathizers.

Internet Training in Al Qaeda’s Ideology

Several Al Qaeda ideologues have spoken about the importance of training and preparation, but they seldom go into detail on how to carry out the training in practice. A notable exception is the strategist Abu Mus’ab al-Suri, who argues in his 1600-page treatise *The Global Islamic Resistance Call* (2005) that rather than calling Muslims to join training camps in other countries, such as Afghanistan, “[i]t is necessary to move the training to every house, every quarter and every village of the Muslim countries. . . .”⁶ In another paragraph, he explicitly states that we need “the spread of a culture of preparation and training [. . .] by all methods, especially the Internet. . . .”⁷ He also provides a rough outline of a training program, in which he recommends learning basic military skills from manuals “that are available today on the Internet,” providing a list of recommended readings.⁸ The recommended manuals provide theoretical knowledge about light weapons, military tactics, communications, security, electronics, and explosives. He emphasizes that live explosive manufacture should only be done under supervision of an experienced chemist, indicating that there are certain aspects of training and preparation that are indeed dependent on real-life training.⁹

What Kind of Training Material Is Available Online?

As mentioned in the introduction, the Internet has two functions with regards to jihadi training and the transfer of knowledge: The main function of the Internet is to be a library where training manuals and handbooks can be easily accessed from anywhere in the world. The other function of the Internet is to provide an interactive environment where people can discuss training-related issues, exchange personal

experiences, and communicate with online “trainers” who can explain and clarify problematic subjects. This section will give an overview of the types of training material that are available online, while the interactive part of the training will be discussed in a later section.

Written Instruction Manuals and Encyclopaedias

The Internet contains a vast amount of written training material. There are pamphlets and handbooks available on almost any topic considered relevant for training and preparation. Some of the most common topics are: conventional weapons, improvised weapons and explosives, field tactics, guerrilla warfare, organisational and field security, and physical training. Some of the manuals are plain text, while others, especially manuals aiming to teach practical skills, may be illustrated with explanatory sketches or photos. Over the last few years, training manuals have also started to appear in video format. Instructional videos are discussed in a later section.

The sources of the manuals vary, but they are almost without exception derived from open sources. There are few (if any) examples of classified material appearing on jihadi websites. The closest examples found by this author was an Egyptian Army manual on deception operations from 1958, labelled “restricted,” and a manual on chemical and biological warfare printed in 1985, labelled “must not be used outside the Armed Forces.”¹⁰ The latter was among the documents found in Iraq after the 2003 invasion, and it was later declassified and published on the Internet by U.S. authorities.

A large part of the instruction material seems to be derived from English open-source literature such as U.S. Army Field Manuals or various “explosives cook-books.” However, other manuals appear to be written by experienced jihadis, field commanders, or trainers, or based on notes from jihadi training camps in Afghanistan or elsewhere. Such manuals can, in fact, provide detailed information on terrorist tactics and training methods used in the past, although the manuals seldom state from when or where they originate. It should be stressed that while these manuals reflect an effort to distribute and spread jihadi experience and knowledge accumulated in the past, they do not necessarily reflect *current* tactics and weapons used on the ground in Iraq or Afghanistan. Specific threat assessments, therefore, should not be based on these manuals alone.

Manuals are often issued in larger collections called “encyclopaedias” (*mawsu’at*). The encyclopaedias are often concentrated on one topic, such as The Large Encyclopaedia of Weapons (*mawsu’at al-asliha al-kubra*), The Security Encyclopaedia (*mawsu’at al-amm*), or The Encyclopaedia of Abdullah Dhu al-Bajadin (*mawsu’at ‘abdallah dhu al-bajadin*), the latter containing a set of explosives lessons written by an online “explosives expert.” Other encyclopaedias cover a mixture of topics, such as the voluminous Encyclopaedia of Preparation (*mawsu’at al-i’dad*). Typically, the encyclopaedias are compiled by Al Qaeda sympathizers who decide to gather all material on a relevant topic, and issue it in a handy format to ease access by others. This is not a phenomenon which is unique to training, but rather a process that takes place within the framework of the larger “media jihad” in which individuals and “media organizations” constantly produce and re-issue jihadi material in slick and easy formats in order to make it accessible to as large an audience as possible.¹¹ Below is an outline of two of the largest and most well-known encyclopaedias:

The Encyclopaedia of Jihad (*mawsu’at al-jihad*), also known as The Encyclopaedia of the Afghan Jihad, claims to be “the first jihadi encyclopaedia.”¹² According to

the editors, it was written by the Afghan Arabs who fought against the USSR in the 1980s, and was issued in paper format by the Office of Services (*maktab al-khidamat*) in Afghanistan after the war. It is dedicated to Abdullah Azzam and Osama bin Laden, among others. Originally, it consisted of 9 or 10 volumes, covering a range of topics. Later, scanned photocopies of the original manuals started to be circulated on the Internet, but the quality of these documents was bad, being copied numerous times, so a group calling themselves Supporters of Jihad (*ansar al-jihad*) decided to re-write the text and publish it in pdf-format, “to contribute to the spread of jihadi culture.”¹³ They kept the original text, except that they corrected some mistakes and added new pictures where necessary, and they also removed a dedication to the Pakistani government, which they refused to include because of Pakistan’s support for the U.S.¹⁴ Thus, the first volume of the Encyclopaedia was re-published electronically in 1423 h. (approx. 2002). The 1,500-page volume is divided into two parts, “Part One: Security and Intelligence” (*al-amm wal-istikhbarat*) and “Part Two: Practical Training” (*al-dawrat al-‘amaliyya*). The first part covers topics such as security and intelligence, organization, investigation, recruiting, operations, and protection, while the second part covers practical lessons in assassination, poison, invisible ink, explosives manufacture, sniper training, etc. Later, the same group re-issued some of the other volumes of the original encyclopaedia (for example, a volume they entitled “The Large Encyclopaedia of Weapons,” which consists of five manuals covering everything from pistols to anti-aircraft artillery), but it is the electronic version of the first volume which is most often referred to as the “Encyclopaedia of Jihad” among Internet users today. It is included in the Encyclopaedia of Preparation under the name “the revised Encyclopaedia of Jihad” (*mawsu’at al-jihad al-munaqqaha*).

