New Terrorism and New Media

by Gabriel Weimann

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Introduction

On the evening of March 1, 2011, Arid Uka, an Albanian Muslim living in Germany, was online looking at YouTube videos. Like many before him, he watched a jihadist video that presented the gruesome rape of a Muslim woman by US soldiers—a clip edited and posted on YouTube for jihadi propaganda purposes. Within hours of watching the video, Arid Uka boarded a bus at Frankfurt Airport, where he killed two US servicemen and wounded two others with a handgun.

After he was arrested, investigators reviewed the history of Arid Uka's Internet activity. It showed—most obviously in his Facebook profile—a growing interest in jihadist content, subsequent self-radicalization, and ultimately his viewing of the aforementioned video, which led him to take action in an alleged war in defense of Muslims.

Arid Uka was not a member of a terrorist organization, nor had he visited any of the infamous training camps for terrorists. His entire radicalization, from early attraction to jihadi preaching to the final deadly mission, was accomplished online. Arid Uka is a typical case of the new trend of terrorists being engaged through the newest online platforms, commonly known as the "new media" or "social media." As cyberterrorism expert Evan Kohlmann argues:

> *Today, 90 percent of terrorist activity on the Internet takes place using social networking tools. . . . These forums act as a virtual firewall to help safeguard the identities of those who participate, and they offer subscribers a chance to make direct contact with terrorist representatives, to ask questions, and even to contribute and help out the cyberjihad.[1]*

The Turn To Social Media

Al-Qaeda, its affiliates and other terrorist organizations have moved their online presence to YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and other social media outlets. Among the groups fighting Syrian ruler Bashar El Assad, several related to terrorist groups or the global jihadi movement have turned to social media for propaganda, psychological warfare, and weapons tutorials. Abu Mohammed al-Golani, the head of an al-Qaeda branch operating in Syria called al-Nusra Front, uses Facebook and other social media extensively. In August 2013, al-Golani vowed unrestrained rocket attacks on Alawite communities, alongside attacks on President Bashar Assad's government in revenge for an alleged chemical strike—a message that was posted on Facebook and

Twitter, as well as on a militant website that often broadcasts the views of al-Qaeda and similar extremist groups. Al-Nusra Front has its own Facebook page (facebook.com/jalnosra), which contains press releases, photographs, and videos from the fighting in Syria; eulogies for the organization's *shaheeds* (martyrs for Islam); and news on the fighting on the ground.

The most recent trend in the Syrian conflict on Facebook, and often also on the Flickr photo-sharing site, is posting eulogies for killed ("martyred") jihadis. These eulogies present the fighters as role models for Muslims and immortalize them—an appealing prospect for radical Muslims who feel marginalized in their respective societies.

Why terrorists use social media

Terrorist use of online platforms is not new. After the events of 9/11 and the antiterrorism campaign that followed, a large number of terrorist groups moved to cyberspace, establishing thousands of websites that promoted their messages and activities. Many terrorist sites were targeted by intelligence and law enforcement agencies, counterterrorism services, and activists, who monitored the sites, attacked some of them, and forced their operators to seek new online alternatives. The turn to social media followed.

Social media differs from traditional and conventional media in many aspects, such as in interactivity, reach, frequency, usability, immediacy, and permanence.[2] Unlike traditional media—characterized as "one-to-many," in which only a small cohort of established institutions disseminates information to an effectively limitless audience—social media enables anyone to publish or access information. New communication technologies, such as comparatively inexpensive and accessible mobile and web-based networks, create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify content. With social media, information consumers also act as communicators, vastly expanding the number of information transmitters in the communication market. This two-way communication promotes creation of small, diffused sets of communicators and groups. Virtual communities using social media are increasingly popular all over the world, especially among younger demographics.

The growing use of social media is impressive. Time spent on social media in the United States increased from 88 billion minutes in July 2011 to 121 billion minutes in July 2012, a 37 percent increase in only one year. In 2013, *eMarketer* research found that the average American user spends 23 hours per week emailing, texting, and using social media and other forms of online communication. Email and Facebook each saw 87 percent of respondents logging in weekly to communicate with others. Slightly more than three out of ten logged on to Twitter and YouTube once a week to connect through text and videos. Even niche social networks like Instagram (photo sharing), LinkedIn (professional networking), and Pinterest (personalized media sharing) saw more than one in ten respondents log in at least once a week.

