A Jihadist's Course in the Art of Recruitment

By Brian Fishman and Abdullah Warius

JIHADIST RECRUITERS HAVE a new handbook to guide them through the art of radicalizing and organizing a fresh generation of operatives. The 51-page handbook by Abu `Amr al-Qa`idi, *A Course in the Art of Recruitment*, is designed to provide less-skilled jihadist recruiters operating independently of any cohesive terrorist organization the tools to effectively recruit secular and moderate Muslims into the global jihadist movement. Abu `Amr's handbook prescribes a highly structured recruitment process with multiple stages and clear, simple metrics to assess a recruit's progress—essentially, the bureaucratization of decentralized jihadist recruitment. Abu `Amr argues that structuring recruitment and providing simple quantitative assessment tools will allow recruiters with less education and knowledge of Shari`a to recruit safely and effectively.

Abu `Amr's handbook has been widely distributed on jihadist websites, but it is not clear whether his recruitment program is actually being applied by jihadist operatives. Rather than a definitive explanation of current jihadist operations, Abu `Amr's book is an insider's look into the ideas and techniques critical to jihadist radicalization, and an attempt to simplify the difficult art of radicalization for a less-skilled generation of jihadist recruiters.

Individual Da`wa Versus Collective Da`wa

Abu `Amr's recruitment course proceeds in five stages, designed to carefully introduce recruits to jihadist ideology and cell formation. Abu `Amr describes detailed goals for each stage and provides recruiters quantitative assessment tools to judge the progress of their recruits and determine when they are ready to move from one stage to the next. Recruiters are advised to tally their recruit's score on end-of-stage questionnaires (which are provided) to determine whether or not recruitment should continue. To make decisions even easier for recruiters who lack jihadist education themselves, the handbook provides various "Go/No Go" questions. If the recruit is deficient in a key area, they are unqualified to enter the following stage.

Abu `Amr's recruitment process is built on the concept of "Individual Da`wa."[1] This is an approach of calling a single individual to Islam, and refers to the person being called, not the person doing the calling. Conversely, "Collective Da`wa" invites multiple individuals to Islam in a public manner through lectures and sermons. According to Abu `Amr, Individual Da`wa is preferable because it will not draw attention from security forces. Abu `Amr explains that an individualized, highly structured recruitment process increases security because it gives the recruiter ways to assess whether the recruited individual has accepted certain key concepts before exposed to the recruiter's true intentions. If the person being recruited is not ready for the next stage, the entire process can be cancelled without exposing the operative.

According to Abu `Amr, Individual Da`wa is also useful because it does not require the recruiter to have a thorough knowledge of Islamic Shari`a. Unlike Collective Da`wa, which requires recruiters who are capable of making legal and political arguments sophisticated enough to sustain public criticism, Individual Da`wa depends on eliciting emotional responses from recruits and building a personal relationship. Abu `Amr's approach illustrates a recruitment concept called *al-targhib wa'l-tarhib*, which is a carrot-and-stick technique of extolling the benefits of action while explaining the frightening costs of inaction. The concept was introduced in the Qur'an and is discussed by many Islamic thinkers exploring the best way to call people to Islam (several scholars, for example, have written books titled *al-targhib wa'l-tarhib*).[2] According to Abu `Amr, recruiters should apply the concept throughout the recruitment process, but emphasize the benefits of action early in the process and the costs of inaction later.
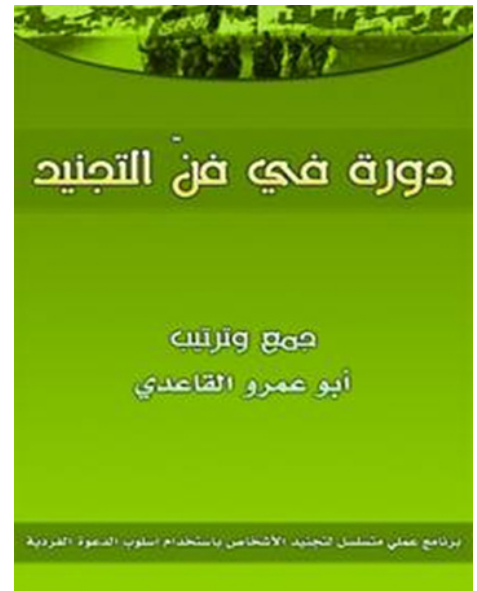

Figure 1. The front cover of the document.

