

RESEARCH PAPER

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Reconfiguring the Swarm: Revival of Strategic Thinking and Technical Knowledge

A new media outlet in the IS swarm of online communication appeared recently: *Mu'assasat al-saqri li'l-'ulūm al-harbiyya*, *Al-Saqri Corporation for Military Sciences*, focuses on the technical and practical aspects of jihadism¹ and a revival of strategic thinking, signaling the ability to reflect upon recent developments on the ground.

An interesting aspect is the willingness of the *Al-Saqri*-outlet to accept contributions – leaving aside the usual veneration of Usāma bin Lādin by IS circles – from al-Qā'ida subcultures, e. g., a reference to Anwar al-'Awlaqī, published repeatedly²:



Al-Saqri presents an infographic showing the production of the outlet, signaling the multilingual aspect: Arabic as the main language, but also English, French, Russian and Turkish. This multilingual material is published separately, but also as packages (see below).

We have to emphasize the ongoing high frequency of the number of publications issued belying attempts to create the impression of a decline of IS online activities. An almost daily production – in this case study, but there are many other indicators – is a strong indicator for the ongoing media production of IS circles. Taking into account the lead time needed to prepare and produce this material, there may have been months used for preparation before going online.

1 For these aspects see my article in *World Wide Warriors* (in print).

2 All the material quoted are available at a database at the Oriental Institute, University of Vienna.

مؤسسة الصقري للعلوم الحربية

إحصائية 15 شهراً

من تاريخ ١٢- ربيع الثاني- ١٤٣٩ هـ

3

خاصة

تطبيقات

25

انفوجرافيك
تصاميم

وسائط

2

صوتية

مقالات

38

كتاب

3

اصدارات

2

مقال

EN
TR
AR
FR
RU

من أعمالنا

1 سم السيانييد

طريقة صنع مؤقت التفجير بالماء

تعطيل الكاميرات بال

الصقري
مؤسسة

وهي مستمرة ومتطورة رغم الحرب
الشديدة عليها من الصليبيين إن شاء الله

يرفق مع التصميم 8 ملفات مضغوطة ١٢ جمادى الآخرة ١٤٤٠ هـ

أعمالنا المستمرة

- وأعدوا لهم
- الإعداد البدني

هاب الصامت

Phosphine

The first appearance of the outlet at *telegram* could be noticed at least on January 5, 2019, with a warning against fake-accounts and bots (see below). Then *Al-Saqri* provided an infographic on the resources to be used for attacks (January 6, 2019, several groups and channels) and a plan for building a silencer (January 6, 2019).

Strategic Thought and Operational Art

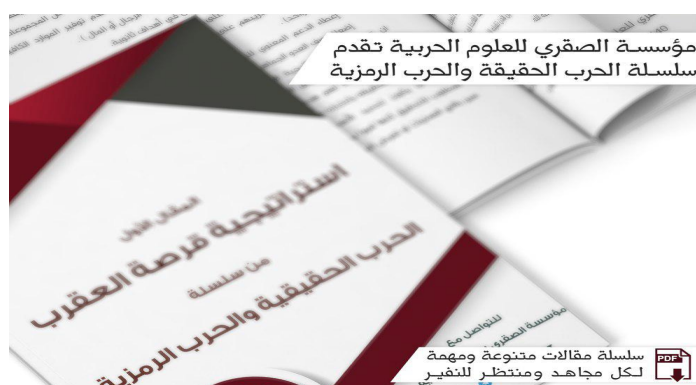
The publishing of resources important lone wolves and other operations are embedded in approaches to be studied in articles published on many IS-related channels and groups on *telegram* in February 2019 in a series called “War of Truth and Symbolic Warfare”.

The first article is titled “Strategy of the Sting of a Scorpion” (*istrātījiyya qarsat al-‘aqrab*), a reissue of an older article. *Al-Saqri* it emerged from the al-Qā’ida of Usāma bin Lādin, not by the al-Qā’ida of al-Zawāhirī, regarded as traitors and squandering the legacy of al-Qā’ida.

The article distinguishes between the two forms of warfare mentioned in the title of the series. Symbolic warfare is seen as the predominant type in the current guerrilla and irregular wars trying to project the idea of being powerful without truly being it. An example given in the article that wearing a revolver may intimidate the enemy even if there are no bullets in it. It is described as being more important to have the power to fight – not only doing so. A true operation will cause a media storm.

The article discusses ways to inflict as much harm to the enemy as possible by defining specific targets. The sequences are described: priority targets and less important ones. The specific targets of operations are arranged according to 1) numbers (the higher the numbers of destroyed, e. g., the better the outcome from the point of view of specific operations, 2) size (the larger the target the better), 3) timing (the more important the time of operation the better), 4) precision (killing a person in an airplane is better than killing in a Hummer vehicle), 5) type (killing a general is better than killing a soldier), 6) location (killing a minister in the Green Zone in Baghdad is better than killing him in the streets), 7) innovation (using new tools or methods is better than using often used tools/methods), 8) strangeness (shooting down a plane with a stone is better than using a rocket). All these aspects have to be looked into to make an operation effective and specific.