The Encyclopaedia of Preparation (mawsu’at al-i’dad) is perhaps the most well-known and comprehensive collection of online training manuals. The editor of the Encyclopaedia appears to be an individual with the nickname Ibn Turab, who was an active member of the jihadi forum al-Ma’sada al-Jihadiyya.¹⁵ In the introduction to the 4th edition, the editor states the purpose of the encyclopaedia: “In order to improve the military knowledge of our brothers in the Islamic movements, we present to you our fourth edition of the Encyclopaedia of Preparation to enable the capable Jihadi cadres with God’s help to re-establish the Islamic Khalifate.”¹⁶ Like most of the online training material, it is not directed towards a specific group or region. The Encyclopaedia had its own, permanent homepage on Geocities, where all its manuals and documents were stored in easily accessible zip-files. It was regularly revised and updated until late 2004. The Encyclopaedia’s homepage is still accessible, but the links to the manuals have been idle for a long time, and it appears that the page is not updated anymore.¹⁷ The 4th and newest edition contains around 300 Arabic-language documents and manuals of various lengths, adding up to some 10,000 pages.¹⁸ In addition, it contains a number of English-language manuals and books. It is divided into the following sub-categories:

- Weapons (guns, rifles, artillery, rockets, etc.)
- Home-made Manufacture (improvised devices, explosives, and bomb-making)
- Guerrilla Warfare
- Regular Military Operations
- Selected English Books

The sources of the documents in the encyclopaedia vary greatly; some manuals are written by veterans of the Afghan war, others by Palestinian militants, while others are written by Internet activists with little or no battle experience. Some manuals are apparently translated from U.S. Army Field Manuals, while others seem to be derived from *The Terrorist's Handbook* and various Internet sources. One of the largest and oldest manuals in this collection is the 1500-page Encyclopaedia of Jihad mentioned above, that appears to be based on training manuals previously used by Arabs in Afghanistan. A manual of a quite different origin is the nearly 800-page *The Nuclear Bomb of Jihad*, which appeared online in 2005, and later was included in the Encyclopaedia. It was written by an active forum participant who claimed to have spent two years studying the subject on the Internet.¹⁹

To assess the amount of material available online would be very time consuming, if possible at all. An indication of the amount can perhaps be found by looking at *The Encyclopaedia of Preparation*. As mentioned above, it was the largest and most comprehensive collection of training material in 2004, and it seems to have enjoyed a particular status among online jihadis. An indication of this is that forum members who posted new training material online often requested to have the material included in the Encyclopaedia. In addition, the Encyclopaedia's homepage address was usually included in collections of "jihadi links" and lists over the most popular jihadi webpages. According to a visitor's count on the Encyclopaedia's webpage, it had been visited more than 390,000 times as of April 2007.²⁰ Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that the Encyclopaedia, at its height, contained most of the training manuals that were regarded relevant for the jihadi movement at the time. As mentioned, they amounted to around 300 Arabic-language documents of various lengths, adding up to some 10,000 pages of training material, in addition to some 20 audio and video or flash files. It also contained around 50 English-language books and articles and links to a large number of English-language webpages related to weapons and bomb-making.

These estimates are based on what the Encyclopaedia looked like in late 2004. It is hard to give an estimate of how much new material has been issued since then, but my overall impression is that the training manuals included in the Encyclopaedia of Preparation still constitute a large part of the material which is circulating online today. The most visible development, in terms of new material, seems to be the emergence of high-quality instruction videos.

Instruction Videos

Over the last few years, advances in Internet technology and new software have made it easy to share relatively long and high-quality video files online. This has led to a drastic increase in the number of jihadi movies produced and distributed every day. A movie is, for example, a more credible "proof" of an attack than a written communiqué, and generally more popular among the audience. While most movies are produced for communication and propaganda purposes, there is also a small number of instructional videos available online. Such videos add a new dimension to the idea of an "online training camp," because they are often more suitable for teaching practical skills.

The online instruction videos can roughly be divided into two groups: 1) Self-produced, that is, produced by militant Islamists or their sympathizers/supporters; and 2) Films that are produced by others, but distributed on a jihadi website because

they are regarded as containing useful information. In the last category, we find, for example:

- An American video on how to extract ricin
- A Saudi Arabian video that explains how to fly a plane, using a flight simulator program
- A German instruction video for snipers

In this overview, only videos that are fully or partly self-produced are included. (“Partly self-produced” means that the producers may have “borrowed” video material from elsewhere, but added own texts, logos, or sound.) As of January 2007, 27 such videos had been found: 23 videos on bombs and explosives (14 on explosives manufacture, 2 on detonators, 7 on bombs), and four videos on light arms (AK-47, AG-3, silencer and RPG).

Twenty of these videos are of a notably better quality than the others. Of these, 19 are produced by the Lebanese Hizballah and one by the Ezzedeen Al Qassam Brigades (Hamas’ militant wing). The Hizballah videos were somewhat manipulated before being posted on the Sunni-dominated jihadi webpages. Any names or logos related to Hizballah appear to have been removed, and in several of the videos, the Minbar al-Murabitin (the website that first distributed the movies) has added rolling titles where they “apologize for the music, but it is because we obtained this video from Hizbillat,” referring to the secular background music which is typical for these videos.²¹ The name Hizbillat is a sarcastic way of referring to Hizballah (Hizballah–“Party of God”; Hizbillat–“Party of the Gods,” i.e., expressing the view that Shi’ites are polytheists). Other Hizballah movies do not have any rolling titles or other information on the publisher. However, it is obvious that the same producer is behind all the movies, because the design, quality, and background music is identical. The 20 videos stand out both because of their quality (sophisticated design, good picture quality, handy format), user-friendliness (detailed, step-by-step instructions) and for the fact that they describe relatively advanced weapon-making techniques. Three of Hizballah’s bomb-making videos (named “Explosive Belt,” “Thunder Bomb,” and “Gas Cylinder”) contain an experimental part, where the weapon is tested in the field against cardboard targets in order to show the effect of the explosion. Some of the videos complement each other. For example, three of Hizballah’s videos describe different steps for making an explosive compound, and a fourth video shows how to make an explosive belt based on this explosive. Below is a closer description of these videos in order to give an idea of their quality and content.

The explosive belt described in Hizballah’s videos consists of two sheets of explosives, each measuring $40 \times 25 \times 1,5$ cm.²² This is somewhat thinner than usual, and the video emphasizes that such sheets must be tested before use to ensure that they actually detonate. The explosive substance is a mixture of three substances: nitrocellulose, nitroglycol, and nitronaphthalene. This particular mixture is not known by any standard name, and in the instruction videos, the mixture is simply referred to as *khalit* (mixture). It appears that this particular mixture has been invented locally, possibly by Hizballah or other groups with the necessary knowledge and resources. It is suitable for use in explosive belts, because it is flexible and can be shaped into thin sheets, making detection more difficult.

Three videos describe the manufacture of the mixture: two of them describe the manufacture of nitrocellulose and nitroglycol, and in the third video, the three substances are combined to make the sheet explosive. Thus, we do not have a video

describing how to make the third ingredient, nitronaphthalene. This ingredient is not available on the commercial market, but it is relatively easy to manufacture from readily available ingredients (naphthalene and acid), if one knows the procedure. However, as long as the instruction video is missing, an amateur without chemistry knowledge would probably not be able to do this. Another crucial element that is missing from the “recipe” are instructions on how to make the detonating mechanism, which means that the person assembling the explosive belt must have access to a ready-made detonator or know how to make an improvised one.