Due to the private nature of Individual Da`wa, Abu `Amr argues the technique is applicable in the West and in countries ruled by "apostates." The individualized approach does not mean Abu `Amr is not ambitious; he boldly explains, "if the preacher can recruit one person a year and that person can recruit one person a year, then after 30 years the total number of the jihadists is a billion."[3]

Stage One: Acquaintance and Selection

Abu `Amr argues that a recruiter's first job is to identify a suitable recruitment target. He advises recruiters to select "an old friend or a relative who happens to be not committed to Islam. Or close to your age or close to your accommodation."[4] Abu `Amr is critical of jihadists who only want to recruit religious people. Indeed, he warns against recruiting "Salafists and memorizers of the Qur'an" because "most Salafists hold opinions opposing to al-Qa`ida that were fed to them by their scholars." Likewise, Abu `Amr does not trust memorizers of the Qur'an and believes that many of them are spies. He also warns against recruiting certain types of professionals, including scientists and military officials, because they are not amenable to al-Qa`ida's message. Abu `Amr does not exclude recruiting religious people, but he focuses on secular individuals because they are

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1 *Da`wa* is the act of calling individuals to Islam and is best understood as evangelism.

2 As stated in Qur'an 21:90, "Indeed, they used to hasten to good deeds and supplicate Us in hope and fear, and they were to Us humbly submissive."

3 Abu `Amr al-Qa`idi, *A Course in the Art of Recruitment*, undated, p. 8, available on jihadist web forums.

4 Ibid., p. 20.

more common and can generally be approached without alerting security services.

Stage Two: Building a Relationship
According to Abu `Amr, a recruiter should build a close, friendly relationship with recruits before raising political or ideological issues. He instructs recruiters to invite recruits for lunch, send them text messages, and give them gifts. Since every recruit requires personal attention, recruiters are told to only target two people at a time. According to Abu `Amr, it is important to urge recruits to embrace the ritual obligations of Islam as a way to increase their sense of obedience, writing:

> The issues that you will talk about at this stage are what we call the refining issues, meaning that you try to remedy his passiveness and make him love the path of obedience and make him perform prayers on time, but nothing more than this so you will not burden or rush him.[5]

Stage Three: Faith Awakening
In stage three, recruiters are urged to awaken passive religious sentiment in recruits. Recruiters are advised to tread carefully and avoid demanding "perfection or full commitment; you should progress gradually." During this stage, recruiters should make recruits seriously consider the pleasures of heaven and the torment of hell. Abu `Amr argues that this dichotomy is a powerful motivator, explaining that radicalization "normally happens to those who fear the torment of the afterlife and who come to know that jihad is the salvation from eternal damnation. The result is that jihad is desired and craved."[6]

During stage three of the program, recruiters should ensure their recruits watch videos of Usama bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri and focus on identifying and fixing any of the recruit's *shubhat* (suspicions). For example, Abu `Amr says that many Muslims blame jihadists for provoking both illustrations of the Prophet

Muhammad in the Western press and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Such *shubhat*, even if they reflect hatred of the West, are disruptive to the recruitment process. Abu `Amr urges recruiters to address them immediately, saying, "Know my beloved brother that one suspicion only is enough to move people off the road, particularly in the beginning."

Abu `Amr is particularly concerned about *shubhat* related to the rulers of Islamic states, and refers to Ibn Abbas' argument that "there is a Kufr that is less than another Kufr."[7] Ibn Abbas argued that a ruler who does not apply Shari`a should not be considered an infidel—and therefore should remain immune from attack—if he applies different rules out of ignorance or if he believes in his heart that the Islamic Shari`a is the right path yet does not know how to apply it correctly. Ibn Abbas' concept directly contradicts Ibn Taymiyya's more expansive understanding of *takfiriyya*—denouncing a Muslim, including the ruler of a state, as an infidel—that is popular with jihadists.

