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Internet Support of Terrorism

Editor

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Abstract. This article identifies aspects of the Internet that can facilitate terrorist operations.

As with many technological changes, the continuing spread of the Internet among individuals, groups, organizations, and various segments of populations worldwide affords the potential for Good and for Evil. Internet support of terrorism is an example of the latter.

The Internet has been and continues to be a site for gruesome pictures of death, injury, and destruction that can arouse emotion, activate hot cognition, and precipitate the violence of revenge. It appears to be secondary whether these pictures are accurate or bogus, embedded within or torn from a social or military context, or are smaller or larger than life even in death. Part of this secondariness seems dependent on the beliefs of many individuals that what is on the Internet must be real and true. Adding to the provocation of the pictures of death, injury, and destruction is the ease with which these pictures can be transmitted to a world audience or to precise human groupings, can be viewed in distributive sequences and/or massed interludes, and can be downloaded for the construction of alternate media products. In addition, these pictures can even be constructed so that portions can convey various support and operational messages to elements of terrorist infrastructures. Much of the above also applies to text communications and can facilitate, not only what should be believed, but the sense that one is not alone but, instead, is part of a community and against some other community. This sense of community against community can increase the cohesiveness and resistance to change of one's belief system.

The facile reaction of antiterrorist and counterterrorist authorities is to fight fire with fire--i.e., enter the Internet with one's own pictures and texts to engage in cognitive, affective, motivational, and, ultimately, behavioral battle. However, because of the well-documented powers of innuendo, first impressions, and ideological primings that render counterpropaganda as only further fueling the propaganda to be countered, the Internet option probably would not manifest appropriate efficacy--although the proactive stance of creating new facts in cyberspace that might elicit ineffective countering by one's adversaries might be promising.

Instead of an Internet battle, a more old-fashioned, slower, consistent, and relentless contest in geographical space with all the tools of foreign policy--viz., military, economic, social, cultural, political--might better win the hearts, minds, and spirits throughout the world. This is the suggested approach of New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman and can be supported by the informing of political psychology by behavioral and social sciences research. In fact, this suggested approach and its converse exemplify two sides of a controversy within the United States Government wherein the fight for hearts, minds, and spirits is conceived as either a marketing problem or a comprehensive foreign policy one--i.e., taking the talk versus walking the walk. Friedman asserts, however, that it might already be too late to employ either of the two and that for the marketing approach it might be just as well. In any case, these are empirical questions whose answers will affect us all. (See Arnott, D.C. , & Bridgewater, S. (2002). Internet, interaction and implications for marketing. *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, 20, 86-95; Friedman, T. (May 12, 2002). *Global village idiocy*. *The New York Times*, 15; Lippmann, P. (2002).

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Dreams , psychoanalysis, and the emergent economic electronic culture. *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*, 11, 27-32; Tyler, T. (2002). Is the Internet changing social life? It seems the more things change, the more they stay the same. *Journal of Social Issues*, 58, 195-205; Weiser, E.B. (2001). The functions of Internet use and their social and psychological consequences. *Cyberpsychology and Behavior*, 4, 723-743.) (Keywords: Friedman, Internet, Terrorism.)