All the videos appear to film improvised “laboratories” equipped with commercially available laboratory equipment, such as beakers, filter paper, a separating funnel, and a magnetic stirrer. In addition, some common household equipment is needed (fridge, hot plate, buckets, casseroles, thermometer). The manufacture of sensitive materials always involves a certain risk, but the videos are quite good at providing security precautions. They emphasize, for example, that when mixing reactants it is extremely important to keep the temperature low, and to add ingredients very slowly. The video on how to make nitrocellulose demonstrates how sensitive the dried material is by lighting a match next to it, causing it to explode, and recommends storing it in a container of water.

The main technical difficulties for an amateur who tries to follow these recipes would probably be to obtain nitronaphthalene and the detonator. Without access to these components, or detailed instructions on how to make them, the amateur would therefore not be able to make an explosive belt based on these Internet recipes only. However, the video explains several important principles behind the explosive belt, and may give ideas and input to experienced bomb-makers to improve or construct their own devices. A person with some experience could probably also manufacture the explosive belt shown in the video.

For a while, the Hizballah videos were practically the only videos on jihadi webpages providing detailed instructions for explosives manufacture. In the fall of 2007, however, a new series of instruction videos appeared on the jihadi Web, entitled “Lessons in How to Destroy the Cross” (*durus fi tadmir al-salib*). It is a series of 25 videotaped lectures totalling some 18 hours, and it explains how to manufacture various improvised explosives and detonators. The ten first lessons (totalling 15 hours) are theoretical, featuring a masked person lecturing in front of a whiteboard. The rest of the series consist of shorter, practical lessons similar to those found in the Hizballah videos, although they appear to be less sophisticated. For example, the Lessons in How to Destroy the Cross do not contain lessons in how to make ready-made explosive devices (such as in Hizballah’s “Thunder Bomb” or “Gas Cylinder”), nor full-scale demonstrations of the effects of the explosives of the type seen in, for example, the “Explosive Belt.” The videos are produced by a group calling themselves the Shura Foundation for Media Production (*mu’assasat al-shura lil-intaj al-i’lami*), a so-far unknown production company whose group affiliations are unclear.²³ The purpose of producing the videos appears to be a general desire to contribute to the spread of jihadi knowledge and to educate “explosive experts” who can contribute to jihad in the field. Interestingly, the Shura Foundation appears to be well familiar with, and possibly inspired by, Abu Mus’ab al-Suri’s writings. Along with the instruction videos, it issued a communiqué stressing that it is not necessary any longer to go through the dangers and fears of travelling abroad for training, when one can access the military knowledge at home (paraphrasing al-Suri’s writings). Further it strongly recommends reviewing al-Suri’s *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*.²⁴

It appears, indeed, that the Lessons in How to Destroy the Cross are meant to support al-Suri's idea of moving jihadi training to "every house, every quarter and every village."²⁵ Based on available information, however, it appears that the series is produced by individuals rather than by high-ranking Al Qaeda members or as part of an organized effort. The main indicator of this is that it has not been issued by one of the more well-known jihadi media agencies such as As-Sahab or Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF), or agencies serving regional Al Qaeda affiliates such as al-Furqan (representing the Islamic State of Iraq).²⁶

It is worth noting that As-Sahab, regarded as Al Qaeda's "official" media agency, has not produced any instruction videos at all. Another well-known jihadi media agency, the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF) has, on the other hand, produced one popular instruction video that shows how to assemble an AK-47 rifle. However, the production is not very sophisticated: the main part of the video has been "borrowed" from an American instruction video, then Arabic speech has been added (ironically, the video still bears the logo of its original producer, Life, Liberty, Etc.).

In sum, the most high-quality instruction videos available online today are those produced by Hizballah. As already mentioned, it appears that the Hizballah videos were picked up by Internet activists, modified to serve a Sunni audience, and then made available on jihadi websites. Thus, it is a misconception that these videos were "made by Al Qaeda" or produced to serve Al Qaeda's global jihad.

Series and Periodicals

Another type of online training material is the so-called series (*silsilat*) and periodicals (*majallat*). These are series of lessons that are issued on a regular basis, for example, weekly or bi-weekly. Each lesson may cover one or several topics relevant for preparation, and they usually mix ideological/religious preparation with practical and military preparation. The course often has a natural progression, in that they start with the very basics ("why fight jihad," lessons on security and physical training, etc.) and move towards more advanced subjects (weapons, explosives making). Some of the series encourage the participants to communicate with the issuer, to submit "homework assignments," questions, or suggestions, thus being more interactive than the previously mentioned categories of instruction material. When a popular series ends, it is usually gathered in a compendium or e-book, and is issued alongside other training manuals. Such ready-made, complete "preparation courses" are especially suitable for aspiring jihadis who do not know where to start their readings. Below I will briefly mention two of the most well-known series, "The Series for Preparation to Jihad" issued by the Global Islamic Media (GIM), and the *Al-Battar Camp* magazine, issued by Al Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (QAP).

The Series for Preparation to Jihad (silsilat al-i'dad lil-jihad): This series was issued in early 2003 on a popular Yahoo group belonging to the Global Islamic Media (a precursor to Global Islamic Media Front).²⁷ It contains 19 lessons that were posted by the group at regular intervals. The series apparently became very popular, as it has been re-issued several times, both as an e-book and word-document. The word-document version is 219 pages, and "collected and organized by Abu al-Qa'qa'." In the introduction he writes,

On request from many of the brothers, I have collected and organized this series in one file, in order to make it easy to review it. These are

important lessons for preparing the Ummah for jihad, and for teaching the Muslims the art of fighting, the use of weapons and instigating the believers to obtain one of the two goods. . . . victory or martyrdom.

The series was not only popular among online jihadis: a downloaded version of it was also found on a computer belonging to the Madrid cell, which was responsible for the train bombings in Spain in 2004 that killed 191 people.²⁸

The documents provide general lessons on guerrilla warfare, security, organisation, weapons and explosives, as well as selected ideological and religious texts on training and preparation. Names of authors are usually not provided, but many of the texts are obviously copied and pasted from other sources.²⁹ It is unclear whether the GIM has written anything themselves, except the introductions to the lessons. The document makes several references to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and encourages its readers to use the series to prepare for jihad on these fronts in particular. In Lesson 2, “Urban warfare,” the author writes: “We encourage the Muslims to use these methods of attack in urban warfare and guerrilla warfare in the case of Iraq and Afghanistan. . . .”³⁰ A later lesson appears to be written right before the onset of the war, stating that “America is preparing to invade Iraq probably the coming February.”³¹ Thus, the motivation for issuing the series seems to have been connected to the American-led campaigns against Iraq and Afghanistan.

Al-Battar Camp (mu'askar al-battar): This magazine, produced by the Military Committee of Al Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (QAP), was issued on a bi-weekly basis from January–October 2004, and provided ideological articles as well as practical lessons on elementary military skills.³² The editor of the magazine was Abdalaziz al-Muqrin, who was the leader of QAP from March 2004 until his death in June the same year. After that, another QAP leader took over as editor. The periodical is named after the well-known Al Qaeda operative Yusuf al-Ayiri, whose nickname was *al-battar* (sabre). This becomes clear by looking at the first issue of the magazine, which displays several versions of the title, *mu'askar al-battar*, *mu'askar al-shahid al-battar* and *mu'askar al-shaykh Yusuf al-'Ayiri* (The Camp of al-Battar, the Camp of the Martyr al-Battar, The Camp of Shaykh Yusuf al-Ayiri). Al-Ayiri was killed by Saudi security forces in May 2003.

The publication features technical and tactical articles written by well-known jihadis who worked as trainers in Afghanistan and elsewhere: Yusuf al-Ayiri (physical training), Sayf al-Adel (security and communication), and Abdelaziz al-Muqrin (tactics and guerrilla warfare).³³ The magazine addresses “inhabitants of the Peninsula and others” who are prevented from preparing in traditional ways. It is aimed at “facilitating the preparation [for jihad] and teaching the Islamic nation to carry and use weapons” to confront “the Byzantine invaders.”³⁴ In the first issue, the editors state that

The main idea behind [this publication] is to spread military culture among the youth, in order to fill a gap while striving to spread the religion, and hopefully in an easy and understandable way, so that the Muslim brother can find in it fundamental lessons inside the military preparation program, starting from a physical fitness programme, passing through light weapons and urban and mountain guerrilla warfare, important points in security and intelligence, that enables you to resist interrogation, in order to carry out the duty of preparation.³⁵

On the last page we find the often-quoted sentence, "...in order to join the great training camps you don't have to travel to other lands. Alone, in your home or with a group of your brothers, you too can begin to execute the training program. You can all join the al-Battar Camp."³⁶ The QAP, then, suspends the duty of emigration (*hijra*) before preparation for jihad could begin, and which was integral to Abdullah Azzam's training doctrine.³⁷

The readers of the magazine are encouraged to submit questions and contributions that are sometimes included in later issues. In one issue, for example, the magazine quotes a letter they received from one of their readers. The letter outlines a detailed plan on how to assassinate the Saudi Minister of Interior (details in the plan have been omitted or changed in order to not reveal the real plan), and this is used as part of a lesson on operations planning. Readers are also encouraged to learn from the magazine and then act on their own. Issue 12, for example, provides a list of "tasks for the Summer Holiday" for their readers, which include revising previously issued magazines, training on practical skills in a remote area and then planning and carrying out a jihadi operation on the Peninsula. The magazine focuses on jihad in Saudi Arabia, but reports on jihadi news from all over the world.

The series and periodicals are interesting in terms of online training. While many of the training manuals are written simply to pass on knowledge about a specific topic, the series are specifically aimed at providing a comprehensive preparation programme for jihadis who might be unable to conduct training in traditional ways. The series start with the fundamentals, and the target group, therefore, appears to be individuals with little previous jihadi experience.

Trends and Developments

The training manuals are developing. As already mentioned, new and more user-friendly formats are appearing, such as e-books and videos. The layout and design of the manuals are becoming more sleek and professional. With regards to the content of the manuals, this is somewhat harder to assess. Most of the manuals are not dated, so a "new" manual could in fact be an old text in a new design, and there are many examples of this. Still, it is possible to make some observations with regards to content: First, the manuals describing conventional weapons have changed. While the Encyclopaedia of Jihad described Soviet Army equipment from the 1980s, newer manuals have been updated to describe weapons relevant for today's conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Palestinian areas. Significantly, The Encyclopaedia of Preparation added a section on British and American weapons in its 4th edition. Second, manuals increasingly contain information relevant for urban warfare and autonomous cells, rather than for fighting on traditional battlefields. Third, with the increased attention to weapons of mass destruction in the West, the focus of chemical and biological manuals has shifted from describing how to use poisons for assassination, to how to make weapons intended for mass killing (the technical quality of these formulations, and whether they would actually work, is another question).³⁸ Yet, CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear) manuals still constitute a very small percentage of the total number of jihadi training manuals, so it is too early to say if this is a new trend. As for bomb and explosives manuals, it is harder to assess whether the content has been "improved," because this would require a detailed comparison and technical evaluation of the different formulations. However, what seems clear is that old and newer training material exist side by side,

and among Internet jihadis, there seems to be no strong interest in improving or updating the explosives formulations. One reason for this is that individuals who access jihadi webpages are generally “amateurs” who are most interested in learning the basics of explosives making. It is more important, therefore, that the training material is presented in an easy and understandable way (such as through audio-visual means), than that they reflect new and sophisticated manufacture methods.

As will be illustrated in the next section, the tactics and technologies currently used by jihadis “on the ground” are not necessarily reflected in the instruction manuals available on jihadi webpages. One explanation for this is probably that jihadis are aware that their forums are being monitored and thus, they are less likely to divulge new ideas or technologies online. During an online Q&A-session on explosives, for example, the instructor stated that the lesson would be based on available jihadi and foreign literature, noting that “this [information] has been known to the enemy for more than 20 years, so even if we explain it or discuss it in public, the enemy will not care. . . .”³⁹ There seems to be an understanding that the Internet is to be used for teaching basic skills and knowledge which can in any case be found in open sources, before recruits move on to real-life training.

Who Produces and Distributes Training Material, and for What Purpose?

In order to say something about the nature of the online training material, it is essential to look at who produces it, and for what purpose. A manual authored by a well-known field commander or ideologue, or a member of an established jihadi organization, is generally more influential than a manual issued by an Internet activist. Similarly, a manual carrying the logo of an “official” media organization may be regarded as more credible than manuals produced by individuals. Second, is the purpose of the manual merely to “contribute to the spread of jihadi knowledge” or, is the manual part of an organized effort by established jihadi groups or media organizations to train potential recruits through the Internet? Generally the producers and distributors of online training material can be divided into three categories: media organizations, regional groups, and Internet sympathizers.