Terrorists have good reasons to use social media. First, these channels are by far the most popular with their intended audience, which allows terrorist organizations to be part of the mainstream. Second, social media channels are user-friendly, reliable, and free. Finally, social networking allows terrorists to reach out to their target audiences and virtually "knock on their doors"—in contrast to older models of websites in which terrorists had to wait for visitors to come to them.

Terrorists' most important purposes online are propaganda, radicalization, and recruitment. They can develop lists of potential recruits or sympathizers through online groups. Just as marketing companies can view members' information to find potential customers and select products to promote to them, terrorist groups can view people's profiles to decide whom to target and how to approach each individual. Social networking sites allow terrorists to use a targeting strategy known as narrowcasting. Narrowcasting aims messages at specific segments of the public defined by values, preferences, demographic attributes, or subscription. An online page, video, or chat's name, images, appeals, and information are tailored to match the profile of a particular social group. These methods enable terrorists to target youth especially. Increasingly, terrorist groups and their sympathizers are using predominantly Western online communities like Facebook, MySpace, and Second Life, as well as their Arabic equivalents. Counterterrorism expert Anthony Bergin says that terrorists view these youth-dominated websites as recruitment tools "in the same way a pedophile might look at those sites to potentially groom would-be victims."[3]

In closed forums, jihadists show strategic sophistication in exploiting the advantages and avoiding the disadvantages of new media. In March 2010, one user on al-Qaeda's Fallujah Islamic Network posted the appeal, "the least we can do to support the Mujahideen is to distribute their statements and releases." He added, "we wish from the brothers to also distribute the statement via YouTube and widely . . . and on Facebook." The user offered a cautionary note about using Facebook: "The suggested method is to always access it via proxy, otherwise you're in danger. Make one email on Yahoo that's dedicated for the [online] battle only. After creating the email, register on Facebook under an [sic] pseudonym with the email you created, and via which the account will be activated. Search for all the profiles and groups."[4]

Electronic Jihad

Online jihadists are awarded a remarkable status in the conclusion to a comprehensive paper on "electronic jihad," published January 4, 2012, on the leading jihadist forums al-Fida and Shumukh al-Islam:

> *"[…] any Muslim who intends to do jihad against the enemy electronically, is considered in one way or another a mujaheed, as long as he meets the conditions of jihad such as the sincere intention and the goal of serving Islam and defending it, even*

if he is far away from the battlefield. He is thus participating in jihad indirectly as long as the current contexts require such jihadi participation that has effective impact on the enemy."[5]

The divine status of a "mujaheed" is presumably among the greatest attractions drawing young people to participate in terrorist actions. The threshold for engaging in electronic jihad is markedly lower than for someone who gives up a familiar, comfortable life to travel to an actual battle zone and risk injury or death. If the judgment wins wide acceptance that online activism is, in the eyes of God and the people, a proper, respectable, and sufficient form of jihad, one can expect ever-increasing efforts in online propaganda and cyber-attacks, which, in turn, could recruit even more radicalized individuals and, ultimately, lead to new attacks.

The call for electronic jihad did not remain unanswered. In July 2013 the Al-Battar Media Battalion announced its establishment as a group exclusively devoted to disseminate propaganda in "the service of jihad and the mujahideen."[6] The emergence of special groups, dedicated to online activism but not necessarily affiliated with any particular terrorist organization (another example is the Nukhbat Al-'Ilam Al-Jihadi, the "Jihadi Media Elites"), marks a new waypoint in jihadists' professional use of the new media.

The online platforms used to promote electronic jihad are also used for operational purposes such as instruction and training, data mining, coordination, and psychological warfare. In the 2008 terrorist attack on numerous locations in Mumbai, India, the attackers used advanced communication technologies, including handheld GPS devices to plan and execute their attack, Google Earth satellite imagery, and mobile phones providing live updates from their handlers about the location of hostages, especially foreigners. YouTube videos as well as Facebook postings are being used to teach the use of explosives, direct followers to websites with instructional material, promote hacking techniques, and share encryption programs. These postmodern terrorists are trained in virtual online camps, using the rich variety of new social media.

Facebook Terrorism

Facebook is the largest online social network. As of January 2014, it had 1.31 billion users, of whom most (54 percent) log in on a regular basis and almost half (48 percent) log on in any given day. Their average age is about 30 years. In the Middle East, Facebook has seen a significant membership increase and reached 67 percent penetration in 2010, and in Asia overall, 23 percent.

