

This is an ICSR insight produced by Research Fellow, Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens

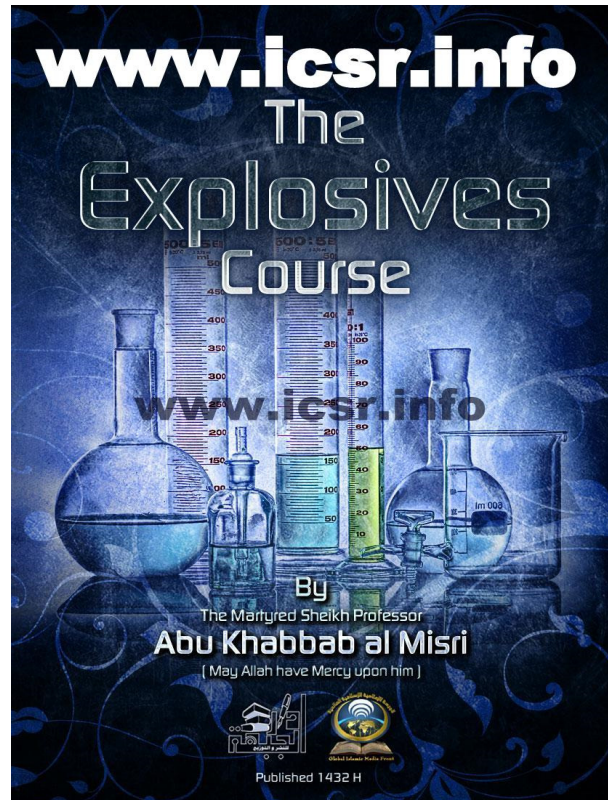
In the last few days, English-language jihadist forums have released a significant new book entitled *The Explosives Course*. Published in 2010 by al-Qaeda's Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF) and apparently compiled by former students of the now deceased al-Qaeda explosives expert Abu Khabab al-Misri (also known as Midhat Mursi al-Sayid Umar), it is among the most comprehensive and sophisticated manuals of its kind. The introduction claims that "this is the first book from a series of books aimed on this subject", noting that further editions and updates will be forthcoming.

Targeting English-speaking audiences, it capitalises on the rise of 'homegrown' extremism in the US and Britain. This manual is widely available within online extremist networks and seeks to arm potential self-starters and 'lone-wolves' with the knowledge they often lack on creating viable explosive devices, in particular those living in the West who are motivated to act but unable to join terrorist training camps abroad. Following a recent rise in incidents of attempted attacks by US nationals on American soil, the US Attorney General Eric Holder claimed earlier this month that the threat of 'homegrown' terror "keeps me up at night". He also warned that "the threat is real, the threat is different, the threat is constant."

To this end, it is notable that al-Misri was a close associate of Abu Musab al-Suri's, with whom he worked alongside at al-Qaeda's Derunta training camp in Afghanistan during the late 1990s. Al-Suri is among al-Qaeda's chief theoreticians, and is credited with formulating the strategic concept of encouraging the creation of self-starter al-Qaeda cells that have little, or no, organisational connection with the network, thus making them less detectable to security authorities.

It is a testament to al-Qaeda's embrace of the al-Suri approach that this work has both the official seal of the GIMF and the alleged backing of a now deceased al-Qaeda senior operator in Sheikh Ahmed Salim Swedan. Furthermore, the work does not contain any details about sophisticated explosives that could only be obtained through high-level terrorist network connections, concentrating instead on substances that are easily procurable for any person living in a Western, urban centre.

Preventing its dissemination will prove an onerous, if not impossible, task for Western security



agencies. This is not least due to it being readily available on the internet, and the determination of many online extremists to continue spreading al-Qaeda materials.

Content

The introduction to the course begins with a frank explanation about its purpose:

This book is aimed for brothers who have a sufficient understanding of the risks in this – both the actual sensitive task of making explosives and of its security risks.

[...]

[it] is released as a reference to practical Shar'ee [Sharia] work of Mujahideen.

The Explosives Course then opens with instructions for building a makeshift laboratory and the various safety precautions required. Later, it lists readily available chemicals which can be mixed to create effective explosive devices. Next to each chemical is also found a suggestion as to its possible location. Popular places include everyday destinations such as supermarkets, garden shops and dental clinics.

The majority of the explosives booklet is devoted to highly detailed instructions – often combined with illustrations – on manufacturing explosives, including the different types of primary charges, main charges, detonators and chemical combinations. There are various types of bombs that the authors recommend, including new and improved versions of handheld Molotov and napalm bombs.

Background

Born in Egypt in 1953, al-Misri remained an elusive character until his death in 2008, but was among al-Qaeda's most wanted operators with a \$5 million bounty on his head. According to the US Department of Justice, he was

[...] an explosives expert and poisons trainer working on behalf of al Qaeda.

He operated a terrorist training camp at Derunta, Afghanistan where he provided hundreds of mujahidin with hands on poisons and explosives training. Since 1999, he has proliferated training manuals that contain recipes for crude chemical and biological weapons. Some of these training manuals were recovered by U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

[Source: United States Department of Justice, Rewards for Justice Program]

Reported to have trained 9/11 conspirator Zacarias Moussaoui and the 'shoe-bomber' Richard Reid, al-Misri was also the head of al-Qaeda's al-Zabadi project; a special unit tasked by Ayman al-Zawahiri with developing chemical and biological weapons for the terror network. For more on Project al-Zabadi and al-Qaeda's WMD programme, see *Through our Enemy's Eyes* by the former head of the CIA's Osama bin Laden unit, Michael Scheuer and The 9/11 Commission Report.

Al-Qaeda also claims that its explosives manual has been approved by Sheikh Ahmed Salim Swedan who was killed in early 2009. Before his death, Swedan was also involved in the early days of al-Qaeda. According to the US Department of Justice, he

was indicted on December 16, 1998, in the Southern District of New York, for his alleged involvement in the August 7, 1998, [al-Qaeda] bombings of the U.S. Embassies in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and Nairobi, Kenya, and for conspiring to kill U.S. nationals.

[Source: United States Department of Justice, Rewards for Justice Program]

To see further coverage in the Daily Telegraph click [here](#).

[Find out More +](#)

ICSR, King's College London, 138-142 Strand, London. WC2R 1HH

Phone: +44 (0) 207 848 2065 | Email: mail@icsr.info

You are receiving this email because you signed up to receive newsletters on our website. If you do not wish to receive these emails please [unsubscribe from this email](#)