Media Organizations

A well-known jihadi media organization issuing training material is the Islamic Media Center (IMC). It claims to have operated since the early 1990s, distributing training manuals on CDs and later via the Internet.⁴⁰ A prominent member of the IMC, nicknamed “Abu Khadija,” is believed to be identical with Oussama Kassir, a Swedish citizen of Lebanese origin who belonged to the circle around the London-based radical cleric Abu Hamza. IMC’s links to Al Qaeda are somewhat unclear, but Kassir, born in 1966, has claimed to have undertaken jihadi training in Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Lebanon, and to have fought in Afghanistan.⁴¹ In 1999, he allegedly went to the United States to set up a jihadi training camp in Bly, Oregon in cooperation with Abu Hamza and others. While in the U.S. he distributed CDs with training material, and from at least 2002, he operated various websites associated with the IMC.⁴² Kassir was arrested in Prague in December 2005, and extradited to the United States in September 2007. The IMC seems to have had wide access to notes and manuals written by experienced jihadis and field commanders, which they often re-issued in more readable formats. They also translated a large amount

of U.S. Army Field Manuals and other English-language material into Arabic. The group produced and distributed an impressive amount of material, which is still circulated on jihadi webpages. A large part of the IMC manuals can be found, for example, in the Encyclopaedia of Preparation. However, the IMC apparently distributed most of its training material as “reference works” rather than “organized courses” directed towards a specific purpose. After 2005, the IMC has largely stopped operating.

Other well-known jihadi media organizations have paid little attention to training. The Global Islamic Media (GIM) is an important exception. To my knowledge, the GIM was among the first organizations to organize an online preparation course, the “Series for Preparation to Jihad,” with the expressed intention to prepare their readers for jihad in the field. This series is especially interesting because it was downloaded by an operational cell (the Madrid cell), although it must be emphasized that is doubtful whether the series itself had any significant influence on the cell or the outcome of the operation. Judicial documents show that the Series was simply one of many jihadi documents downloaded by the cell after visiting jihadi webpages on a regular basis, and the radicalization and training of the cell members clearly involved other factors and processes. However, the case of the Madrid cell shows that online training material has actually been accessed (and presumably read) by jihadis “on the ground,” not only by Internet-based sympathizers.

Regional Groups

The best example of a jihadi group actively producing training material intended for study on the Internet is Al Qaeda on the Arabic Peninsula (QAP), who turned to the Internet after the security situation in Saudi Arabia made traditional training difficult. They launched their online magazine, *al-Battar Camp*, in order to facilitate training and preparation for individual mujahidin, and encouraged them to use the information provided in the magazine to start their own training camps and, after a while, small operational cells, to operate primarily in Saudi Arabia. The bi-weekly publication came in 22 issues, and covered everything from physical training and wilderness survival to explosives making. The “students” of al-Battar were encouraged to communicate with the editors through e-mail during the course, and to submit questions and contributions. While jihadi periodicals issued by other groups also have included articles on technical or military topics,⁴³ the QAP is probably the only example of an Al Qaeda-affiliated group who have systematically used the Internet in an attempt to train followers.

Another group which deserves mention, albeit not part of the Al Qaeda network, is the Lebanese Hizballah, which produced at least 19 sophisticated training videos on explosives manufacture and bomb-making. However, it is harder to find documentation on their original purpose and how they were intended to be used. The modified versions of the videos do not contain any information on this, and this author has not had access to the original videos. However, it is likely that their purpose was similar to that of al-Battar, perhaps even more specific: viewing traditional training as insufficient, and limited by security precautions, they might have decided to provide an option of “remote learning” to expand the pool of qualified bomb-makers to serve their cause. Open sources provide some indications on this. For example, in May 2003 the ship Abu Hasan was intercepted by Israeli authorities, and was reported to contain bomb-making equipment and 36 CD-ROMS with

“...instructions on how to assemble bomb belts for suicide bombers.”⁴⁴ According to Israeli authorities, the ship was also carrying a Hizballah “explosives expert” who was to be smuggled into the Gaza strip along with the weapons and instruction material.⁴⁵

Hizballah’s instruction videos have been circulated on Al Qaeda-affiliated web pages since at least early 2006, and are quite popular due to their high quality.⁴⁶ In 2005, media also reported that Hizballah-made videos had been recovered from Iraqi insurgents.⁴⁷ According to open sources, however, it is hard to determine whether the videos themselves have in fact contributed to transferring technological knowledge to Iraqi groups. For example, there have been speculations that Iraqi insurgents have learned how to make so-called EFPs (Explosively Formed Penetrators) from Hizballah-made instruction videos,⁴⁸ but according to the video material reviewed by this author this seems somewhat unlikely. One of the videos, entitled “*sijjil*,”⁴⁹ does show how to assemble a “hand grenade” which the video claims can be used against armoured vehicles. However, the “hand grenade”-type device described in the *sijjil* video does not reflect the EFP technology reportedly used on the ground in Iraq.⁵⁰ Moreover, the video appears to be a video on how to assemble pre-made parts, not how to make an EFP from scratch. In February 2007 a jihadi forum member also commented on this, complaining that “. . .the [*sijjil*] video does not explain a thing, it is for those with advanced skills, who know how to manufacture the detonator, the timer . . .and so on” (other members praised the posting of the video, but this is a common response to any kind of training material posted on jihadi forums, regardless of its quality).⁵¹ It cannot be ruled out, though, that other Hizballah-made instruction videos exist in Iraq that may have enabled Iraqi insurgents to manufacture EFPs. My main point here was to illustrate how instruction material posted on jihadi webpages do not necessarily reflect the technologies and tactics used on the ground in, for example, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Internet Activists

This category includes the less official “media groups,” discussion forums, and individual forum members. They have fewer resources and the quality of the training material they produce tends to be somewhat lower. This is especially true for instruction videos. Rather than producing their own videos, individuals often rely on videos taken from Western sources, which typically demonstrate weapons or the effect of explosions. For example, in the fall of 2007 the al-Boraq forum re-issued a well-known American instruction video, *The Ultimate Sniper*, with Arabic subtitles.⁵²

As for the written material issued by individuals, the quality is variable. It can be at the same level as large media organisations and groups (individuals can have excellent computer and technical skills, and the content is usually drawn from old manuals available on the Internet), but the quality can also be more dubious. Individuals may compile and issue manuals based on Internet sources without having the experience or knowledge to assess whether the information is correct, resulting in misleading and sometimes totally wrong information. This is typical for topics such as biological or nuclear weapons, where information provided is sometimes inaccurate or even potentially wrong. Other forum members may be equally unfamiliar with the topic, so the technical flaws of these manuals are often not commented on.

Overall, internet activists play important roles in re-producing and distributing jihadi training manuals. Individuals seldom state a specific goal or agenda, but seem

to distribute training material because they view this volunteer work as their individual contribution to the jihad. While this creates an abundance of instruction material on virtually all kinds of topics, it also leads to an “information overflow” that may make it hard for beginners to separate good-quality training material from the rest.

To What Extent Is Online Training “Interactive”?

It seems clear that in order to call the Internet a “virtual training camp,” it has to represent more than just a place for storing and distributing training material. The Internet is already becoming the most important meeting place for jihadis all over the world, to communicate, discuss, and share their views. But to what extent is the Internet used as a classroom for jihadi training?

