‘A Lecture on Kidnappings’ by Saif al-Adel
**Saif al-Adel** (literally: "Sword of Justice") is a pseudonym for Muhammad bin Salah al-Din Zidan, an Egyptian strategist belonging to the generation of the founders of Al-Qaeda. Zidan was responsible for bin Laden’s security, he served as the organization’s explosives expert and he was involved in, among other things, planning the terrorist attacks at the US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998. Zidan’s location in recent years remains unknown, although it is widely assumed that he was under house arrest in Iran, from which he was finally released – as reported – in September 2015.  

The lecture, which is summarized below, appeared in a nearly 40-page document dating back to November 2000 but was published for the first time in February 2017 on jihadist Web forums and social networks. Despite its age, the issue of abduction remains relevant for Al-Qaeda and the timing of the document’s publication - in Arabic and English simultaneously - attests to the emphasis the organization still places today on kidnappings as a means of exerting pressure to release prisoners (and, therefore, Saif al-Adel himself dedicates his lecture to jihad fighters languishing in prisons). It should be noted that the leader of Al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, has addressed the issue of kidnappings more than once and encouraged the capture of Western hostages in order to release them in exchange for jailed jihadists (for example, in his recorded speeches that were published in July 2017 and in April 2014). In addition, it is worth recalling that Al-Qaeda carried out several kidnappings over the years in various arenas, including: Mali, Burkina Faso and Yemen. Additional evidence of the importance placed on kidnappings by Al-Qaeda can be found in an operational manual that was written back in 2004 by a member of the organization, Abu Hajer Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin, and was published in the framework of the magazine, *Mua'askar al-Battar*, a leaflet on operational issues published by the ‘Military Council of the Mujahideen in the Arabian Peninsula’ (the predecessor of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula). In the chapter that deals with kidnappings, al-Muqrin presented an analysis of the topic similar to that presented by Saif al-Adel below. 

The lecture is divided into four chapters. The first chapter is devoted to a general overview of the topic of kidnappings, the second chapter deals with the stages of a kidnapping, and the third and fourth chapters are dedicated to secret and public kidnappings, respectively.

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1 September 18, 2015. [http://goo.gl/I96CYP](http://goo.gl/I96CYP)
‘A Lecture on Kidnappings’ – the banner page of the document

Chapter 1 – An Overview of Kidnappings

In the first chapter, Saif al-Adel defines the concept of kidnapping and lists several of its main objectives:

1. To release Muslim prisoners from the jails of the infidels.

2. To obtain important information.

3. To conduct a trial for the enemy after the kidnapping and to execute him for the purposes of deterrence.

4. To create deterrence by means of kidnapping and suicide operations in order to prevent the enemy from committing acts of destruction or using lethal weapons.

5. To provide serious support to Islamic minorities and to promote their agenda by kidnapping figures who fund and support their enemy (for example, in Palestine).

6. To use the media in order to expose the causes that the organization seeks to promote, and in order to present their legitimacy and righteousness in an attempt to garner international empathy.
7. To achieve political goals by turning those issues into international causes.

8. To achieve necessary funding for the movements to finance their jihadist activities.

In terms of possible types of kidnappings, Saif al-Adel creates the following distinction:

1. **Secret Kidnapping** - The abduction and arrival at the hiding place are carried out without detection by security forces. This type is more secure and less risky.

2. **Public Kidnapping** – An abduction by means of transportation, which involves several hostages, and will cause security forces to surround the location and begin negotiations. This type of kidnapping carries great risk and, therefore, in many cases it is preferable to make it a suicide operation.

In order to secure the kidnapping, intelligence must be collected prior to the operation, the plan should be kept simple, tasks should be divided according to teams, an appropriate hiding place should be found and rehearsals should be carried out. In order to ensure a successful kidnapping, Saif Al-Adel emphasizes that it is imperative to maintain secrecy, and to utilize the element of surprise in terms of the weapons, timing and tactics to be used in the operation, such as negotiating aggressively and ensuring that the hiding place is inaccessible.

**Chapter 2 – Stages of the Kidnapping**

In this chapter, Saif al-Adel explains how to carry out a kidnapping in order to attack the three-headed enemy – “the Jews, the Americans and the English”. Al-Adel distinguishes between the two types of kidnappings – the kidnapping of hostages along with the vehicles in which they traveled (public kidnapping) or the kidnapping of hostages only (secret kidnapping). The identity of the hostages bears a great deal of importance and, therefore, the kidnapping of Jews, Americans and English should be prioritized (in that order). Citizens of Western European countries are the second priority for kidnapping, and citizens of Eastern Europe – especially Russia – are the third priority. From the social and political perspectives, it is worthwhile to kidnap tycoons, prominent politicians, senior military personnel, scientists who deal with sensitive sciences, celebrities from the world of art and media, government officials and tourists. It is worth noting that Saif al-Adel makes a distinction between white and black captives, explaining that chances are that a black American tourist will be left to his fate while every effort will be made to release a Jewish tycoon.
In the description of the stages of a kidnapping, al-Adel lists the following: intelligence gathering, planning, execution, transfer of captives, activation of the hiding place and treatment of the captives, negotiations and reaching an agreement, the prisoner exchange, and retreat and hiding. The following is a description of the stages:

1. Intelligence gathering

Intelligence gathering is an essential action to be taken prior to the kidnapping and includes the following:

- The kidnapping target (a person, a group or a transportation vehicle). Intelligence regarding the target of the kidnapping can be gathered from visible sources (the Internet, media, etc.), from human sources, Eavesdropping, surveillance and photography. The necessary intelligence about the target includes its daily schedule, the defense agents that surround it, the people nearby, its habits and weaknesses (Said al-Adel illustrates his theory using intelligence gathering about a group of tourists).

- The kidnapping involves three places: the place the kidnapping is carried out, the hiding place and the place where the hostage is handed over. For instance, it is important to check the locations where the target of the kidnapping tends to stay in order to compare and select the most appropriate place to perform the operation.

- It is important to select roads that will allow for a quick getaway from the kidnapping location. For this purpose, it is necessary to check in advance which roads have a presence by the security forces and what the hours of congestion are on the roads.

- It is important to examine the vehicles that pass through the area where the target of the abduction is located.

2. Planning

Planning involves researching the targets in order to determine the appropriate target, determine the best means to carry out the operation, and define the procedures that will confuse and surprise the enemy as well as reduce the losses as much as possible in case of exposure. Saif al-Adel explains
that the target must be examined from the following aspects: the legitimacy to attack it according to shari’a, its importance and sensitivity from a political perspective, the operational ability to access it, the extent to which harming the it will have an effect in the Islamic world and in the international community, whether it can be rescued, and whether it is possible to assess the enemy’s response to the kidnapping.

In the context of selecting a place to carry out the kidnapping, Saif al-Adel explains that the best places for a kidnapping are those that can be reached with ease before security forces arrive, and he adds that the roads that lead to the kidnapping location and to the hiding place must be safe, with low security presence and little traffic. Regarding the time factor in a kidnapping operation, Saif al-Adel explains that the duration of the kidnapping itself must be taken into account, as well as the amount of time needed to transfer the hostage and conduct negotiations.

Regarding the kidnapping plan, Saif al-Adel notes that a distraction should be used to draw the attention of security personnel from the main area of activity. In addition, he stresses the need to prepare manpower, equipment and cover stories ahead of time. In order to ensure the security aspect of the plan, the intelligence must be kept confidential and its accuracy must be verified. Alongside the main plan, alternative plans must be considered and the roles of each member of the group, as well as what he must do if arrested, should be defined. In order to maintain the precise execution of the plan, Saif al-Adel emphasizes that it is necessary to follow instructions, prevent confusion between roles, apprise of any hitch that might impede the operation, and enforce security procedures on the people, documents and equipment involved. In terms of ‘know thine enemy’, Saif al-Adel details the guidelines that governments have issued to their citizens regarding the desired conduct of hostage in captivity.

3. Execution

The perpetrators of the kidnapping must be divided into several groups:

- *The group that distances the target* – The role of members of this group, who are dressed in civilian clothes and carry concealed light weapons, is to occupy the security forces and keep them away from the breakout group carrying out the kidnapping itself.

- *The group that secures the target* – The members of this group are stationed as guards
at the entrances and exits of the target area in order to secure the area in which the breakout group is operating in order to prevent external interference.

- **The breakout group** – The members of this group must be in excellent physical shape and possess knowledge of martial arts, weapons use and sign language. This group is divided into a deterrence team tasked with breaking into the site (usually without fighting) and a takeover team tasked with seizing the hostage or hostages. In addition, members of this group must wear clothing that will mark them for members of the other groups.

- **The pursuit prevention group** – Similar to the group that distances the target, the role of members of this group is to help the breakout group but in contrast to the former, members of the latter group are mobile and not stationary.

Saif al-Adel divides the attack into three stages (battle, breakout and retreat) and notes that the real attack must be preceded by a distraction event, such as a large fire or a car explosion on a bridge. In the framework of the real attack, the distancing group must seize positions and signal to the security group that it is ready to divert the security units. After preventing security forces from intervening, the security group must signal to the breakout group that the situation is under control.

In the next stage, the deterrence team must break into the site where the target is located while causing fear and confusion in order to prepare the ground for the takeover team that comes immediately after it, kidnaps the hostage quickly and retreats. At this stage, the deterrence team must provide cover for the takeover team as it retreats. The takeover team must retreat quickly to safety while the deterrence team protects the takeover team. The moment the takeover group leaves the site of the kidnapping, the security group must leave the site for its point of origin and signal to the distancing group to evacuate. The distancing group also returns to its place of origin and blends in among civilians. In the final stage, the pursuit prevention group must occupy the security forces that gave chase and prevent them from reaching the breakout group. Saif al-Adel ends by remarking that it is forbidden for any one group to know the safe place of another group.

4. Transfer of the Captives

The command must verify that the groups reach the secure locations safely and, most importantly,
must make sure that the breakout group arrives together with the hostages to the final hiding place.
Later, the rest of the groups must be withdrawn or dismantled according to the plan or the development of the security situation. Regarding the method of transferring the hostages, Saif al-Adel recommends being creative and innovative, and suggests drugging the hostages and transferring them in a car that will not arouse suspicion (a vehicle for transporting a coffin, a vehicle for transporting prisoners, a tour bus, or a fruit and vegetable truck).

5. Hiding places and treatment of hostages
Saif al-Adel emphasizes the importance of the hiding place in light of the enemy’s desire to locate the site in order to storm it and free the hostages. As examples of places that the enemy will find difficult to penetrate, Saif al-Adel mentions the Kandahar Airport or the Philippine forests.

The initial hiding place is where traces of the kidnapping should be erased and from which the hostages are transferred to various safe locations. The final hiding place must be in an inaccessible area (such as mountains or forests) outside the sovereign territory of the enemy state. Saif al-Adel emphasizes that this is one of the reasons behind successful negotiations, and that the enemy must be made to feel that it will be able to rescue the hostages without conceding 75% of the demands.

Regarding the treatment of the hostages, Saif al-Adel explains that it depends on the message that the kidnappers wish to convey to the authorities as well as to the hostages after their release.

4. Negotiations and Reaching an Agreement

After arriving at the final hiding place, the negotiation process must begin. In this context, Saif al-Adel stresses that the negotiators must be familiar with the issue over which the abduction was carried out by demonstrating verbal skills and using strong arguments against the enemy. If the government drags its feet and procrastinates, they must begin executing the hostages.
Saif al-Adel notes that, contrary to assassinations or other attacks, kidnappings can serve as a platform to promote an issue or to convey messages. He emphasizes that the message should be prepared in advance and the strategy of the organization should be explained concisely and firmly.

With regard to exerting emotional pressure on public opinion, Saif al-Adel notes that videos must be published documenting the suffering of the hostages in captivity, but he clarifies that it must be done gradually and that torture or beheadings that could damage the general issue in the long
run should not be immediately documented. Saif al-Adel explains that the demands made in exchange for the release of the hostages must be deliberately exaggerated in order to allow room for bargaining with the enemy. In addition, he lists several warnings with regard to kidnapping, such as: avoid holding the hostages for long periods of time, be cautious of snipers, check the food served to the kidnappers, and exercise caution against the enemy’s use of anesthetic gas. In this context, Saif al-Adel recommends not releasing the infirm, the elderly, women and children since they are likely to provide information that will help the enemy.

5. The Prisoner Exchange

Saif al-Adel stresses the importance of this stage in the kidnapping, and notes that the handing over of the hostages must be carried out in friendly surroundings, full of obstacles or under the control of the organization carrying out the kidnapping, and he adds that it is preferable for the hostages to be handed over to humanitarian (and not governmental) bodies. With regard to the exchange received by the kidnappers, he recommends making certain that the prisoners released are healthy and were not poisoned, that the money is not counterfeit and that the weapons or equipment that were transferred are in good condition.

6. Retreat and Hiding

In this chapter, Saif al-Adel makes a number of recommendations regarding the procedures to be taken after receiving the exchange for the hostages. He recommends avoiding giving personal information to the released hostages and suggests that a masked individual maintain contact with them. In addition, he explains that the organization’s strongholds and commanders must be secured and a defensive plan must be prepared in case the enemy decides to attack.

Chapter 3 – Secret Kidnappings

The third chapter was supposed to deal with secret kidnappings and analyze, as a case study, a kidnapping that was carried out by Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines (in 2000, the Abu Sayyaf organization carried out several kidnappings and it is impossible to know with certainty which one of them the chapter was meant to address). Saif al-Adel notes here that since he does not have sufficient information about this kidnapping, he is unable to analyze the incident.

Chapter 4 – Public Kidnappings
In order to address public kidnappings, Saif al-Adel presents as a case study the Indian Airlines Flight 814 hijacking in December 1999. This hijacking led to – among other things – the release of Sheikh Masud Azhar, the founder and leader of Jaish-e-Mohammed, a jihadist group that operated in Azad Kashmir. Saif al-Adel relates how, at the end of the month of Ramadan in 2000, he met Ibrahim Azhar, the commander of the operation, who told him the story of the hijacking over several hours (Ibrahim is the brother of Sheikh Masud Azhar). In this framework, Ibrahim explained that since the arrest of Sheikh Masud Azhar, attempts were made to free him within India but they were unsuccessful and, therefore, it was decided to carry out an operation outside of India, such as kidnapping the Indian Ambassador or hijacking an Indian plane. Since attempts to kidnap the ambassador did not succeed, the plan changed to hijack a plan, which led the hijackers – approximately one-and-a-half years before the hijacking – to issue Indian certificates and documents, and to collect data on airplanes, airports and security procedures in various countries, as well as watch videos about airplane hijackings.

Based on this examination, a number of places were identified as having loose security, and in the end Nepal was chosen as the target of an aircraft hijacking for the following reasons:

1. There are many Western tourists in Nepal. The kidnapping of foreign tourists will embarrass the Indian government and put pressure on it.

2. An examination of flights and tracking of tourists shows that Western tourists usually arrive in Nepal and go from there to India, and not vice versa.

3. There is an agreement between India and Nepal that allows their citizens to pass from country to country without a visa or passport.

4. Nepal was favored due to its weak economic situation, based on the assumption that living costs, arrangements, and arms purchases would be low – an assumption that turned out to be wrong.