The general strategic aim of hitting the enemy at many places is merged with operational art considerations.



The second article mentions that it was first published in jihadi fora in 2009 and is republished because of its usefulness. The article is called “Obscurity and Clarity” (*al-ghumūd al-ifsāh*). The article makes a distinction between operations that are respectable and those that are not, may be called, e. g., pure terrorism. The article emphasizes the importance of achieving one’s ends. For this purpose, organizations may be established that are not known but able to operate successfully. For symbolic warfare, it is important to mention the names of the organization connected to any operations, for true warfare it counts what works. Israeli and Iranian operations are discussed others against Shiite interests in Iraq.

The same merging of strategic and operational art levels of thinking is discernable. How are these thoughts applied in practice?

Tactical Thought

An article by *Al-Saqri* posted in several groups on *telegram* (January 10 and 11, 2019) titled “After the execution” (*mā ba‘da al-tanfīdh*) gives instructions how to plan a lone wolves (or “lone lion” as in the text) operation, discusses the errors that may occur. The next text is about using lasers to temporarily neutralize camera sensors, a translation of an English language text into Arabic by *Al-Saqri* (January 14, 2019).

On



January 22, 2019, several cross-postings were published disseminating a handbook for 'lone wolves', containing drawings illustrating every aspect of the 200 pieces of advice offered to a future 'lone wolves' attacker.

On January 23, 2019, a new series started in several IS groups on *telegram* with the title "*harb al-sumū*", the war of poison, published under the heading "*uqtulhum bi'l-samt*", kill them silently. The first installment is on the production and use of cyanide as a poison (in Arabic: *samm al-sayānīd*). The series has been published on *drive.google.com* using password protection, later it was published as a package (see below). On January 24 the second was out discussing the production and use of botulinum toxin (in Arabic: *butulūmīnīyūm*).

On February 1, 2019, *Al-Saqri* published in several groups an instructional video on the effective use of explosives. There is a warning inserted at the beginning of the video saying it was adopted from a Palestinian source related to "the filthy Iran" indicating the theological distinction between a "pure" Sunni group, esp., IS and Iran as the leading force of the Shiite world going back theologically to the Wahhabi tendency of Islam.

On February 3, 2019, the publication of a brochure is announced. The brochure discusses the best and safe way to deal with explosives. The brochure discusses precautions like the use of safety glasses and provides other warnings for the use of explosives: "The first error will be the last error" (p.3).



Leaving aside this brochure, there is another booklet published on February 3, 2019, discussing the methods of disguise. The booklet stresses the importance of exact planning of operations. Part of it is disguising and changing the appearance of persons. It discusses the changing of complexion, darker or brighter, the disguise of accents if contacts with other people are necessary, changes in the bodily appearance by using certain clothing, using false beards, changing the color of hair, etc.

On February 4, 2019, an announcement classified as "important" has been published

announcing in a religiously contextualized language the start of a new branch of *Al-Saqri* dedicated to physical exercise. The need for physical exercise is stressed in a textual posting on February 16, 2019.

The next installment (No.5)³ of the “Kill them silently” series was published at February 17, 2019, and dealt with “the poisonous oleander”. This was supported by a spoken announcement imbued with religious language and referring to the history of IS by quoting an ancient leader. All installments of the series are mentioned. On February 17, 2019, the packages mentioned above were published in Arabic and Spanish language groups, too.



The package “Kill them silently” is a collection of English language guides⁴ for producing and using toxins published in the series with the Arabic/English title *uqtulhum bi-samt/Kill them silently*.

A package called “Video publications” has a video jointly published by several IS media outlets (*‘Abd al-faqīr/AF*, *al-Battār*, *Al-Saqri*) was published after the announcement of US-president Trump that US-troops will be withdrawn from Syria. The narrative of the video follows the line of

- 1) the announcement of a victory over jihadism has been made before (going back to the “mission accomplished” statement of US-president Bush,
- 2) fighting is going on, “has just begun” in the video, and
- 3) enumerating potential targeted for low-level attacks on “the unbelievers”, esp., by arson to spread “panic in societies that fights Islam.”

The second video in this package produced by *Al-Saqri* is on cyber attacks (Arabic, sg.: *al-darba al-iliktrūniyya*) giving advice on how to carry out effective hacking attacks. The third video is the on producing and using explosives mentioned before.

A package called “Graphics and Infographics” has image files in different formats, e. g., how to build a silencer, constructing a water timer, physical exercise, mixing explosives, a prayer, sticky bombs, hiding a knife in a bread loaf etc. The material as

3 Issue No. 3 and 4 were not publicly disseminated at that day. No. 3 was published as a separate document on February 22, 2019, and discusses the use of a “unique innovator” (Arabic: *mubtakir*), a binary chemical device. No. 4 on animals poison was published in one of the packages mentioned before.

4 Available in Arabic, too.

published before on several *telegram* groups and channels.

The package containing “Material” in French, Russian and Turkish offers instruction for using explosives, esp., explosive belted, hiding knives (see above), constructing a timer and propaganda images saying, e. g., “Hit them violently and ensure that you inflicted the greatest losses on the ennemi” in French.