Terrorists, noting the trends, have set up their Facebook presence. Their motivation was outlined in a jihadi online forum calling for "Facebook Invasion":

Facebook is a great idea, and better than the forums. Instead of waiting for people to [come to you so you can] inform them, you

go to them and teach them! . . . [I] mean, if you have a group of 5,000 people, with the press of a button you [can] send them a standardized message. I entreat you, by God, to begin registering for Facebook as soon as you [finish] reading this post. Familiarize yourselves with it. This post is a seed and a beginning, to be followed by serious efforts to optimize our Facebook usage. Let's start distributing Islamic jihadi publications, posts, articles, and pictures. Let's anticipate a reward from the Lord of the Heavens, dedicate our purpose to God, and help our colleagues.[7]

The "Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah" Facebook page was created October 21, 2011, and currently has 2,693 "likes." The very first post, on the same day, stated in English: "O Allah, Please Clean This World From Jewish Contamination."
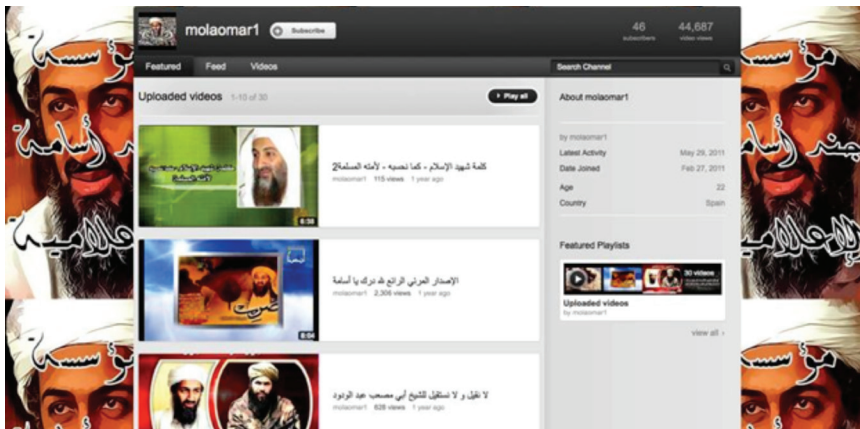
Launched September 11, 2012 – You Tube Channel Featuring Senior AQAP Cleric Sheikh Ibrahim Al-Rubaish

Through the Facebook invasion, the jihadist hoped to reach "the misled American people, and second, to reach the vast people's base among Muslims." The posting also included images detailing the process for registration, adding friends, and setting up groups. "It may be a new technique and a new field that we did not wage before," the jihadist commented, "or for the security of the site and the arrest of many among the organizers of strikes. If it is a new technique, we will use it and master it, with permission from Allah."

A special report by the US Department of Homeland Security listed various terrorist uses of Facebook:

- As a way to share operational and tactical information, such as bomb recipes, weapon maintenance and use, tactical shooting, etc.

- As a gateway to extremist sites and other online radical content by linking on Facebook group pages and in discussion forums.

- As a media outlet for terrorist propaganda and extremist ideological messaging.

- As a wealth of information for remote reconnaissance for targeting purposes.[8]

Generally, two types of Facebook pages with terrorist content can be identified: official and unofficial. *Official* pages are often introduced with a statement by the sponsoring group, which also has other internet forums and media. An example is the "Al-Thabaat" page, emerging on Facebook on May 5, 2013, and describing itself in the "About" section straightforwardly as "Jihadi page for the group, 'Ansar al-Islam.'" Not surprisingly, the page offers links to the official forum, and also the Twitter account, of Ansar al-Islam. In December 2013, Al-Fajr Media Center, the exclusive online distributor of al-Qaeda propaganda, released a new encryption program called "Amn al-Mujahid" (Security of the Mujahid). The program and its 28-page user manual were issued on jihadi forums. Some jihadist forums maintain Facebook pages under their very own name; for example, the forum of Ansar al-Mujahideen actually mirrors all of its content to a Facebook page named "Ansar al-Mujahideen Network" via an RSS feed. *Unofficial* pages, by contrast, are mostly maintained by sympathizers who disseminate propaganda or instruction material. For example, jihadists allegedly supporting the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant launched a website-based encryption program called "Asrar al-Ghurabaa'," (Secrets of the Strangers), which users can utilize to securely communicate. An administrator of the jihadi forums al-Iraq wal-Sham announced the launch of the program on November 26, 2013, and described how to access and use it.