Ibrahim related that, despite the difficulty in obtaining weapons in Nepal, he and his men managed to obtain four hand grenades and four guns from a retired army officer. In order to get the weapons into the airport, the hijackers made contact with a senior member of the airport staff on the pretext that they wanted to smuggle a drug package from Nepal to India. After they discovered that the bribe
amount would be higher than they could afford to pay, the hijackers decided to enter the airport with the weapons hidden in their luggage according to the following plan: Only one person would enter the airport with a weapon – and if he succeeds in smuggling the weapon inside, he will make contact with the rest of the group members staying at a hotel in order for them to join him. If he is arrested or does not make contact, the rest of the group members will leave the country, not via the airport. Ibrahim noted that, according to the plan, the person smuggling the weapon must be able to speak to the media and present the Kashmir issue if he is arrested.

After the weapon smuggler is selected via lottery, the plan to smuggle weapons into the airport is hatched. In this context, Ibrahim said that since members of the group had passed through the airport in Nepal several times, they noticed that the security personnel tended to be soft on the passengers and sometimes did not even check passengers with the respectable appearance of well-off people. Based on all of the above, the final plan for the flight was prepared:

1. Two first class and three economy class tickets were purchased.
2. Elegant and expensive clothing were purchased in order to give a look of respect and prestige.
3. A pouch was purchased for carrying money, as well as two lap belts and masks for each member of the group.
4. Ropes and daggers were purchased, which are permissible to carry because of their traditional value in Nepal.
5. It was decided to place the four hand grenades in the money pouch and the four guns in the lap belts, two guns in each belt.

Ibrahim related that the gun smuggler managed to pass through the airport "as if the world was struck blind" and he thanked Allah for that. After he made contact with them from the airport, the rest of the cell members joined the smuggler and boarded the plane together. Ibrahim detailed the plan from the moment of boarding the plane:

1. The chosen flight is scheduled to leave Katmandu for New Delhi and to last approximately an hour and a quarter.
2. The hijacking will be timed for the middle of the flight, while the plane will be over India.
3. The gun smuggler flying in first class will enter the bathroom in order to put on the mask, take out his weapon and announce the hijacking.

4. The second member of the cell will be near the bathroom in order to take the weapons and masks from the first member, and distribute them.

5. According to the original plan, the first member of the cell was supposed to break into the cockpit but that ended up not being necessary since the moment he approached the door a steward exited, enabling the first cell member to hold a gun to the steward’s head and to threaten to activate the grenade and start shooting.

6. The remaining cell members will evacuate first class passengers to the economy section in order to turn first class into a place for them to keep hostages or execute them without the rest of the passengers witnessing it. Two members of the cell were stationed at the front aisles, one member was stationed at a back aisle and the fourth was to serve as the connecting link between the members of the group.

7. Should there be a need to execute hostages, they should be carried out using daggers out of concern that gunfire could cause damage to the body of the aircraft and cause panic among the passengers.

8. After subduing the passengers and crew, the passengers must be informed that the plane is under the control of the hijackers and that the operation is being carried out for Kashmir and its conflict with India.

9. The eyes of the passengers should be covered – this was not carried out in the end due to the difficult state of the passengers, which included sick individuals, women and children.

10. The following arrangement was decided upon:

a) The plane will first fly outside India, stopping first in Dubai.

b) The plane should not remain long in the same airport for fear of an attack by the authorities.

c) Demands will only be presented if the plane is refueled.
d) The plane’s engines will not be turned off and the plane will not be parked in place, but rather it will station itself on the runway and move slightly.

e) In the event that the authorities attempt to attack or encircle the aircraft, the execution of hostages will begin immediately.

f) In the event that the authorities tarry, the plane will leave the airport immediately even if it is surrounded.

g) In the event that negotiations fails, the operation will be changed to a suicide operation in order to 'teach the world an unforgettable lesson' so that in every future hijacking operation, the demands will be met immediately.

h) In the event that an agreement is reached, the prisoner exchange will take place at the Kabul Airport for a number of reasons. Ibrahim explained that this location was selected in anticipation of identification and empathy by the Islamic regime of the Taliban in Afghanistan for the jihadist identity of the hijackers, and based on the shari’a prohibition against killing Muslims for infidels. Ibrahim adds that he and his associates assumed that the Taliban would serve as an ideological ally of the hijackers, based on the personality of the Emir of the Faithful (Mullah Omar) and his steadfastness on the issue of Osama bin Laden.