The package of “Material” in English has a guide of how to build a desktop spy device using a modified cell phone, another file from the “Silent terrorism series” on hydrogen sulfide gas and on phosphine gas, hiding a knife in a loaf of bread, mixing an explosive for a solidox bomb, a detailed guide for building adhesive bombs, making explosive belts and vests and a safety manual mentioned before.⁵



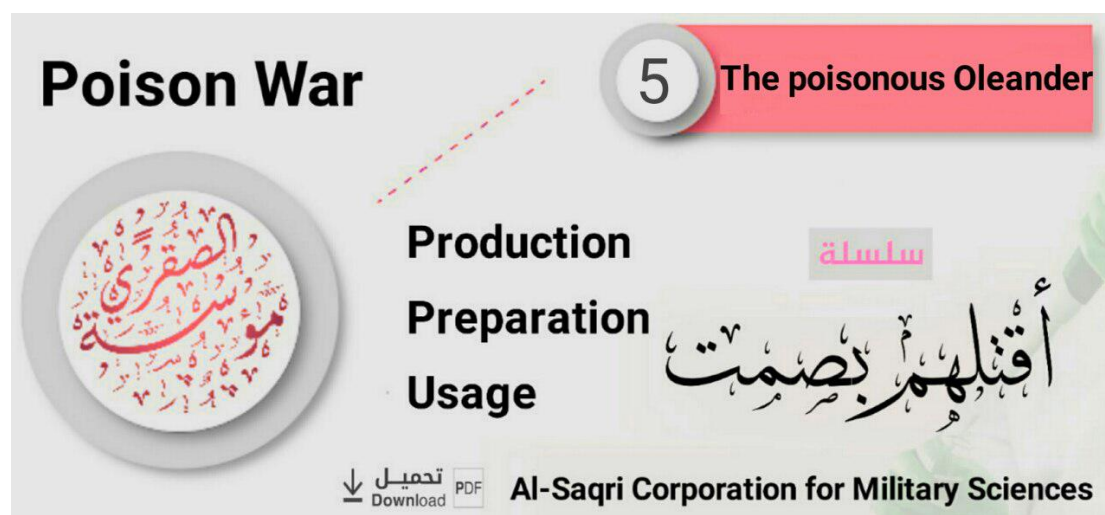
The content of the “Books and Articles” package consists of Arabic language material. Some of the material has already mentioned. Others are a short study on “Oriental Ammunition”, i. e., used by Eastern European guns, Arabic and Iranian, a study on “Western Ammunition”, i. e., ammunition from Eastern European countries,

⁵ The version discussed before is an Arabic language version.

how to build adhesive bombs with a link to an instruction video from the IS-*wilāya* Baghdad, a guide for snipers to fire from the trunk of a car, a short guide on making a silencer, a detailed guide on building tunnels, making a timer using a Casio alarm clock.

The largest file in this package is a book of 168 pages, an “Encyclopedia of Military Engineering” (*al-mawsū‘a al-handasiyya al-‘askariyya*) dealing, esp., with explosives, mines, grenades, etc.

On February 22, 2019, the series “Kill them silently” was published in a series of



PDF-documents including some documents not published before separately. A collection of this series in English was published on February 17, 2019.

On February 19, 2019, and on February 20, 2019, a file with eight pages was published with the title “The poisoned bullet” (*al-rasāsa al-sāmma*). The text of this file was already published in a textual posting on April 24, 2017, and now redesigned in a more attractive form. The text praises the accomplishments of IS technicians in producing ammunition⁶ and describes this kind of bullets as improved ammunition for IS snipers.



Another series started on February 26, 2019. The title reads “The silent terror: Poison gas” (*al-irhāb al-sāmit al-ghāzāt al-qātila*).⁷ It is a ten pages PDF-document on mustard gas its characteristics, its use and how to treat contamination.

⁶ An article on these issues is in print.

⁷ This issue was according to the counting in publication No. 3. Other issues are to be expected.



The next step of the publishing efforts of *Al-Saqri* was the publication of the theoretical articles discussed at the beginning of this paper.

The presentation of the technical material was further increased by using text postings. On March 12, 2019, a course on explosives started on a *telegram* group called *sa-riyya-al-dhi'-ab-al-mu-nfa-rida*. The *Al-Saqri* outlet posts texts of a course for producing explosives for beginners and aiming at “unbelievers, Jews, apostates (*murtaddīn*) and Shiites (*rāfida*)”. The first installment offering an introduction into explosives is out.

On March 11, 2019, and March 12, 2019, *Al-Saqri* issued again an English and Arabic⁸-language warning against fake accounts or bots already published in January (see above):

Warning


الساقرى للعلوم العسكرية

We are your brothers in Al Saqri foundation for the military science warn and caution you that we don't have any publisher or contact accounts beside this bot [@S_R99873_BOT](https://t.me/S_R99873_BOT)

All other accounts that claim belonging to the foundation are fake accounts and they are spies trying to hunt you brothers so be careful

Al Saqri foundation for the military science team

⁸ See our research paper on the new marketingism of IS.

The text in Arabic:

