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"The Online Jihadist Threat"

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A Plain Paradox

Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda's main leadership, remain isolated and likely hidden along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, relegated to one of the most remote areas of the world. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who terrorized Iraq since the US invasion in March 2003, is now dead and buried. Khalid Shaykh Muhammad, Abu Zubaydah, and a host of other top and mid-level al-Qaeda operatives have been killed or captured. The US military destroyed al-Qaeda's most significant training camps in Afghanistan. The United States, the United Nations, and numerous other countries and entities have embarked on ambitious campaigns to stem terrorist financing, exposing terrorist front groups and blacklisting individuals involved in providing logistical and financial support to al-Qaeda and similar groups. Measured by these benchmarks, the Global War on Terror is an unmitigated success.

Yet, anyone who reads the front page of a newspaper today quickly recognizes that al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups are far from defeated. Despite their isolation, bin Laden and Zawahiri maintain an active dialogue with followers, issuing statements through the internet to a worldwide audience. Jihadists continue to hold al-Qaeda in the highest esteem, with localized terrorist groups in Iraq, Egypt, Algeria, Somalia, and elsewhere pledging their allegiance to bin Laden. For example, in December 2006 and January 2007, the SITE institute retrieved two official statements from the Algerian Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC). In these communications, disseminated via the internet, the local group renewed its allegiance to bin Laden and changed its name to "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," following bin Laden's approval. Situations like this one are mere examples of how the support for Al-Qaeda seems to be growing, rather than the opposite.

On a daily basis, a wide range of jihadist supporters re-experience the increasing violence in Iraq by watching online videos that exalt such figures like "Juba, the Sniper," champion the destructive power of the constantly refurbished IED systems, and highlight the vulnerability of the might of Chinooks, Apaches, or Black Hawks. Instead of being discouraged by Abu Musab al Zarqawi's death, the entire jihadist online community used this opportunity to eulogize him as a martyr and continue rallying support for the cause. Likewise, as evidenced by the detailed operational reports known to the online jihadist community as "harvests," suicide bombings now appear regularly in Afghanistan, a country that has never seen such types of attacks in the past. Post-9/11 terrorist bombings in Madrid, London, Bali, Istanbul, and elsewhere poignantly demonstrate that the war on terror is not won. In addition to these successful attacks, it seems as though a never-ending series of terrorist plots and training camps are constantly being broken up across the world, from China to Canada. Nowhere appears to be immune from terrorist activity.

The paradox is plain: Despite very real and significant successes in dismantling and disrupting terrorists and their supporters, the terrorist threat remains and does not appear to be shrinking. What, then, enables jihadist terrorist groups to continue recruiting, planning, and fundraising, undeterred by the litany of measures taken against them? The short answer is that jihadist

networks have evolved to the point where no gun, bomb, or assassination can harm them permanently.

A New War

The United States military has the most advanced weapons in the world and yet is currently unable to defeat the jihadist movement, whose weapons pale in comparison. While the United States military has demonstrated some remarkable successes, such as eliminating Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the resulting impact on the jihadist movement has been minimal. As has been noted repeatedly since 9/11, al-Qaeda has transformed into a decentralized movement led by an ideology, not any particular leader. The military and law enforcement agencies will always have a role in disrupting the activities of jihadist groups on the ground, but combating an ideology with bullets only is not enough.

The defense establishment and other branches of our government need to further refine their understanding of various dimensions which are playing an increasingly important role in the transformation of this global challenge. The impact that ideology and information technology are having on the evolution of the jihadist phenomenon can not be underestimated by any institution tasked with the defense of national or worldwide constituencies.

So long as there remain individuals who believe in the jihadist ideology, jihadists will continue to exist, able to replace the leaders and operatives who are killed, arrested, or otherwise marginalized. The challenge is to defend ourselves from the jihadist threat to the best of our ability. However, we can not develop effective counter-strategies without understanding the enemy completely, both ideologically and operationally. Though studying the jihadists on the ground and in the battlefield is a vital component to understanding their modus operandi, it is not the only place we must look for answers. We must examine the space where jihadism exists unabated: the internet.

It is the internet that enables jihadist networks to continue to exist despite the military might of the United States. Regional jihadist groups throughout the world, whether in Pakistan, Indonesia, Somalia, Iraq, or elsewhere, may have difficulty in contacting and connecting with one another in the physical world; however, on the internet, these jihadist networks all share the same virtual space, forming a unified online jihadist network that knows no physical boundaries.

Though guns, IEDs, and other weapons are necessary for terrorists to maintain their relevance and dangerousness, the internet is what enables jihadists to coordinate, share information, recruit new members, and propagate their ideology. If we do not treat the internet as a crucial battleground in the war on terror, we will not be able to defeat the jihadist threat.

In addition, by studying jihadists on the internet, we can learn about our enemy, including who they are, their location, their ideology, trends in tactics, and their training. Understanding our enemy will help us to counter their propaganda, predict types of future attacks, find them, and

defend ourselves against their methods. Though by no means a panacea to the jihadist threat, examining their activity on the internet will aid the Global War on Terror.

The Power of Open Source Intelligence

Undeniably, classified information will always comprise an important source of intelligence. However, since the global jihadist movement exists in the public domain accessible to non-governmental organizations, open source methods of intelligence gathering provide a wealth of intelligence that can result in very real strategic, operational, and even tactical successes.

The SITE Institute has spent several years infiltrating, studying, and analyzing the online jihadist community and has been able to gather actionable intelligence from jihadists on the internet. This information, obtained using open source methods, has directly helped warfighters in Iraq. The *Christian Science Monitor* noted, "According to a Marine colleague who just returned from Iraq, information on the SITE website was used within hours of posting to prevent a terrorist attack in Iraq, demonstrating that third-party analysis has become a key component of intelligence."[1]

The SITE Institute has also provided intelligence to foreign governments that has aided in preventing jihadists from leaving European countries to joint jihadists in foreign countries to attack coalition forces. After infiltrating and monitoring an online jihadist internet forum used for recruiting individuals to jihad, the SITE Institute obtained intelligence that members of the forum were soon leaving their countries of residence in Europe to engage in suicide operations against coalition forces in conflict areas. We contacted a federal US law enforcement agency to provide them with the intelligence, but the agency was uninterested. The SITE Institute then reached law enforcement agents in the European countries, who eagerly received the information. The European governments determined that the intelligence was indeed actionable and promptly detained the individuals.

In other cases, just by monitoring jihadist forums, the SITE Institute has informed the US military of potential threats. For example, previously in 2004, the SITE Institute discovered a posting on the now defunct Ansar jihadist forum. The message, titled "A Photo and Important Information,"[2] concerned a Sergeant[3] of Arab descent in the US Air Force. The message included detailed information about the Sergeant taken from the Air Force's website. The message concluded, "This hypocrite will be going to Iraq in September of this year – I pray to Allah that his cunning leads to his slaughter. I hope that he will be slaughtered the Zarqawi way, and then [go from there] to the lowest point in Hell." The message also contained information not available publicly on the Air Force's website that the soldier was to be deployed to Iraq soon. The SITE Institute promptly alerted the serviceman's line of command, who, we were told, had

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[1] Douglas Raymond and Paula Broadwell. "The Wikipedia way to better intelligence." *Christian Science Monitor.* January 8, 2007.
[2] http://www.ansarnet.ws/vb/showthread.php?t=11241
[3] Name withheld for his security.

not received any other warnings pertaining to the Sergeant from any government agency or anyone else, which then prompted them to start their own investigation into how the soldier's deployment details were known by the jihadists.

Clearly, intelligence gathered with an open source method can be extremely valuable. While classified sources will always serve as essential means of crafting intelligence, open source information can just as often lead to actionable intelligence, as well as provide us with a strategic understanding into how the current jihadist movement operates. Indeed, the intelligence related in the following pages has all been gathered using open source methods.

Current Structure of the Online Jihadist Movement

In order to understand the global jihadist threat, it is necessary to review the structure of the online jihadist movement. After developing a basic knowledge of how jihadists groups utilize the internet, one can see how established jihadist groups like al-Qaeda direct the jihadist movement and can continue to exist despite the traditional measures taken against them. Once dissected, the online jihadist movement can be infiltrated, analyzed, and countered. The following provides an overview of how jihadists uses the internet, how information is disseminated and circulated, and how the internet serves all the necessary functions jihadist groups need to continue to survive.

At least since the 1990s, Al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups have used the internet to broadcast propaganda and recruit members. After 9/11 and the resulting destruction of terrorist training camps followed by the ensuing decentralization of al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups, the internet became essential to allowing jihadist groups to continue to operate effectively. Today, jihadist groups utilize websites, messageboards,[4] e-groups, blogs, instant messaging, and other services available through the internet to continue to indoctrinate, communicate, recruit, and plan attacks.

While many may perceive that jihadist activity on the internet is chaotic, it is in fact very structured. Only a handful of primary source jihadist websites distribute the media of the leaders of al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups. Through this small number of specific, password-protected online forums, the leading jihadist groups, like al-Qaeda, post their communiqués and propaganda. By keeping the number of primary source jihadist websites small, online jihadist ideologues and leaders of jihadist groups can provide a transparent mechanism to authenticate communiqués. In this way, the global jihadist movement can instantly discern the difference between official and fake communiqués by checking the source of the website and the individual who posted it. Though the number of primary source forums is small, there are tens of thousands of members registered on these websites, giving the jihadists a wide reach.

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[4] An online messageboard, also called an online forum, allows users to communicate and discuss topics easily with each other on the same website. Messageboards, which may be password-protected, foster the creation of virtual communities and are essential to reinforcing a shared global jihadist identify.

Once an official message from a jihadist group is posted to a primary source message forum, members of the primary message forum will then disseminate that posting to other secondary messageboards. From these secondary messageboards, other peripheral individuals will then disseminate the information onto other messageboards (See Figure Below)

DATA

Primary Websites

Secondary Websites

Tertiary Websites and Beyond
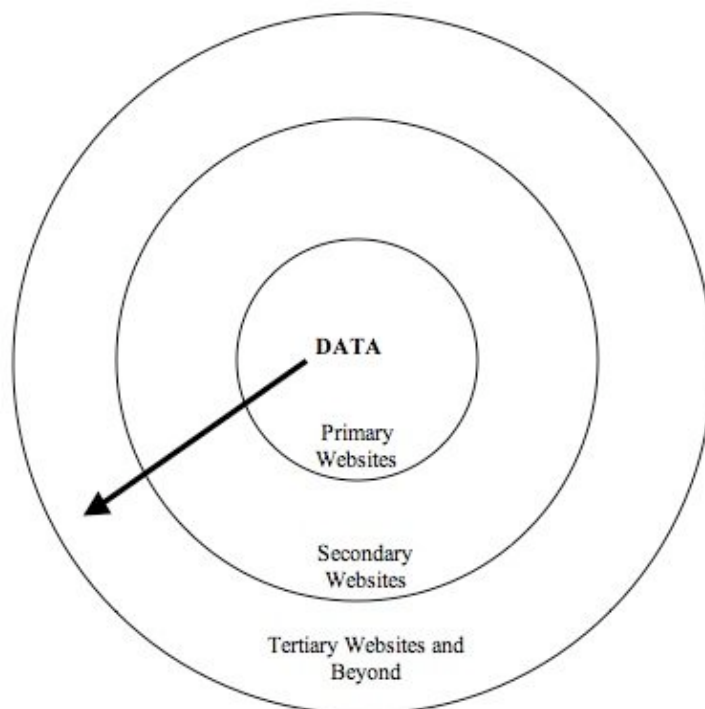
Dissemination of Primary Source Jihadist Data

Thus, the online jihadist movement has developed in such a way that it is at once decentralized but rigidly hierarchical. The jihadists can demonstrate that their communiqués are authentic by releasing information only on the primary websites and then rely on the secondary and tertiary websites to disseminate their data to larger groups of people.

Al-Fajr Center

The group that coordinates the online distribution of authentic jihadist communiqués, such as a video by bin Laden, Zawahiri, and other jihadist leaders, is called Al-Fajr Center. Established officially in January 2006, Al-Fajr Center is entirely virtual and exists only online. The organization serves not only al-Qaeda but numerous jihadist groups who share the same ideology. Besides al-Qaeda, the groups that utilize Al-Fajr Center include several of the Iraqi insurgency groups, Palestinian jihadist groups, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (formerly the GSPC), the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, Somali jihadist groups, Saudi jihadist groups, the Taliban and other insurgent groups in Afghanistan, and even a group in western China.

The underlying purpose of Al-Fajr Center is to coordinate propaganda efforts through highly centralized and secure channels. This enables the groups utilizing al-Fajr to unify strategies, achieve economies of scale, and establish trusted channels of communication. Through the center's efforts, individuals across the globe are provided with easy access to authentic jihadist propaganda coming from a single source. This tactic slowly erases the lines between the regional terrorist groups, effectively portraying a strong, united group against the West. Because of the apparent closeness between al-Qaeda and the other groups using Al-Fajr Center, those indoctrinated by Al-Fajr Center will support any jihadist group releasing media through the center, not just al-Qaeda.

The group's products are eclectic and very frequent, creating a stimulating environment for jihadists. Al-Fajr Center distributes dozens of daily communiqués from jihadist groups taking credit for attacks in Iraq, Afghanistan, Algeria, and elsewhere. In addition to these daily communiqués, the group also regularly dispatches special releases. For example, in November 2006, Al-Fajr released a written analysis of the current state of conflict in Afghanistan. The following week, the organization released a strategic manual, the "Technical Mujahid," devoted to understanding the internet and internet security. The very next day, the center was responsible for the release of a video provided by a representative of a Somali jihadist group. These releases came only days after a video calling for jihad in Xinjiang, China, called East Turkistan by the jihadists.

Al-Fajr Center itself is very structured and is divided into several different brigades, each with a designated purpose.

These brigades include:

- **Hacking Brigade**, in charge of hacking websites, carrying out Denial of Service (DoS) attacks, and identifying vulnerable websites
- **Intelligence Brigade**, in charge of gathering information, both online and in the physical world. For example, this brigade monitors the websites of the government, think tanks, and the media, like the White House, the U.S. Army, the Rand Corporation, the Jamestown foundation, Newsweek, Time Magazine, and others.
- **Distribution Brigade**, in charge of distributing the propaganda released by jihadist groups, such as taking credit for daily attacks, media from jihadist leaders, videos of attacks, training videos, and other videos of fighting from all over the world
- **Publications Brigade**, in charge of producing studies and training manuals in magazine form, like the "Technical Mujahid"
- **Cybersecurity Brigade**, in charge of protecting the security of jihadist websites
- **Multimedia Brigade**, in charge of producing multimedia jihadist propaganda, including attacks on American forces, preparation of IEDS, audio and video messages from jihadist leadership, statements of martyrs, and other propaganda

Each of these groups has its own special messageboard which only members of each brigade can access. Each brigade contains leaders who coordinate their efforts with the jihadist leadership.

The costs to run these brigades are minimal, as those involved are donating their time and effort for their cause. The members of these brigades do their work not for any particular jihadist group but for the entire movement. The virtual layer between the members of these brigades and the actual jihadist groups themselves creates an extremely operationally secure mechanism to transmit information.

While these propaganda efforts are the driving force behind Al-Fajr Center, the organization does serve another purpose for jihadist groups by providing numerous services for jihadist leaders. Because Al-Fajr Center is in communication with representatives of all the major jihadist groups, including al-Qaeda, it can also facilitate the rapid transfer of information between jihadist groups and pass on information that the center has gathered. In this way, the online representatives of jihadist groups can then pass the information on to the leaders of there groups via courier, even in the remote areas of the Northwest Frontier Province in Pakistan.

This mechanism may help explain how isolated jihadists like bin Laden and Zawahiri can reference extremely current events in the propaganda they release. Likewise, the efficiency of Al-Fajr Center may also explain how jihadist leaders have been able to release messages more frequently than in the past. Reinforcing this trend is that jihadist leaders have begun to release their videos online first, rather than relying on the al-Jazeera television network, which often only shows a small portion of the entire propaganda piece.

Al-Fajr Center is a powerful tool for jihadist groups because their messages can be spread rapidly while retaining their authenticity. As the primary outlet for most of the major jihadist groups, Al-Fajr Center's operations contribute greatly to fostering a unified, global jihadist community. Similarly, the center benefits jihadist groups themselves by allowing them to coordinate, share information, and consolidate their power to continue to lead the jihadist movement. Damaging Al-Fajr Center would prove a severe blow to the jihadist groups' ability to gather information, proselytize, and recruit.

Global Islamic Media Front and Other Online Jihadist Media Organizations

Al-Fajr Center serves the role of the official distributor for the propaganda of many jihadist groups, but the center is not the only major outlet for jihadist propaganda. Other virtual groups, like the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF), the Jihadi Brigades, the Ansar e-Group, and smaller groups, also contribute propaganda to the online jihadist community. Some groups have no direct affiliation with any particular jihadist organization but are made up of supporters who believe in the jihadist ideology. The existence of these groups provides the online jihadist with a continuous stream of propaganda, never leaving the online jihadist community without movies, documents, messages, magazines, training manuals, and even video games, all of which are created to indoctrinate others to support the jihadist cause.

One of the oldest and most prominent virtual propaganda groups is the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF), which also disseminates its propaganda through Al-Fajr Center. GIMF, which

openly supports al-Qaeda, produces copious amounts of propaganda, but the identity and location of the individuals who comprise GIMF are kept secret. What is known about GIMF is that its members are jihadists who have taken on the duty of disseminating the propaganda of al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups. At the same time, GIMF provides potential jihadists with the tactical knowledge and tools needed to carry out jihad.

GIMF's Internet material includes Flash presentations, videos of "Americans and Western crimes against Muslims," and even indoctrinating entertainment in the form of TV programs and video games. One such program, fashioned as a television network's nightly news is titled "Voice of the Caliphate." The news program features masked anchors seated in front of the backdrop of an assault weapon and providing news, including video segments, from fronts of jihad, such as Iraq, Chechnya, and Palestine. One of GIMF's most popular video games recently was titled "Night of Bush Capturing." The first-person perspective shooting game, in which the player targets American soldiers, President George Bush, Prime Minister Tony Blair, and Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, was distributed in September 2006 throughout jihadist message boards and created for "terrorist children." Besides these visual media, GIMF distributes numerous print and multimedia material very frequently. Within hours after release, the material is spread across numerous jihadist forums, websites, e-groups, email lists, and other internet forums, reaching a large audience. Occasionally, the GIMF's material attracts mainstream media attention and can appear on Arab and worldwide media.

Because of the huge audiences they can reach, GIMF and groups like it provide the jihadists with relentless propaganda and are succeeding at indoctrinating, radicalizing, and recruiting new supporters. Countering these jihadist media organizations is essential to stemming the flow of new recruits and to prevent jihadist groups from having a powerful, global voice. By taking measures against them, jihadist groups would find it more difficult to broadcast and glorify their activities, eliminating a powerful piece of propaganda.

The Virtual Jihadist Network

Jihadist groups use the internet to provide a virtual social network to indoctrinate, recruit, and train followers. Because of the constant and overwhelming propaganda the jihadists produce, any individual, even with no prior association to jihadist ideology, can quickly feel like he or she is part of the global jihadist community and self-radicalize himself or herself. Once a believer, these self-radicalized individuals will seek out others who think like them online, eventually discovering the primary source jihadist websites run by the jihadists themselves. By studying these primary source websites, jihadist groups can cull new recruits while exerting much less effort, as potential recruits come to them, rather than the opposite.

In addition, through this virtual jihadist network, jihadist groups can indoctrinate individuals and them provide them with the tools they need to carry out either individual or small group attacks, without having to be specifically recruited by an established jihadist group. Jihadists provide strategies and tactics for the entire community so that independent terrorist cells can spring up

throughout the world. From online training manuals, these independent cells can learn which are the best targets to attack, how to attack them, and how to make sure that the attack will be inline with the overall jihadist strategy.

The virtual jihadist network revolves around these dimensions:

- Propaganda, Indoctrination, and Psychological Warfare
- Training and Tactics
- Communication and Coordination
- Strategy
- Financing
- Recruitment

The following will examine each dimension of the virtual social network in further detail.

Propaganda, Indoctrination, and Psychological Warfare

The propaganda the jihadists release is powerful and reaches a global audience. As one jihadist recalled, "The first time I saw an al-Qaeda video, I was ready to go. I wanted to kill the disbelievers."[5] The propaganda in jihadist videos is compelling, convincing, and able to be accessed in a growing number of languages. While most primary source propaganda is released in Arabic, individuals and groups dedicated to the jihadist cause will translate them into their vernacular language, so that the message of jihadist leaders can be heard across the world.

Jihadist propaganda is released in English, Turkish, French, Somali, Russian, and a host of other languages. Jihadist messageboards and websites also exist exclusively in English and other languages as well. Even some extremely prominent Arabic jihadist messageboards, like the Al-Hesbah[6] forum, now contain an English section. Because of the availability of jihadist propaganda in so many languages, potential jihadists can know only their native language and still be radicalized.

By being able to reach a global audience, jihadist groups can continue to indoctrinate many more individuals than they could otherwise without a propaganda outlet through the internet. In an interview released in December 2005, Zawahiri explicitly discussed al-Qaeda's policy of distributing important videos and messages as widely as possible. At the conclusion of the 43 minute interview, Zawahiri calls upon media organizations to distribute the interview in "all languages and as widely as possible." The release of the interview itself carried English subtitles and was distributed shortly thereafter with French, German, and Italian subtitles on online forums by December 2005.

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[5] Stewart Bell. "Making of a Zealot." *National Post.* June 30, 2006.
[6] http://www.alhesbah.org

In the last year, al-Qaeda's production company, As-Sahab, has begun to produce English transcripts and subtitles for most of al-Qaeda's major releases, especially messages from bin Laden and Zawahiri. In the past year, at least 20 videos from As-Sahab have been released with either English subtitles or transcripts, broadening the group's reach. Al-Qaeda has also issued videos in English speaking directly to Americans. A native Californian wanted by the FBI for his role in al-Qaeda, Adam Gadahn, or Azzam al-Amriki, provides a voice directly from the al-Qaeda leadership in Afghanistan to the American people. His September 2006 video, "An Invitation to Islam," carried the messages of al-Qaeda but in an American accent. Gadahn devoted much of his 45 minute video to explaining al-Qaeda's ideology, rationale, and motivations.

While Adam Gadahn speaks to an American audience, al-Qaeda uses the British men who perpetrated the July 7, 2005, bombings in London. In commemoration of the bombings, an annual video is released to the forums in which one of the bombers discusses his reasons for the attack in a thick English accent. As with "An Invitation to Islam," each of the 7/7 commemoration videos are edited as compilations combining clips of al-Qaeda leadership with a significant portion read by a native speaker to the people of the country being addressed.

The demand for jihadist materials in other languages is high. Recently, an influential French jihadist forums, al-Mourabitoune[7], has begun providing translations of videos and statements of responsibility from Arabic into French with very little lag time. For example, on May 23, 2006, GIMF released bin Laden's "A Testimony to the Truth" with both Arabic and English transcripts. By the next day, al-Mourabitoune was carrying a French translation of the transcript. Following a flood of requests posted to English and French messageboards, GIMF provided subtitled editions of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's April 26, 2006, video, entitled, "A Message to the People." A version of "A Message to the People" with French subtitles was soon released along with a full French transcript to French-language jihadist forums on May 4, 2006.

There is a rising trend of jihadist material being released in Turkish. The videos distributed through the Mucadele[8] Turkish online messageboard are predominantly those from Chechen jihadists. On October 16, 2006, Mucadele distributed the Ramadan video address of Abu Hafs Al-Urdani, a Jordanian leader of Chechen jihadists until his reported death in November 2006. In the video, Abu Hafs, speaking in Arabic, beseeches his audience for additional funding for the mujahideen. Ten days later, another jihadist commander in Chechnya, Abu Abdullah al-Turki, appeared in a video speaking directly to the Turkish people about the need to support jihad in Chechnya, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The 8 and a half minute video, which also featured Abu Hafs Al-Urdani, was narrated in Turkish and given Arabic subtitles.

In August 2005, As-Sahab released a long video titled, "The War of the Oppressed." The video showed how Al-Qaeda fighters began regrouping in Afghanistan, attracting volunteers from around the world, and featured the attacks that al-Qaeda members carried out on American

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[7] http://www.ribaat.org
[8] http://www.mucadele.com

forces in Afghanistan, including the downing of a SOCOM helicopter. The video also interspersed clips of popular jihadist ideologues like Abdullah Azzam, bin Laden, Zarqawi, and Zawahiri with speeches from jihadists currently in the field in Afghanistan. A powerful montage sequence of mujahideen addressing the camera in their native language occurs in the video. An Australian, a Turk, an Italian, and other nationalities espouse their jihadist ideology in their vernacular with Arabic subtitles, calling on the viewer to join them in jihad.

While many may perceive jihadist propaganda as crude and barbaric, replete with beheadings and bombs, much propaganda is instead strongly argued rhetoric that is becoming increasingly sophisticated. Jihadist ideologues, like Hamid Al-Ali in Kuwait, release masterful pieces of religious rhetoric exhorting others to jihad. Many of the white papers, studies, books, and other documents that the jihadists release are heavily footnoted and maintain a scholarly tone. The result is that the propaganda takes on an air of professionalism and scholarship that is extremely convincing to critically thinking potential jihadists.

Oftentimes jihadist ideologues appeal to baser emotional responses to violence and sex. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's filmed beheadings attracted an instant audience, and videos are released daily of attacks, gruesome shots of dead victims and mujahideen, and other gore. This gore serves as powerful psychological warfare, and sensationalized murders, like beheadings, intimidate the enemies of the jihadists while bolstering jihadist support. On the other hand, the death of mujahideen is portrayed as painless, desensitizing many to the fear of participating in such violence.

While not commonly addressed, sometimes sex is exploited to attract jihadists. In November 2006, a three and a half minute audio message from Hamid Al-Ali, an extremely important jihadist shaykh famous for his fatwas and designated a terrorist by the United States, was posted to jihadist messageboards explaining the great rewards in heaven waiting for those who die in battle. The speaker provides strikingly erotic details about the "wives" which pleasure martyrs in paradise:

> "Paradise has eight great gates through which whoever enters will never come out again. Each gate determines what the martyr has achieved; in Paradise they will enjoy endless tasteful food and drinks, with a beloved wife. She will astonish your mind. Her hair is made of silk. Her flirtation appears in the bed as politeness and expertise in these things; she knows all about sexual intercourse. By touching, looking, and hearing, her vagina never complains about how much sex she had. She becomes a beautiful virgin again. The more intercourse she has the more love she gives, and she gives a beautiful smile."[9]

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[9] Hamid Al-Ali. "Description of Martyrs in Paradise." Audio clip circulated on jihadist forums and posted on Hamid Al-Ali's official website at http://www.h-alali.info/snd_open.php?id=b75e9fb4-f2b5-1029-a701-0010dc91cf69

Demonstrating how closely jihadists study the West, they are becoming much more adept at using American officials' own words against America. On February 17, 2006, former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld gave a speech before the Council on Foreign Relations in which he admitted America's weakness on the media front in the war in Iraq, stating, "Our enemies have skillfully adapted to fighting wars in today's media age, but for the most part we, our country, our government, has not adapted."[10] Three days later, GIMF issued a message responding to Secretary Rumsfeld's speech and ridiculed American efforts to conduct an effective media war.

Ahmad al-Watheq Billah, the author of GIMF's document, mocked this "failing project of the American army" and lauded the jihadist media as "superior on the internet network and other information sources." GIMF used Secretary Rumsfeld's comments to call upon jihadists to join the ranks of "information jihad," capitalizing on their current presence on the internet. The author encouraged, for instance, those who can use mobile phones to capture photos and videos that depict the "failure and disgrace" of the enemy in Muslim lands to disseminate those through appropriate venues. Billah charged that such pictures that represent the "truth" will be used to attack America's "weak point." Many other pieces of jihadist propaganda reference the speeches of American leaders and spokespeople, and use these speeches to demonstrate that the jihadists are winning the media war.

In another remarkable example of the jihadists turning our mistakes into their own benefit, insurgents in Iraq retrieved an American soldier's USB flash drive filled with sensitive information to create a powerful propaganda video aimed to debase support for the U.S. military. The Islamic Army in Iraq, a prominent insurgent group, in collaboration with Al-Boraq Media Organization, another online distributor of jihadist propaganda, produced a video called "Lee's Life for Lies." The video, released in January 2007, refers to PFC Lee Kendall Tucker, an actual US soldier whose USB flash drive apparently fell into the hands of the Islamic Army in Iraq.

The video marries authentic information, such as PFC Tucker's social security number and official U.S. Army documents, with a fabricated letter allegedly written by PFC Tucker criticizing the US military that the Islamic Army in Iraq maintained was found on the flash drive. The sham letter describes hellish and stressful conditions amid mortar fire for American soldiers, describing IED detonations, sniper fire by insurgency groups, and criminal acts committed by fellow soldiers. The letter is a narrative that portrays a failing and unnecessary war, launched for the benefit of a few at the expense of many.

While the letter is fake, the video contains the voiceover of an American reading the letter, making it more believable. As the letter is read, several scenes are shown of mujahideen launching military operations, images of PFC Tucker posing for the camera, and footage of combat taken from media sources such as The History Channel. As propaganda, the aim of the presentation is to influence the opinion of the target English-speaking audience, showing the frustration of a soldier on the front lines and disenchantment with what is claimed to be a failed

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[10] "New Realities in the Media Age: A Conversation with Donald Rumsfeld." Council on Foreign Relations. Transcript online at http://www.cfr.org/publication/9900/

war. The jihadists recognize that domestic public opinion has a great effect on foreign policy and modeled the video as such for this purpose.[11]

The amount of propaganda the jihadists produce is staggering. With jihadist propaganda widely available in numerous languages, the jihadists can reach an extremely large audience. This large reach of jihadist propaganda, coupled with the shrewd use of rhetoric, has created an online jihadist environment where individuals are capable of self-radicalizing themselves with little direct guidance from established jihadist groups. So long as this propaganda is not countered, jihadists will always have a steady stream of potential recruits.

Training and Tactics

Using the internet, jihadists have created a virtual classroom that teaches the online jihadist community how to produce and construct weapons ranging from simple IEDs to nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. Not only are jihadists taught military tactics; they also learn how to mine the internet for information, protect their anonymity online, encrypt the contents of their computers, and use the internet to benefit the global jihadist movement. Given the difficulty many individuals have in reaching training camps in the post-9/11 world, online training gives jihadists the tools they need to plan, coordinate, and execute terrorist attacks. Indeed, soldiers from Iraq have informed us that training manuals discovered in jihadist safe houses in Iraq were printed from the jihadist manuals found online.

Al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups have produced magazines and multimedia exclusively for training purposes. "Al-Battar," a publication of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia, is solely dedicated to training prospective mujahideen, even supplying ideal targets. Issues have featured weapons discussion, such as using a pistol for sniper training, how to hold and target a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG), and survival tactics. Even though the most recent issue of "Al-Battar" was released two years ago, the magazine continues to widely circulate online on jihadist websites.

Excerpts from large compendiums of urban warfare, explosives and poisons training manuals are frequently posted to the jihadist forums, in addition to members own suggestions, often using photographs and video to support their explanations. Videos exist which give training instructions for suicide bombings, construction and dismantling of landmines, and composition of various explosives substances. Electronic books, or e-books, are also used to provide a single resource for particular training. For example, an e-book compilation of IED construction, camouflage, and placement was distributed to the password-protected al-Firdaws[12] forum, which contains a special military section. This publication suggested the planting of explosives in shopping bags in markets, butter tubs, flower bouquets, candy boxes, briefcases, and buses.

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[11] More about the letter and the video can be found at
http://siteinstitute.org/bin/articles.cgi?ID=publications242207&Category=publications&Subcategory=0
[12] http://www.alfirdaws.org

In addition to traditional explosives, jihadists are also attempting to educate themselves about chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) weapons, which are incessantly discussed on jihadist forums. The "Encyclopedia of Poisons" offers a variety of methods to kill an enemy with a several toxic substances and is freely available to any member of the online jihadist community. Ricin and botulism bacilli are just two examples of individual poisons that have received much attention on jihadist forums. Members on these forums detail the speed with which a victim will die when receiving the poisons by injection, inhalation, or digestion. Other weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear and radiological devices have also been the subject of interest and instruction by the jihadists. One author, calling himself "Ozooo", produced a large compendium offering nuclear knowledge among other security, espionage, and military training.

In addition to physical preparation and military training manuals, the jihadists also impart knowledge to each about computer technology. Internet anonymity, of primary importance to members to avoid surveillance and capture, is frequently addressed. Al-Fajr Center, GIMF, and other jihadist media groups release cybersecurity manuals to aid the online jihadists. Al-Fajr Center created a specific cybersecurity magazine, "Technical Mujahid," which provides information remain anonymous online, how to utilize Pretty Good Privacy (PGP) software for encrypted communications, and detailed methods for a user to hide their sensitive files using a virtual machine. In its first pages, the "Technical Mujahid" states the jihadist stance concerning the virtual battle ground: "the internet provides a golden opportunity... for the mujahideen to break the siege placed upon them by the media of the crusaders and their followers in the Muslim countries, and to use [the internet] for [the sake of] jihad and the victory of the faith." The GIMF provides similar information and recently distributed an encryption program built by the jihadists themselves to facilitate anonymous communications.

Tactical information is rapidly shared on jihadist messageboards. They study our analyses, distribute our reports, and quote our editorials, searching for our weaknesses. On their own initiative, jihadists are constantly providing data to the forums, posting maps of suggested targets, locations of American bases throughout the Middle East, and distributing aerial photographs captured by the Google Earth software, while others pull maps from government and university libraries.

Furthermore, the jihadists also inform each other about new technology being employed against the mujahideen, such as the Joint IED Neutralizer and Stryker armored vehicle, advising in ways the devices' defenses may be circumvented to launch a successful hit. In August of 2006, a forum member posted to the military section of a password-protected forum a US report written in 2003 at the behest of Congressman Jim Saxton, detailing the susceptibility of Stryker combat vehicles to an RPG7. The member then urged mujahideen to exploit the weakness found in this report, which had been unearthed from the Defense and National Interest website, a US think tank.

Several primary jihadist websites house areas solely dedicated to training. Within these training areas, jihadists are encouraged to contribute their own expertise and data, so that all the jihadists

can benefit from the knowledge of the entire jihadist community. Indeed, some of these forums even hold online training seminars, where less experienced jihadists can ask questions to jihadist weapons experts and receive direct responses online. In this manner, should any jihadist have difficulty in successfully manufacturing a bomb, or has a question regarding the procurement of required ingredients, there are thousands of other members, some with significant experience, who are available to provide the desired information.

By studying the training manuals and tactical material that exist on jihadist messageboards, warfighters can understand better the types of weapons likely to be used against them as well as the targets that jihadists are choosing for attack. Additionally, observing the training jihadists receive online will help security officials plan for threats discussed on jihadist websites, eliminating some of the guesswork involved in imagining the types of attacks jihadists are planning. While finding and destroying physical training camps will be essential to prevent jihadists from learning how to attack us, jihadists can instead rely on the internet for an interactive, comprehensive military education.

Communication and Coordination

Due to the efforts of security forces around the world, jihadists have an increasingly difficult time communicating and coordinating with one another utilizing traditional communication devices that can be easily traced, such as cellular or satellite phones. However, the internet provides a flexible, instant communication tools for jihadists. Whether via email, chat rooms, instant messaging services, e-groups, messageboards, websites, or voice over IP (VOIP), jihadists can communicate securely with one another rapidly using sophisticated, freely available encryption methods.

Jihadist media groups like GIMF and Al-Fajr Center release programs and training manuals to ensure that members of the online jihadist community know how to communicate with each other securely, using encryption methods like PGP. Groups and individuals desiring to form their own cells can therefore coordinate online with each other clandestinely below the radar of security officials. Even individuals spread across vast geographic areas can communicate with one another instantly and securely, forming virtual cells that work together. The members of these virtual cells may never meet each other in person but can nevertheless aid one another in planning attacks.

Established jihadist groups like al-Qaeda can also communicate online to discuss everything from strategy to attacks. In one telling example, in December 2005, a top jihadist ideologue using the pseudonym Louis Attiyah Allah wrote to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, discussing Zarqawi's role in Iraq and its place within the larger jihadist movement. At the end of the letter, Attiyah Allah notes to Zarqawi that he can be contacted on the "Ana Al-Muslim"[13] jihadist forum, indicating that even the top leadership of al-Qaeda uses the internet to communicate.

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[13] http://www.muslm.net

Jihadist leaders have also used public messages to alert jihadists of their need for support or to exchange information. Bin Laden and others use public messages also to alert their need for support or to exchange messages. For example, in a July 2006 audio message, bin Laden exhorted the jihadist community to support the mujahideen in Somalia and elsewhere, stating, "I also urge the Muslim youths and their merchants to sacrifice everything valuable and to provide for all the needs of the mujahideen through trusted people, especially in Palestine, Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Sudan."[14] In March 2005, Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi posted a public message on jihadist forums addressed to the jihadists in Saudi Arabia praising them and openly welcoming Saudis to come fight in Iraq. Three days later, Saleh Al-Oufi, a now deceased leader of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia, responded with a public audio message distributed on jihadist messageboards congratulating Zarqawi for his efforts and offering his group's support.

As one notable example of cross-continental coordination, the infamous online jihadist Irhabi007, whose real name is Younis Tsouli, was arrested in England in October 2005 and was indicted under the UK's Terrorism Act 2000, with charges including "conspiracy to murder, conspiracy to cause an explosion, conspiracy to obtain money by deception, fundraising and possession of articles for terrorist purposes." Tsouli gained fame online for his teaching the global jihadist movement hacking and cybersecurity skills while facilitated the dissemination of jihadist propaganda coming from jihadist groups in Iraq and elsewhere.

As part of his online activities, Tsouli was also in communication with a jihadist cell in the United States. In March 2006, two Americans in Atlanta, Georgia, were arrested and eventually charged with "material support" to a terrorist group and are accused of plotting to attack oil refineries in the United States. These men, Ehsanul Islam Sadequee and Syed Haris Ahmed, visited Washington, DC, in spring 2005 and recorded video footage of the U.S Capitol, the Masonic Temple, the World Bank, and a fuel depot. Remarkably, this footage was also found among Tsouli's belongings, indicating that the two American terror suspects were indeed in contact with Tsouli and were feeding him tactical information via the internet.

Aside from the obvious means by which small cells can coordinate and plan attacks through the internet, the online jihadist community has also engaged in coordinated cyberattacks on numerous websites. Because the jihadists can freely communicate while online, jihadists can designate electronic targets to a widespread audience and establish common timetables to launch cyberattacks. The electronic attacks usually involve "Denial of Service" (DoS) attacks whereby a targeted websites is flooded with requests at a single time. For these attacks to be successful, numerous individuals must attempt to access a website simultaneously.

Because the internet provides the jihadists a means to advertise the timing of a DoS attack to a large number of jihadists in a short time, these types of attacks only fail when too few jihadists participate in the attack at the same time. Prominent members of the jihadist Internet community, such as Irhabi007, have instructed jihadists in how to execute DoS attacks, and some

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[14] Osama bin Laden. Audio speech released on jihadist messageboards on July 1, 2006.

groups that have announced a planned attack provide the necessary software with the address of the target already inputted. This method of attacking the enemy allows online jihadists to target Western interests from their own home and with little risk.

The results of these hacking initiatives have resulted in breaches of government security. Jihadists have hacked government and military websites and have retrieved extremely sensitive information on soldiers, including their areas of deployment, their health status, their social security numbers, their salary, their bank accounts, and other demographic information.

Jihadist cyberattacks launched on Dutch websites, including those belonging to the Dutch government, in January and February 2006 took many offline. The DoS operation, results, and images of a dead Theo van Gogh, a Dutch filmmaker who was murdered by a jihadist, were included in a video distributed shortly celebrating the attack. In another case, on November 27, 2006, a message was distributed on jihadist forums announcing the "Electronic Battle of Guantanamo," which was to target the websites of American stock exchanges and banks. The Department of Homeland Security warned about the attack and its danger, and though nothing came of the electronic jihadist operation, it fueled the desire for additional attacks. Even the Vatican's website was targeted by jihadists.

Retarding the ability of jihadists' to communicate is another necessary step in minimizing the jihadist threat. Though governments have done well in preventing jihadists from utilizing traditional means of communication, the internet remains the best communication device for the entire jihadist community. Allowing them to communicate instantly over vast distances, virtual cells can form quite easily, and coordinating cyberattacks requires a mere posting to a messageboard announcing the time and date of such attack.

While obviously we can never shut down the internet, we can monitor jihadists' use of the internet and track down their physical locations. Once jihadists learn that the internet is not a safe haven for their communications, many will become fearful of utilizing the internet as a means to communicate. It is unlikely that we will ever cut jihadist communication online to nothing, but at the very least, we can provide disincentives to jihadists using the internet by punishing those who do.

Strategy

The strategy behind the jihadist movement is not amorphous. Jihadist ideologues have developed a timeframe for their jihad, thinking both short-term and long-term, and understanding that success will only come after years of struggle. Major jihadist ideologues are able to direct the global jihadist movement by releasing white papers and books analyzing the situation of the jihadist movement and providing the jihadists with long-term strategies to ensure that the movement itself always has directions and goals. Jihadist strategies are released online and are widely circulated on jihadist forums so that the entire jihadist community can follow the same strategies and goals, reducing the discord amongst them.

In the run up to the war in Iraq, jihadists immediately began releasing online propaganda encouraging jihadists to prepare for a jihad against the United States in Iraq. Even after the war began, Yusuf Al-Ayiri, a now deceased leader of Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia and an influential jihadist ideologue, published an online study in August 2003 entitled, "The Future of Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula after the Fall of Baghdad." Al-Ayiri describes the advantages of the removal of the Ba'ath regime and harps on the window of opportunity for the establishment of an Islamic state ruled according to the Sharia law.

One of al-Qaeda's most important strategists subsequent to 9/11 is Abu Musab al-Suri, an al-Qaeda operative who ran terrorist training camps in Afghanistan. Al-Suri's publications and studies are highly regarded by jihadists and are always housed on primary source jihadist websites and others. His 1600-page magnum opus, "The Global Islamic Call to Resistance," is an extremely influential jihadist manifesto and is available to download in a variety of digital formats. Jihadists discuss and analyze Al-Suri's writings both publicly and secretly to understand, develop, and expand upon his ideas.

In "The Global Islamic Call to Resistance," Abu Musab al-Suri details his theories of how to best wage jihad in the twenty-first century. The scope of the book is very broad, with topics ranging from a history of the Islamic world to autobiographical anecdotes about his role in the jihadist movement. However, a significant portion of the book discusses the most effective strategies for waging jihad against the West. Focusing on the types of attacks that will bring the mujahideen the most success, al-Suri advocates establishing self-starting, independent cells in Western countries with no direct affiliations to established jihadist groups. These cells operate to support the global jihadist movement, rather than any particular organization or leader.

Many of al-Suri's publications reiterate that jihadists must set up independent cells within their country of residence, bide their time, and only strike when the time is appropriate. Better, al-Suri intimates, to wait ten years studying and planning for a large, poignant attack rather than carry out a quick suicide bombing at a mall in America doing little damage. Demonstrating the power of the internet, Al-Suri was arrested late 2005, yet his strategies and theories continue to exist in cyberspace. Al-Suri's videotaped lectures at Al-Ghurabaa training camp in Afghanistan prior to 9/11 have been digitized and are available online as well. Whether dead or captured, the internet provides jihadists with a virtual immortality.

Available online, the publications of al-Suri and other ideologues share common themes in their strategies. These strategies include:

- Utilizing guerilla warfare
- Establishing self-starting, independent cells in Western countries with no direct affiliations to established jihadist groups
- Damaging the United States' economy through terrorist activities
- Attacking Arab governments that work closely with the West
- Attacking Western targets in Arab countries.

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These strategies also include specific targets. For example, Al-Suri organizes the most important targets to attack in America and its allies as follows:

- Politicians
- Major economic targets, like the stock exchange, airports, bridges, metros, tourist attractions
- Military bases
- Media personalities
- Computers and information centers that connect the institutions of the country
- Jewish gatherings and notable Jews
- The offices of supranational targets, like NATO and the EU
- Buildings belonging to the CIA, FBI, and other security institutions
- Civilians, while avoiding women and children if possible, to prevent generating negative publicity

Obviously these targets are not the only vulnerable individuals and institutions in the West. However, by studying and understanding the strategy the jihadist ideologues propose, we can better prepare ourselves against attacks that independent jihadist cells are likely to target. Also, we can develop more effective long-term counterstrategies against jihadists once we discern how they plan on expanding the jihadist movement. Therefore, the need to study jihadist strategies on the internet is paramount; it is an open window showing us how the jihadist movement will likely develop in the future.

Financing

Stemming the flow of money to jihadists is essential. Though carrying out terrorist attacks usually requires relative little money, jihadists do need funding for weapons, training, distributing propaganda, and the costs of hosting internet websites and messageboards. Since 9/11, the US, the UN, and other countries have worked hard to locate the methods and means by which terrorists transfer money. Prior to this crackdown, money was transferred to terrorist groups through sham front groups and charities or through offshore banking techniques. The US and others had much success in identifying the financiers of terrorism and exposing them.

While these traditional techniques no doubt still play a role in terrorist financing, jihadists have also turned to using the internet to transmit funds. Online remittance systems and other means of transferring money over the internet are constantly being used by jihadists to finance the jihadist movement. Jihadist webmasters use these electronic means to pay for their servers, and virtual jihadist groups have now appeared online soliciting donations from followers.

The Islamic Army of Iraq, an insurgent group operating within Iraq, released a video celebrating its October 15 attack on an American ammunition facility in Baghdad. Interestingly, this video ended with a plea for donations to be sent to "The Electronic Nusra Society." Two days later,

the group released the tenth issue of its online magazine, "Al-Forsan," which contained a full page advertisement seeking donations for the "The Digital Nusra Society." Though these advertisements offered no physical address to which to send donations, they indicated that donors could contact the group electronically for further instructions on how to donate.

Discussions on jihadist messageboards have gone into specific detail explaining how jihadists can donate online to jihadist groups. On the influential Al-Hesbah online forum, one jihadist described the process by which cash can be transferred through online remittance services. With certain online remittance services, individuals can add money to their online bank accounts by using cash to purchase physical cards (similar to phone cards) of various values from designated "brick and mortar" retailers across the world.

Using such an online bank account, an individual could then transfer cash to a jihadist group in the following manner:

1. The individual wishing to send jihadist groups cash purchases a physical bank card and transfers the value to an intermediary jihadist via an email with the required information to transfer the money.
2. The intermediary jihadist, in direct contact with the mujahideen, receives the online money transfer and then gives the mujahideen the value of the transfer in cash.
3. The jihadist groups receiving the cash from the intermediary can use the funds however they like, while the intermediary jihadist who received the initial online money transfer can use that money to purchase online goods.

As an example, a donor could purchase $100 worth of online virtual money from a physical store and then email the value of that money to an intermediary jihadist. That intermediary, now $100 richer, will give a jihadist group $100 in cash out of his own pocket. The intermediary, however, now has $100 worth of virtual money to spend online, while the jihadist group now has $100 in cash.

While this type of remittance is just developing and is only one way of transferring money, the chatter surrounding the ways to transfer money through the internet has been increasing on jihadist messageboards. Discovering and monitoring how jihadists transfer money online will enable us to further act against their financing methods, as we have done successfully before with traditional remittance services. If we are to continue our assault on terrorism financing, authorities must devise new ways to monitor and regulate online remittance services that can be abused by jihadists.

Recruitment

Recruitment takes on two forms in the online jihadist community. The first path is attempting to head to a current theater of conflict to fight with the mujahideen. These recruits are sometimes required to bring money with them to support the jihad. Though many jihadists likely utilize local connections to make their way to the lands of jihad, some online handlers do exist to aid jihadists wishing to travel to an area where they can fight. Mark Robert Walker, a 19-year-old student in Laramie, Wyoming, originally from Rochester, New York, pled guilty to aiding a terrorist organization in October 2005. Walker, using the screen name "Abdullah," was in contact with an online individual named "Khalid" who had agreed to help Walker leave the United States to fight with jihadists in Somalia. The FBI intercepted Walker's online communications with "Khalid" and arrested Walker at El Paso International Airport, as he attempted to leave the country.

Walker's case is not isolated; many like him exist within the online community. These members who desire to travel to lands of jihad to fight with the mujahideen are reinforced by the material found on the forums. Jihadist messageboards proudly announce when a member of a forum has been killed while fighting. On February 6, 2007, the al-Hesbah jihadist forum carried a message announcing that one of its members had carried out a successful suicide attack in Iraq that "shook the crusaders" in Iraq. The individual, an established jihadist online figure known by the alias "Risalah," died while fighting since the start of 2007. On January 3rd, 2007, Na'im Muhammad bin Abdullah, also a member, was announced to have been killed fighting U.S. forces in Baghdad. Both were prominent members of the online jihadist community. The announcements of their deaths prompted praise from other members, reinforcing the strength of the community. This praise also paints physical jihad as a natural outgrowth of participation in the online forum.