As this study is only concerned with publicly available websites, the answer to this question will only be partial. There are a lot of other channels in which training and exchange of information may take place, such as chatrooms, PalTalk and private e-mail, in addition to forums with more restricted membership that require personal references or other screening processes.⁵³ However, when looking at openly available webpages, the most common form of interactivity is discussion forums. Many discussion forums have sub-sections dedicated to training and preparation, where forum members can post questions on a specific topic and receive answers from other forum members. The activity in sub-forums dedicated to training is relatively small compared to the activity in the forum as a whole. In one of the largest discussion forums, al-Firdaws, which at the time of access in December 2006 contained some 19,000 threads, 750 threads (or 3.9 percent) were posted in the “equipment and preparation” sub-forum (*muntada al-'udda wal-i'dad*). In comparison, 24 percent of the threads were posted in the sub-forum for communiqués and reports (*muntada al-bayanat wal-taqarir*). Other forums showed a similar distribution.⁵⁴ In any case, there is usually daily activity in these sub-forums.

Discussion Topics

What do people discuss in these sub-forums, and what topics are most popular? Stephen Ulph wrote in a 2005 article that in such sub-forums there are “detailed exchanges of participants requesting or providing specific information on military technology, requests for supplies or funding, or enquiries on how to join a cell on the front line.”⁵⁵ A survey of a popular discussion forum, al-Firdaws, showed the following distribution of topics in the sub-forum for “equipment and preparation” (Figure 1):

The distribution is based on an analysis of 764 threads posted in the sub-forum over a period of two years (2005–2006). The analysis does not differentiate between enquiries and other types of threads, but gives a general impression of the kind of topics that forum members are interested in. It can be noted that explosives and conventional weapons are by far the most common categories, while enquiries on “how can I join the jihad” (1.0 percent of total) or requests for funding (0.1 percent of total) are extremely rare in open forums.⁵⁶ Such enquiries were probably more common a few years ago. A main reason for this, presumably, is an increased awareness that the forums are being monitored by intelligence agencies. Several cases have occurred where forum members and activists have been tracked down and arrested, and thus, forum members are strongly discouraged from revealing personal

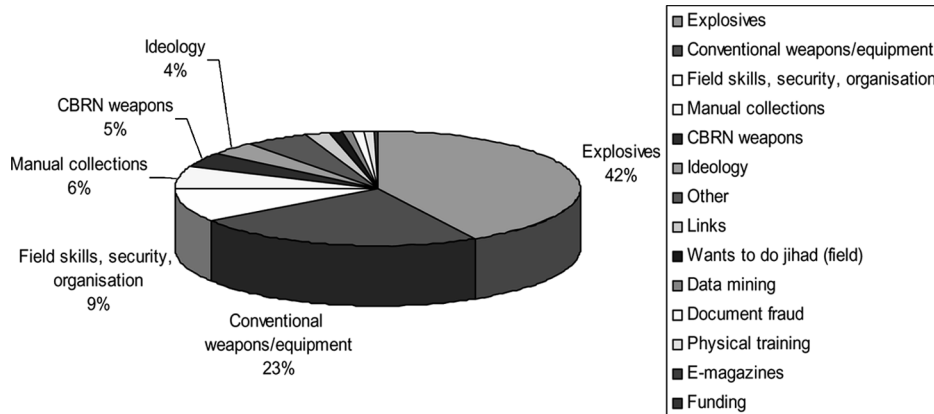


Figure 1. Distribution of discussion topics in *al-Firdaws* sub-forum for equipment and preparation, 2005–2006.

information on the forums. If someone accidentally reveals their e-mail address or place of residence, it is often removed by the forum administrators.

Occasionally, individuals turn to the forums to ask for advice on how to join the jihad on the ground. Such requests are often answered with general phrases such as “be patient and trust in God,” while other members may provide general information on a “jihadi front” such as Iraq or Somalia (for example, a map of the target country, information about its topography, population, and possible travel routes, etc. gathered from open sources). However, lately, people have been discouraged from asking such questions. In July 2006, for example, a member posted a short message on the *al-Firdaws* forum stating his desire to go to jihad “against the Zionists and Crusaders” and asking how to proceed. Shortly afterwards, he was instructed that the forum was not a safe place to ask, and that he should try “on the ground” before turning to the forums. The next day, the thread was closed by the administrators, along with a short message saying that such a topic should not be discussed on the forum.⁵⁷ Yet, a few years ago, it was possible to find much more detailed information on how to join the fronts. In 2003, for example, the Global Islamic Media published a “Letter from a Mujahidin in Iraq,” a very detailed account of how the author of the letter travelled to Iraq and joined a training camp, including his exact travel route and how he crossed the border.⁵⁸ Such information may, of course, be exchanged in more private channels such as e-mail: every forum member also has a mailbox where he or she can receive private messages from other members. As Weimann has noted, while the forums themselves may not reveal detailed information on how to join the jihad, they may serve as “portals that lead to one-on-one relationships with the people who run them—and it is through those relationships that converts can learn better how to smuggle themselves into Iraq.”⁵⁹

Online “Trainers” and “Trainees”

Who are the online “trainers” answering questions and enquiries from other members? Due to the security precautions they seldom reveal any details on their background, and remain shadowy figures hiding behind nicknames such as “Khattab”

or “Layth al-Islam.” Only when they are killed or arrested may their identity become known. There was a case in Lebanon, for example, where a member of the jihadi group Fatah al-Islam was killed, and in his “martyr biography” it was revealed that he had worked as a trainer in training camps as well as being an active participant of several online discussion forums, answering questions and offering advice to other forum members.⁶⁰ However, such examples are rare, and generally the online “experts” seem to have little field and practical experience, if any at all.⁶¹ One gets the impression that it is not very hard to achieve status as an “expert,” because in any case, the information that is exchanged on these forums tends to be very basic.

The forum members who take active part in online discussions, and who use the discussion forums as “virtual classrooms,” form a much narrower group than those who use the Internet simply to access training material. Many of the participants in this interactive environment, both trainers and trainees, appear to be Internet-based jihadis and curious teenagers rather than hard-core members of jihadi cells and organizations. A plausible explanation for this is that they do not want to risk exposing themselves in forums known to be monitored by the intelligence services, even under a nickname. Another obvious explanation is that face-to-face contact and real-life training is still regarded as the best alternative. Although this article has focused purely on military skills, one should keep in mind that training and preparation for jihad involves a number of other processes as well, such as confidence-building, socialization, and radicalization.

Concluding Remarks

In order to talk about the Internet as a “virtual training camp,” we have to establish whether Al Qaeda is, in fact, making an organized effort to train their followers online. A review of the jihadi training manuals and interactive forums that exist on the Internet today shows that this is not the case.