After providing the details of the plan, Ibrahim related what actually took place. The plan for the assault and takeover went as planned but as a result of fuel limitations it was not possible to reach Dubai and after being refused landing in Lahore, it was decided to land in Amristar in India. After their request to refuel the plane was refused in India, the hijackers - who cut one hostage's throat and wounded another - forced the pilot to take off from there to Lahore (after discovering that army forces were hiding behind the refueling truck and preparing to storm the plane). Following discussions with the Pakistanis at Lahore Airport where they landed, the plane was refueled and continued to Kabul but due to technical difficulties it was impossible to land there at night and the plane diverted towards Dubai.

In Dubai, the plane landed at a small airport, which was later discovered to be a military airport. After the hijackers threatened to execute another hostage, the local authorities agreed to refuel the plane in exchange for the release of 24 hostages (women with children, several sick individuals, the man who was executed and the wounded hostage).
In Dubai, a fuel leak was discovered from the plane but it was not repaired since the pilot took off under threats from the hijackers after their request to authorities for food to be delivered by children arriving on a bus was denied. The plane left Dubai and headed to Kabul a second time but it were refused landing for a second time and directed to Kandahar. Ibrahim related that throughout the entire flight, he never stop imagining the Muslim prisoners in jails in India for whose sake the hijacking was being carried out.

After landing in Kandahar, the plane refueled but as a result of the worsening of the malfunction in the fuel tank, the hijackers realized that they could not keep moving and that they must present their demands, which were:

1. To present the Kashmir issue to the world as well as the suffering of the Kashmir nation at the hands of the Indian government.

2. The Indian government must pay 200 million dollars in ransom for the plane and its passengers.

3. India must release 36 prisoners from the ‘heroes of Kashmir’ being held in Indian prison, especially Sheikh Masud Azhar.

Ibrahim explained that, despite lengthy negotiations, the hijackers’ will was not broken, and they drew encouragement and support from their presence on Afghan soil. After long days of waiting, an Indian plane eventually landed carrying Sheikh Masud Azhar and two other 'heroes' who were released from prison. The hijackers boarded a bus that took Sheikh Masud and his two comrades, while the passengers of flight 814 were transferred to a new plane. Ibrahim concluded that the operation was successful because it succeeded in bringing attention to the Kashmir issue and bringing about the release of Sheikh Masud and two others. Ibrahim concluded with several pieces of advice with regard to hijackings:

1. Weapons can be easily smuggled on to a plane if one has enough money.

2. Determination ensures success in such operations.

3. Everything that is said should be taken seriously and one must be capable of carrying it out.

4. One must be willing to change the operation from a hijacking to a suicide operation.
5. No law in the world should be taken into account because the job of Muslims is to destroy the secular laws.

On the last page of the document, the lessons learned from the hijacking operation were presented. Among others, importance was attached to the sense of brotherhood and earnestness that accompanied the hijacking, as well as the collection of accurate intelligence over time, which was one of the factors that led to its success. It was explained that the hijacking succeeded thanks to the proper preparations made by the hijackers (in terms of documents and cover stories suitable for places of residence and travel) and thanks to the selection of a country with loose security where it was possible to take the type of hostage necessary (in this case, Indian citizens). Another lesson was the intense thought that the hijackers put into every possible development, the determination that they showed during the negotiations, and their understanding of human nature (as reflected in their ability to make the pilot cooperate). He also mentioned that the demands of the operation were commensurate with its scope, and he noted positively that the victims’ throats were slit, which creates a stronger deterrent effect than had they been shot to death. Finally, he noted that a hijacking operation must always be turned into a suicide operation in the event that negotiations fail or security forces storm the hijackers.
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