Stage Four: Implanting Jihadist Concepts
The purpose of stage four is to instill jihadist interpretations of traditional Islamic concepts in recruits. Abu `Amr highlights five concepts that are particularly important:

1. Adherence to the book (Qur'an) and the sunna.
2. The religious duty of jihad and the necessity to be prepared.
3. The acceptability of *takfiriyya*.
4. Democracy is a religion and participation in elections is unacceptable.
5. The concept of *al-wala' wa'l-bara'* (loyalty and disavowal).

Abu `Amr understands that the average recruiter will not be a theologian. Rather than master complex ideological arguments themselves, recruiters are urged to instruct recruits to use classic jihadist texts to explain and substantiate critical ideas. Among others, Abu `Amr recommends several classic jihadist writings, including `Abdullah `Azzam's "Liberation of Muslim Lands," the biography of Abu'l-Walid al-Ansari, the *fatwa* of Shaykh al-Shaykh on illegitimate rulers, and Abu

Basir al-Tartusi's "Islamic Ruling on Democracy and Multiplicity of Parties." In addition to reading these texts, Abu `Amr recommends that recruiters teach recruits to download jihadist media and correspond on web forums. In general, however, Abu `Amr's approach to jihadist media is very cautious; he urges recruiters to only show recruits videos when they are in a contemplative mood and are willing to internalize the political message of the propaganda.

Abu `Amr is adamant that recruits accept jihadist ideological doctrine in its entirety, and eschew all other interpretations of Islamic concepts. He argues that doubts and confusion of any kind are disastrous to the effective radicalization of a recruit. Abu `Amr is particularly concerned that new jihadists will be dismayed if their fellow fighters commit illegitimate acts, which presumably refers to the killing of Muslims in places such as Iraq and Algeria. To allay this problem, he explains that recruits must understand that their only true relationship is with God; fighters should maintain their relationships with flawed jihadists but focus on their personal religious commitment rather than worldly concerns.

Stage Five: Formation of a Cell
Forming a cell is the fifth and final stage of Abu `Amr's recruitment course. The fifth stage begins when the recruiter is convinced that a recruit has accepted the principles of jihadist ideology and truly desires violent jihad. Abu `Amr argues that these newly radicalized recruits are ready to read Abu Mus`ab al-Suri's book *The Global Islamic Resistance Call* and suggests that al-Suri's concept of decentralized "individual jihad" is appropriate for the current struggle. Recruiters are to urge recruits to wage jihad in their home country, but to expect that recruits may be unwilling to do so and will be more interested in traveling to Iraq or Afghanistan. Abu `Amr explains that recruits are emotionally drawn to high-profile jihads and must be convinced that it is religiously legitimate and strategically wise to fight at home.

Conclusion
Abu `Amr's greatest innovations are the detailed methodology he provides lay-recruiters, the provision of specific

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5 Ibid., p. 23.
6 Ibid., p. 28.

7 Ibid., p. 37.

tools for measuring the progress of recruits, and an interesting explanation of how to use al-Qa`ida propaganda. By providing these tools, Abu `Amr aims to use structured bureaucratic techniques to empower a less-educated generation of jihadist recruiters to expand al-Qa`ida's reach. In doing so, Abu `Amr also bridges the gap between al-Qa`ida's bureaucratic organizations in Afghanistan and Iraq and the decentralized global jihadist social movement. Most al-Qa`ida handbooks for the decentralized jihadist movement are technical and focus on issues such as weapons or online security. Abu `Amr's handbook is important because it tries to bring the organizational efficiencies of bureaucracy to individual jihadists everywhere.

Abu `Amr's strict methodology reflects the long-standing struggle of jihadists to operate securely but effectively, using relatively unskilled people. Abu `Amr's entire concept of recruitment is founded on the idea that recruiters—not just recruits—will have limited knowledge of jihadist ideological concepts, and therefore need a highly structured program to walk them through the recruitment process. Even though that program is designed to be applied in secret, Abu `Amr's rigorous evaluation mechanisms will inevitably create a signature that less methodological recruitment approaches might not. Cautious recruiters will take care to minimize their risk of discovery, but in the real world not all of Abu `Amr's recruiters will be so cautious. Abu `Amr's program is a dangerous tool that may empower unskilled jihadist recruiters, but like all such innovations, it is also a double-edged sword.

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