A large part of the online training material seems to be produced and distributed by Internet-based sympathizers rather than Al Qaeda central. An indication of this is that Al Qaeda’s most prominent media arm, as-Sahab, has so far not produced any specific instruction videos. Another well-known jihadi media agency, GIMF, has issued one instruction video, but of a rather low quality compared to those issued by Hizballah. The best example of an Al Qaeda-affiliated group making an organized effort to use the Internet to train their supporters is Al Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (QAP). Realizing that the security situation in Saudi Arabia had made traditional training difficult, the QAP launched the magazine *al-Battar Camp* in 2004 as an alternative way of training their supporters.⁶² However, this model of a “virtual training camp” has so far not been copied by other influential actors within the jihadi current. Thus, it appears that Al Qaeda at the present stage is not utilizing the full potential of the Internet in terms of training potential recruits.

It has been argued that the Internet may nevertheless function as a substitute for real-life training, especially in cases of “home-grown” terrorism where operatives do not have the necessary network or contacts to travel to training camps abroad, or in cases where this is regarded too risky.⁶³ In order to assess whether this is becoming a trend, however, it is not sufficient to evaluate the nature and quality of training material found on jihadi webpages. It is also necessary to look at how jihadi cells “on the ground” actually prepare and train for their operations. Petter Nesser, who has examined jihadi training in Europe from the end of the 1990s to the present,

notes elsewhere in this issue of *TPV* that “with one possible exception, I have not been able to find examples of terror cells that can be characterized as ‘virtual-only’ in terms of developing operational capabilities.”⁶⁴ The notion of a “virtual training camp,” therefore, appears to be misleading, at least in the case of European jihadis. While the topic requires further study, including case-studies from various regions, Nesser’s findings from Europe seem to indicate that jihadis still seem to prefer classical forms of jihadi training, even if it involves greater security risks. This may, of course, change in the future, especially if Al Qaeda or their affiliates decide to make a more visible and organized effort to train recruits via the Internet.

As of today, the Internet is best viewed as a resource bank for self-radicalized and autonomous cells, which is used alongside more traditional ways of training and preparing. In many cases, jihadi Internet manuals may function as a preparation for real-life training, rather than a substitute for it. This also seems to be a common view among the jihadis themselves. The idea that Internet training material should be used to learn the basics—before moving on to classical jihadi training—makes it perhaps more accurate to talk about the Internet as a “pre-school of jihad” rather than a “university.”

Notes

1. I would like to thank my colleagues at FFI, Brynjar Lia, Thomas Hegghammer, and Petter Nesser, for their valuable feedback on this article.

2. See, for example, Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2006), 123–129; Hanna Rogan, *Jihadism Online: A Study of How Al-Qaida and Radical Islamist Groups Use the Internet for Terrorist Purposes* (Kjeller: FFI, 2006); Brynjar Lia, “Al Qaeda Online: Understanding Jihadi Internet Infrastructure,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review* (Jan 2006).

3. Gabriel Weimann, “Virtual Training Camps: Terrorists’ Use of the Internet,” in James J. F. Forest, ed., *Teaching Terror: Strategic and Tactical Learning in the Terrorist World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 112.

4. For example, the forum Stormfront (www.stormfront.org/forum/), with 100,000 registered members and 20,000 active members as of May 2007, has a sub-forum entitled “Self-defense, Martial Arts and Preparedness.” The page www.militiaofmontana.com/ sells military training manuals. However, a closer study of other extremist websites is necessary in order to determine the similarities and differences between different types of extremist websites.

5. Here, “hactivism” refers to a form of jihad (also labelled “E-jihad” or “cyber jihad”) that uses the Internet as a battlefield, and the aim is often to destroy or deface “enemy” websites, theft of sensitive data, etc. Hactivism is clearly part of the “jihadism online” phenomenon, although it has had little practical influence so far.

6. Abu Mus’ab al-Suri, *The Call to Global Islamic Resistance* [in Arabic] (Place and publisher unknown; 2005), 1425.

7. *Ibid.*, 1424.

8. *Ibid.*, 1428.

9. For more on al-Suri’s training doctrine, see Brynjar Lia, “Al-Suri’s Doctrines for Decentralised Jihadi Training - Part I,” *Terrorism Monitor* 5, no. 1 (18 Jan 2007); and Brynjar Lia, “Al-Suri’s Doctrines for Decentralised Jihadi Training - Part 2,” *Terrorism Monitor* 5, no. 2 (1 Feb 2007).

10. The Egyptian Army manual, entitled *al-shirak al-khida’i*, was downloaded from al-Firdaws (www.alfirdaws.org/vb/) on 5 Sept 2006, while the Iraqi manual, entitled *istikhdam al-asliha al-kimiyawiyya wal-haya’iyya* was downloaded from al-Firdaws (www.alfirdaws.org/vb/) on 4 March 2007.

11. For an analysis of Al Qaeda’s “media jihad,” see Hanna Rogan, *Al Qaeda’s Online Media Strategies: From Abu Reuter to Irhabi 007* (Kjeller: FFI, 2007).