Facebook is especially important for letting terrorists find mainstream Islamic youth who may be occasional viewers of jihadist content and link them to the more

Frankfurt gunman in US airmen killing kept radical company on Facebook

Arid Uka, who confessed to killing two US airmen at the Frankfurt airport March 2, 2011 had links with radical groups online but is believed to have acted on his own.German police stand at the federal court in Karlsruhne, Germany, on March 3, where the suspect in the slaying of two US airmen at Frankfurt airport was brought. German federal prosecutors said this attack on a busload of US airmen that killed two and wounded two others at the Frankfurt airport appears to have been motivated by Islamic extremism.

conspiratorial jihadist forums that primarily attract already hard-core jihad sympathizers. On the Shumukh al-Islam forum on June 2, 2011, a jihadist advised his companions on attracting a more mainstream audience by naming the account in a misleadingly innocent way or against naming their Facebook accounts too aggressively:

> *So, for example, the page 'I am a Muslim, Praise be to Allah' has 24,522 fans, even though it doesn't spread valuable materials amongst Muslims. Meanwhile, "The Global Network of Jihad" doesn't exceed 500 fans despite the importance of what it publishes.*

There are other instances of creatively named jihadist Facebook pages. For instance, two pages mimicked the world-famous Egyptian civil rights slogan "We are all Khaled Saeed,"[9] calling themselves "We are all Usama bin Laden" and "We are all Jabhat an-Nusra."

In contrast to the low-profile accounts, some online jihadists insist on maintaining a more prominent profile. One group called on users to post the upcoming jihadi magazine *Inspire* on the Facebook pages of several public US figures and institutions, including First Lady Michele Obama and the US Army. They even offered link lists and online tutorials on how to use Facebook. Terrorists do, however, perceive some risk in their use of Facebook. In several jihadist forums, users outline relatively sophisticated measures to avoid detection, such as using entirely faked personal data and running anonymization software when browsing.

Twitter Terrorism

Twitter is a free micro-blogging service that allows every account holder to distribute messages, called "tweets," which are limited in length to 140 characters. A user's tweets can be entirely open to the public or restricted to other users who choose to "follow" him or her. Twitter can be accessed at its website or through mobile devices. By mid-2013, the 554,750,000 Twitter users tweeted about 9,100 messages every second, or 58 million per day, a number that is growing rapidly. Different from Facebook, Twitter is especially suitable for momentary, occasional users, who account for 72 percent of its members. Forty-three percent of the users are between 18 and 34 years old.

Twitter has recently emerged as terrorists' favorite Internet service, even more popular than self-designed websites or Facebook, to disseminate propaganda and enable internal communication. Terrorist use of Twitter takes advantage of a recent trend in news coverage that often sacrifices validation and in-depth analysis for the sake of almost real-time coverage. Under these conditions, especially when there are few options, mainstream media may take tweets as a legitimate news source. Terrorists repeatedly and methodically exploit this shortcoming for propaganda purposes. A prime example is the fake "breaking news" of a bomb attack inside the White House, which the Syrian Electronic Army tweeted via a hacked news agency's account on April 23, 2013. Wall Street consequently suffered $136 billion in losses caused by panicked reactions to the hoax.

The militant group Al-Shabaab, during its September 2013 attack on Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, gave a live commentary on its actions on Twitter. Several hours into the attack, an account belonging to the Somali-based, al-Qaeda–related group tweeted, "The Mujahideen ('holy warriors') entered Westgate mall today at around noon and they are still inside the mall, fighting the Kenyan kuffar ('infidels') inside their own turf." The group then tweeted its rationale for the attack and gave operational details of the assault—all in real time. The tweets were the first confirmation that the attack was the work of Al-Shabaab, and journalists around the world quickly reported it. This attack, which killed 72, was the first time that a group which had mounted a terrorist operation used Twitter to claim responsibility for it. Al-Shabaab has been active on Twitter since December 2011, sending out a stream of tweets to sometimes more than 15,000 followers, including a good number of journalists and terrorism analysts, according to a study by the London-based International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence.

Terrorists mainly use Twitter to communicate with sympathizers. An examination of 76,000 tweets by the al-Qaeda–related al-Nusra Front in Syria revealed that they contained more than 34,000 links, many leading to other jihadist content.[10] The tweets also included updates from various theaters of operations and propaganda releases. Al-Nusra's official Twitter account, @jbhatalnusra, has enjoyed a steady increase in the

number of followers. Twitter has become the main hub for the active dissemination of links directing users to digital content hosted on a range of other platforms. Similarly, Twitter was used to publicize the eleventh issue of al Qaeda's online English magazine *Inspire* after the common practice of uploading the magazine to jihadi forums became increasingly difficult in the face of constant hacking and content removal by various counterterrorism agencies. The tweets directed users to sites where *Inspire* was available. Twitter-based applications Twishort and TwitMail were used extensively by an account named "Minbar at-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad" to link users to authoritative legal opinions (*fatwas*) on topics such as, "Leaving one's country to wage jihad in another country's battlefield" and "Rulings on using stolen money for jihad." Twitter was even used to host an online press conference by AQIM (Al Qaeda branch in the Maghreb) on April 18, 2013, wherein participants could post questions that AQIM answered one week later in a PDF document (announced again via Twitter).

Twitter may also be used for practical communication. When US airstrikes against Syria seemed imminent in August 2013, several jihadi and Hezbollah groups in Syria used Twitter's real-time function to exchange urgent communications, preparing for attacks that they thought were aimed at themselves. Some experts believe that Twitter also could be used to help terrorists coordinate actual attacks. A 2008 intelligence report released by the US Army's 304th Military Intelligence Battalion included a chapter titled "Potential for Terrorist Use of Twitter," which claimed that Twitter could become an effective coordination tool for terrorists trying to launch militant attacks.[11]

Twitter has increasingly come under criticism for hosting terror feeds. On the one hand, Twitter maintains a rigorous free speech approach and has repeatedly refused

After Hacking Of Taliban Websites, Taliban Use TwitLonger To Publish 9/11 Anniversary Statement

Following the hacking of Taliban websites, the organization began using social media to publish their propaganda material. The following statement, dated September 9, 2012 and marking the 11th anniversary of 9/11, was posted by the Taliban using TwitLonger, a new social media service permitting tweets that are longer than the 140 characters allowed by Twitter.

On August 15, 2013, the Syrian Electronic Army hacked the websites of CNN, Time, and the Washington Post, announcing on its Twitter account that it had done so "in one strike."

to delete anti-Semitic, anti-Islamic, or other offending contents. For quite a while, it tolerated Hezbollah's media wing, al-Manar, as a user. On the other hand, the company has shut down numerous accounts because of public pressure and demands made by the Israeli law group Shurat Hadin in December 2011. Usually, however, this approach proves ineffective. After Twitter suspended its original account, the Syrian al-Nusra Front opened up an alternative account that gained 24,000 followers within a single day. This example illustrates how fast terrorists can recover and restore their existing information networks online.

A May 2009 posting on the al-Qaeda web forum Al-Faloja rated YouTube highly for jihadi support purposes: "YouTube is among the most important media platforms in supporting the mujahedeen, as it is ranked third in the world with more than 70 million daily visitors."

YouTube Terrorism

YouTube was established in February 2005 as an online repository for sharing video content. According to YouTube, on average, more than 1 billion users watch about 6 billion hours of videos every month. One hundred new hours of video are uploaded every minute. Overall, YouTube passed 1 trillion watched videos in 2011. Statistically speaking, that means 140 views for every human being on the planet. YouTube has localized sites in 61 countries and across 61 languages, and 70 percent of YouTube traffic comes from outside the United States.

The gigantic video-sharing service has become a significant platform for jihadist groups and supporters, fostering a thriving subculture which uses it to communicate, share propaganda, and recruit new individuals. YouTube's massive global audience ensures that jihadists can simultaneously aim at both potential recruits and targets for terrorism. As important as the videos themselves is YouTube's usefulness in facilitating social networking among jihadists. The ability to exchange comments about videos and to send

private messages to other users help jihadists identify each other rapidly, resulting in a vibrant jihadist virtual community.[12]

Terrorist groups have realized the potential of this easily accessed platform to disseminate their propaganda and radicalization videos. Convicted Moroccan-born terrorist Younis Tsouli (under the account name "Irhabi007") observed, "A lot of the funding that the brothers are getting is coming because of the videos. Imagine how many have gone after seeing the videos. Imagine how many have become shahid [martyrs]." In 2008, a jihadist website suggested a "YouTube Invasion" to support jihadist media and the administrators of al-Fajr-affiliated forums, which are associated with al-Qaeda.[13] The post outlining the concept provides a synopsis of the YouTube site and its founding and notes its use by US president-elect Barack Obama during his campaign. The message suggests YouTube as an alternative to television and a medium that allows jihadists to reach massive, global audiences. It even instructs jihadists in how to cut mujahedeen videos into ten-minute chunks (to comply with YouTube's video length requirements) and upload them sequentially to the site. "I ask you, by Allah, as soon as you read this subject, to start recording on YouTube, and to start cutting and uploading and posting clips on the jihadist, Islamic, and general forums," said the posting on the jihadist website. "Shame the Crusaders by publishing videos showing their losses, which they hid for a long time." The jihadists themselves noted the success of the YouTube Invasion in the following December 2008 statement on the Al-Faluja forum (one of al-Qaeda's propaganda forums):

> *After the great success accomplished by the YouTube Invasion and the media uproar it caused that terrorists are getting trained to use YouTube, we have to clarify some matters about the YouTube Invasion. It is a continuous and successive invasion of YouTube. It does not have a time frame or that it will be over after a while. No, it is ongoing and flowing. Brothers, you have to study YouTube in a detailed manner, because it will be one of the pillars of jihadist media. It will be a permanent tool, Allah willing, to reveal the Crusaders and their helpers. Strive to discover new tools and means.*

Some jihadists have shown a particular affinity for YouTube as a medium for terrirost messaging. Colleen LaRose, known as "Jihad Jane," is among the more widely known jihadist distributors on YouTube. In March 2009, she was charged in a federal court in Pennsylvania with conspiring to provide material support to terrorists. LaRose maintained several YouTube channels replete with jihadist content. According to her indictment, LaRose posted on YouTube that she was "desperate to do something somehow to help the plight of Muslims."

Even more influential on YouTube was the late Anwar al-Awlaki, the mastermind of jihadist online propaganda. A 2009 British government analysis of YouTube found 1,910 videos of al-Awlaki, one of which had been viewed 164,420 times. Al-Awlaki, the American-born radical cleric who was killed in Yemen in 2011, told jihadists in an Arabic-language

YouTube video: "Don't consult with anybody in killing the Americans; fighting the devil doesn't require consultation or prayers seeking divine guidance. They are the party of the devils." Al-Awlaki, who in addition to his YouTube videos had a blog and a Facebook page and was the editor of the online magazine *Inspire,* was described by the Saudi news station *Al Arabiya* as the "bin Laden of the Internet." He was a force in terrorism on American soil: he was in contact with at least two of the 9/11 hijackers and is credited with inspiring or directing the failed 2008 Times Square bombing, the 2009 shooting inside the Fort Hood military base, the failed 2009 "underwear bomber," and a failed 2010 bombing attempt involving a parcel bomb hidden inside a printer in the cargo hold of a passenger jet. Roshanara Choudhry, a Muslim student jailed for attempting to murder British MP Stephen Timms in May 2010, was inspired by al-Awlaki's online videos. Choudhry claimed that she was radicalized after being directed inadvertently by YouTube to a stream of al-Awlaki's videos. Despite demands to YouTube to remove his videos, a January 1, 2014, simple keyword search for "Al Awlaki lectures" brought up over 300 YouTube video clips.

Many YouTube pages have posted terrorist clips, some correlated with major terrorist events around the world. On April 30, 2010, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan group created its official YouTube Page. One day later, the terrorist organization posted its first video, a claim of responsibility for the attempted 2008 Times Square attack. Chechen rebel leader Doku Umarov used a video posted directly to YouTube to claim responsibility for the March 29, 2010, Moscow subway bombing carried out by two Chechen women; the video was announced on the website of the Kavkaz Center, a group associated with Chechen jihadist movement. In 2012, numerous YouTube pages posted installments from a series of detailed video lessons produced by the Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, the military-terrorist wing of Hamas. Most of them videos were about half an hour long and focused on bomb-making and using various weapons. The series is titled "Waa'iddu" ("And Prepare"), a Hamas slogan taken from a Koran verse that instructs Muslims to prepare for battle with the enemy.