Al-Hesbah is not the only jihadist forum with members who have left to join the jihad. For example, after a Saudi administrator of the Hedayah forum[15] was killed fighting in Iraq in December 2006, one member eulogized him, "In the forum he was special and was a provider . . . and there he is today, writing . . . with his blood, not with his pen." Just traveling to a land of jihad garners praise, as well. In December 2006, it was announced that Firas al-Ta'an, a moderator of Al-Ekhlaas[16] jihadist forum, had traveled to Iraq and reached the mujahideen safely.

Rather than travel to where there is active fighting, the other path a recruit can take is to engage in a local terrorist plot, where no handler is needed. Instead, the training manuals, tactics, and strategies available within the online jihadist community take the place of a handler. For example, in March 2004, Mohammad Zaki Amawi, a US citizen, returned to Ohio after a failed attempt to enter Iraq through Jordan to fight against US and coalition forces. Undeterred by his

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[15] http://www.hedaaya.net
[16] http://www.alekhlaas.net/

inability join an active front, Amawi gather jihadist training manuals and videos through jihadist websites to build his own cell in Toledo. He soon recruited others local to the area.

Among the materials Amawi collected from online sources to train the cell were a "Basic Training" course for jihadists, a prerequisite for an "Advanced Training" course, videos on the production and use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and an instructional video for building a suicide bomb vest, titled "Martyrdom Operation Vest Preparation." One member of the cell, Marwan Othman El-Hindi, proposed downloading the videos to show to two of his recruits in Chicago. For practice, the cell traveled together to a shooting range in Toledo. During this time, Amawi maintained contact with jihadists traveling into and out of Iraq using encrypted e-mail messages, contacting them for technical assistance.

These self-starting cells can also span continents. As described previously, the online jihadist Irhabi007 in England, was in contact with two men from Atlanta, Georgia, who were providing Irhabi007 with surveillance videos of American targets. The men, Ehsanul Islam Sadequee and Syed Haris Ahmed, visited Washington, DC, and recorded video footage of the U.S Capitol, the Masonic Temple, the World Bank, and a fuel depot. Their footage was found amongst Irhabi007's belongings.

This cell, however, also had another component connected through the internet. In June 2006, Canadian authorities disrupted the cell in Ontario, arresting 17 individuals, including 5 minors. Many members of this cell are charged with attempting to blow up targets throughout Canada. It was soon revealed that the two Georgian men providing support to Irhabi007 had traveled to Canada to meet with members of the cell, after having met online. The men from Georgia were also members of the same jihadist messageboard as some of the members of an alleged cell in Canada.

Jihadists will continue to utilize the internet to recruit others to plan attacks so long as the internet remains a safe haven. Recruitment takes place on jihadist forums in many languages, from Arabic to German to English. By infiltrating the jihadists' online forums, we can better monitor the relationships between online jihadists, looking for both those who wish to travel to lands of jihad as well as those seeking to do harm locally. Studying messageboards allows us to determine which online jihadists participate in the recruiting process and enables us to develop countermeasures to act against them. Furthermore, identifying the physical locations of online jihadists can disrupt actual cells and prevent actual attacks.

Conclusions

The internet remains one of the most valuable tools the jihadists have at their disposal, serving all the functions necessary to sustain a violent jihadist movement at minimal cost. Through virtual means, jihadists have in many ways replaced the training camps of the 1980s and 1990s that jihadist groups established in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Indoctrination, recruitment, financing, and training continue 24 hours a day on jihadist messageboards. A National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) Report produced in April 2006 and declassified in September 2006 agreed, "We judge that groups of all stripes will increasingly use the Internet to communicate, propagandize, recruit, train, and obtain logistical and financial support."[17]

In recent years, many have realized the extraordinary power that jihadists obtain by being able to exploit the internet. However, little seems to have been accomplished in preventing jihadists from using the internet to their advantage, directly harming our security, both domestic and foreign. As General Abizaid maintained in his testimony before this Committee in March 2006, the internet remains a "safe haven" for jihadists that has not been explored and countered:

> "But there are other safe havens used by the enemy that are truly safe. These are places where al Qaida also conducts military training, propaganda operations, and plans for future terrorist attacks. It is also where they do most of their fundraising. It is the virtual world. And this safe haven of websites and the internet is proliferating rapidly, spreading al Qaida's hateful ideology well beyond its birthplace in the Middle East. Parts of Europe, for example, have now become intellectual hubs of extremist Islamic thought, largely because of the internet and lax government policies regarding extremist activities. **Yet we have done little to contest these safe havens, even though they are at least as dangerous to our security as the enemy's physical sanctuaries have been. [Emphasis Added]**"[18]

As long as the internet remains an uncontested safe haven for jihadists, the jihadist movement will continue to grow, regardless of the death or arrest of any jihadist leader or ideologue. The internet provides immortality to the ideology behind the jihadist movement, and countless individuals can absorb this propaganda, which is readily available in numerous languages. While not all individuals exposed to jihadist propaganda will succumb to it, the images, sounds, and thoughts that the jihadists produce are carefully woven, attractive, and compelling. Many will buy into the ideology and become part of the online jihadist community. So long as this virtual community exists unopposed, jihadist groups will always be able to refill their ranks and keep their movement alive, indoctrinating and training their future army.

The challenge now is to infiltrate and erode this virtual network to weaken this driving force behind the global jihadist movement. Studying the online jihadist community empowers us. We

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[17] http://odni.gov/press_releases/Declassified_NIE_Key_Judgments.pdf
[18] Statement of General John P. Abizaid, United States Army Commander, United States Central Command before the House Armed Services Committee on the 2006 Posture of the United States Central Command. March 15, 2006.

can listen to what they say, understand the way they think, and determine how they operate. We can grasp their ideology and devise effective counter-propaganda. We can better defend known targets, identify potential threats, devise countermeasures to their tactics, undermine their strengths, and exploit their weaknesses. There is a wealth of information available online, if we are willing to take the time to collect, study, and analyze the data, as the SITE Institute is doing.

To take advantage of this online intelligence and counter the jihadists on the internet, policy makers and authorities should embark on the following steps:

1. Understand how jihadists utilize the internet, including the hierarchy and structure of online jihadist networks, the technical process of distributing the videos, and how jihadists exploit services on the internet.
2. Effectively monitor jihadist activity on the internet. Because monitoring the entire internet is impossible, understanding the hierarchy of online jihadist networks will help focus efforts on the most important websites and other internet services the jihadists use.
3. Identify and exploit the weaknesses of the jihadists on the internet.
4. Mine jihadist activity on the internet for intelligence. By successfully infiltrating the most important jihadist forums, more specific, actionable intelligence can be obtained than simply by monitoring secondary and tertiary jihadist websites. This intelligence can then be used to deal severe blows to the global jihadist movement.

The SITE Institute has implemented these steps to understand, monitor, and infiltrate jihadist websites and has achieved tangible results. Authorities must continue to study the internet as a vital battleground in the war on terror and undertake further efforts to combat jihadists on this front. Delving efficiently into the online world of jihadists will be one significant step in the war on terror.