12. Encyclopaedia of Jihad, Part One: Security and Intelligence (1423 h.), 2.
13. *Ibid.*, 2–3.
14. *Ibid.*, 3.
15. “Link to the video on how to manufacture the explosive belt” [in Arabic], thread posted on al-Ma’sada al-Jihadiyya, 11 Jan 2005, www.alm2sda.net/vb/.
16. Encyclopaedia of Preparation, www.geocities.com/i3dad_jihad4/.
17. See, for example, the Encyclopaedia of Preparation, 3rd edition at http://www.geocities.com/m_eddad/ and 4th edition at www.geocities.com/i3dad_jihad4/. The links to the manuals did not work as of March 2007.
18. This estimate is based on counting the documents and pages in the 4th edition of the Encyclopaedia of Preparation, downloaded by FFI in June 2005.
19. “Fourteen Lessons on the Manufacture of the Atomic Bomb, with Pictures (fast to download)” [in Arabic], thread posted on Muntadayat Risalat al-Umma al-Jihadiyya, www.alomh.net/forums/showthread.phpt=911; No. 1, “The Nuclear Bomb of Jihad and How to Enrich Uranium” [in Arabic], 2.
20. Encyclopaedia of Preparation, www.geocities.com/i3dad_jihad4/.
21. These rolling titles are present, for example, in the videos entitled Nitric Acid Fulminate, Mercury Fulminate, Ammonium Nitrate, Nitro Cellulose, Nitro Glycol, and Nitro Glycerine.
22. I would like to thank FFI Scientists Eirik Svinsås and Erik Unneberg for their useful contributions to this section.
23. The first lesson of the series appeared on the jihadi web page Mubashir al-Jihadi in July 2007, see <http://web.archive.org/web/20070710224338/mobasher.110mb.com/Shura.htm>. The Shura Foundation has claimed that Mubashir al-Jihadi is its primary media outlet, see <http://mobasher.110mb.com/ShuraXShura.htm>.
24. Mubashir al-Jihadi, <http://mobasher.110mb.com/ShuraXShura.htm>.
25. Al-Suri (see note 6 above), 1425.
26. One member of the al-Ikhlās forum went so far as to question the validity of the Lessons in How to Destroy the Cross series, expressing concerns that it might contain altered formulations intended to harm the operator. See “Specialized Series of Lessons on Explosives and their Manufacture” [in Arabic], thread posted on al-Ikhlās, 9 Nov 2007, www.alekhlaas.net/forum/showthread.php?t=96621&page=4.
27. See home page of the Global Islamic Media, <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/abubanan>.
28. Proceedings 20/2004, Indictment of April 10 2006, Court of First Instance Number 6 of the Audencia Nacional [in Spanish], courtesy Petter Nesser, FFI.
29. For example, Lesson 3 seems partly identical to a fatwa by Shaykh Ibn Baz entitled “*wujub al-i’dad lil-a’da’*.” Lesson 4 is identical to a passage in the book “*al-zinad fi wujub al-jihad*” by Sultan bin Bijad al-’Utaybi. Lessons 8, 10, 13, have been previously issued by the Islamic Media Center (IMC). Lesson 9 has also been published under the name of a Saudi cleric, Abu Jandal al-Azdi (Faris al-Zahrani).
30. “The Series for Preparation to Jihad, Lesson 2: Urban Warfare” [in Arabic], 28–29.
31. “The Series for Preparation to Jihad, Lesson 6: To Prepare the Ummah for Jihad” [in Arabic], 83.
32. For background information on the QAP, see, for example, Thomas Hegghammer, “Terrorist Recruitment and Radicalisation in Saudi Arabia,” *The Middle East Policy* 13, no. 4 (2006).
33. Stephen Ulph, “A Guide to Jihad on the Web,” *Terrorism Focus* 2, no. 7 (2005).
34. “*al-khatima*,” *Mu’askar al-Battar* 2 (2004).
35. Abu Thabit al-Najdi, “*fi al-bud’ kilma*,” *Mu’askar al-Battar* 1 (2004), 3.
36. “*al-khatima*,” *Mu’askar al-Battar* 1 (2004), 28.
37. Brynjar Lia, “Doctrines for Jihadi Terrorist Training,” Paper presented at Oslo Military Society, May 2007.
38. For more information, see Anne Stenersen, “Chem-Bio Cyber-Class: Assessing Jihadist Chemical and Biological Manuals,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review* (1 Sept 2007).
39. “The Answers of Brother Abdallah Dhu al-Bajadin to the Mujahidin’s Questions on the Science of Explosives” [in Arabic], Kata’ib al-Firdaws al-A’la, downloaded from al-Firdaws, 13 June 2007, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/.

40. Abu al-Khansa' al-Shami, "Clarifying statement regarding our E-mail address" [in Arabic], Islamic Media Center, undated. Courtesy Brynjar Lia, FFI.
41. United States of America v. Oussama Kassir, Complaint, Southern District of New York, 3.
42. United States of America v. Mustafa Kamel Mustafa, Oussama Abdullah Kassir and Haroon Rashid Aswat, Indictment, Southern District of New York, 14–21.
43. See, for example, various issues of *al-Fursan*, the periodical of the Islamic Army in Iraq.
44. The description of one of these CD-ROMs corresponds well with Hizballah's "Explosive Belt" video reviewed by this author. "The Seizing of the Abu Hasan," Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 22 May 2003, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2003/5/; "Israel Captures top Hezbollah bomb-maker in ship seizure," *Irish Examiner*, 23 May 2003.
45. "The Seizing of the Abu Hasan" (see note 44 above).
46. The presence of Hizballah-made videos on jihadi webpages was first recorded by the FFI in early 2006.
47. Michael Isikoff and Mark Hosenball, "Insurgency Instructions: A Video Made by Hizbullah—and Possibly Iran—Is Helping Iraqi Insurgents Wage Their War," *Newsweek*, 24 Aug 2005.
48. Ibid.
49. The name *sijjil* is probably derived from a Qur'anic expression, *bi-hijaratina min sijjil*, usually translated as "stones of baked clay."
50. EFPs used in Iraq are remote-controlled IEDs, typically fired from the side of the road, and normally using a concave copper disc as a "projectile." Hizballah's hand grenade-type device described in the *sijjil* video is meant to be thrown onto the armoured vehicle and is designed as a shaped charge which relies on a cone-shaped liner.
51. "Video of an Anti-Tank Hand Grenade" [in Arabic], thread posted on Shabakat al-Muhajirun al-Islamiyya, 18 Feb 2007, www.mohajirun.com/vb/.
52. "Al-Buraq workshop:(21m): Video tape "The Ultimate Sniper" translated into Arabic" [in Arabic], thread posted on al-Firdaws, 24 Oct 2007, www.al-firdaws.net/vb/showthread.php?t=30596.
53. Other possible forms of "virtual training" that have not been examined in this article is the use of online computer games and simulators teaching military skills, or the use of Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs).
54. The percentage for the other forums were: Muntadayat al-Nusra al-Jihadiyya: 2.8 percent (www.alnusra.net/vb/), Shabakat Abu al-Bukhary al-Islamiyya: 3.9 percent (www.abualbukhary.info/vb3/), Muntadayat Risalat al-Umma al-Jihadiyya: 3.9 percent (www.al-ommh.net/vb/). All forums were accessed on 19 Dec 2006.
55. U1ph (see note 33 above).
56. However, it cannot be excluded that such requests may appear in other sub-forums or other types of jihadi web-pages, which were not thoroughly investigated during this study.
57. "I want to go to Jihad against the Zionists and the Crusaders, but how?" [in Arabic], thread posted on al-Firdaws, 18 July 2006, www.alfirdaws.org/vb/.
58. "How to go to Jihad in Iraq" [in Arabic], available, for example, at www.d-sunnah.net/forum/archive/index.php/t-13116.html.
59. Quoted in Jonathan Curiel, "TERROR.COM," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 10 July 2005.
60. "29-3 Fatah al-Islam Movement/Communiqué on the Martyrdom of our Brother and Leader (Abu Abd ar-Rahman al-Maqdisi) Khattab Laden" [in Arabic], thread posted on al-Ikhlās, 29 March 2007, www.alekhlaas.net/forum/.
61. See for example, "Message to al-Qabid 'ala al-Jamr" [in Arabic], thread posted on al-Nusra, 20 Oct 2006, www.alnusra.net/vb/.
62. To what degree QAP's "virtual training" project actually led to visible results is another question which has not been addressed in this study, due to its complexity.
63. See for example, Rita Katz and Josh Devon, "The Online Jihadi Threat," Testimony before the Homeland Security Committee, Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing and Terrorism, 6 Nov 2007, 3.
64. Petter Nesser, "How Did Europe's Global Jihadis Obtain Training for their Militant Causes?," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 2.