Some terrorist groups have even launched their own versions of YouTube. In 2008, Hamas launched the video-sharing website AqsaTube. Not only is AqsaTube's name like YouTube's, but its logo and page design look just like YouTube's. The service describes itself as "the first Palestinian website specializing in Islamic and jihad audio-visual productions." It presents videos glorifying terrorists and terrorism, including commemoration of martyrs, songs, and the glorification of operatives from Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades. After some Internet providers refused to host the website, Hamas launched newer versions named PaluTube and TubeZik.

A study conducted by Maura Conway and Lisa McInerney analyzed the online supporters of jihad-promoting video content on YouTube, focusing on those posting and commenting on material promoting martyrdom originating from Iraq. Most of the users they studied are younger than age 35 and reside outside of the Middle East and North Africa, with the largest percentage located in the United States. As the researchers concluded, "What is clearly evident however is that jihadist content is spreading far beyond traditional jihadist websites or even dedicated forums to embrace, in particular, video sharing and social

networking—both hallmarks of Web 2.0—and thus extending their reach far beyond what may be conceived as their core support base in the Middle East and North Africa region to Diaspora populations, converts, and political sympathizers."[14]

YouTube, like the other leading social media sites, forbids any content that would be regarded as an incitement to violence, and has also responded to numerous government requests to remove videos of radical groups. Despite their efforts, many videos remain available and even more terrorist propaganda is constantly being posted. For instance, a 2013 experiment raised questions about the effectiveness of the flagging system that is used to mark questionable content for removal. Out of 125 videos flagged, 57 (45.4 percent) were still online more than four months later.[15] Finally, if speech "which attacks or demeans a group" is barred according to YouTube guidelines, why does a YouTube search of "kill the infidels" yield more than 950 hits?

Instagram and Flickr Terrorism

More and more applications interconnect the different services and extend the possibilities of conveniently sharing material. Lately, Instagram and Flickr, two applications for editing and sharing pictures and videos, have gained great popularity among the mainstream audience. By the end of 2013, Instagram had 150 million active monthly users, more than 60 percent of whom were from outside the United States, who shared 55 million pictures each day on average. Flickr offers a web service which allows users to upload photos and videos to its website, and, if desired, to their social network profiles. By March 2013, Flickr counted 87 million registered users and approximately 8 billion photos.

Although Instagram and Flickr have reputations primarily for being trendy-but-casual ways to share photos with friends and strangers, terrorists have also adopted these photo-sharing services. Online jihadists have littered Instagram with radical propaganda glorifying terrorist masterminds such as Osama bin Laden and Anwar al-Awlaki, as well as a slew of lesser-known al-Qaeda leaders who have been "martyred" while fighting against the United States and the West. Other photo sets include graphic pictures of dead jihadi fighters with captions that read, "The perfect smile!" and "Sins forgiven by the first drop of blood." Cached versions of a deleted Instagram account belonging to Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, one of the two brothers involved in the April 2013 Boston Marathon terrorist attack, showed that the young bomber "liked" a picture of Chechen militant figure Shamil Basayev. Basayev, who was killed in 2006, was a leader of Chechnya's radical insurgency, and is believed to have been the mastermind behind several terrorist attacks on Russia. On Flickr, a virtual monument was created for foreign fighters killed in Syria, featuring their name, origin, and admiring remarks about their devoutness and combat strength. Undoubtedly, a major goal of this propaganda is to encourage more alienated Muslims to join the fight. Finally, gruesome pictures of the beheading or shooting of hostages can also be freely accessed on these pages, as the example of the account of "Almurbati1" on Instagram shows.[16]

Counterterrorism Looks Forward

Terrorists have long used the Internet for purposes that range from recruitment, propaganda, and incitement to datamining and fundraising. They have turned to the new media not only because counterterrorism agencies have disrupted their traditional online presence but also because the new media offers huge audiences and ease of use. Terrorist followers, sympathizers, converts, and newcomers also find in the new media a much lower threshold to access terrorist-produced and terrorism-related content than they faced in discovering and signing up for access to the hardcore forums (those which have not been shut down, at least). This trend is combined with the emergence of lone wolf terrorism: attacks by individual terrorists who are not members of any terrorist organization.[17] Lone wolf terrorism is the fastest-growing kind of terrorism, especially in the West, where all recent lone wolf attacks involved individuals who were radicalized, recruited, trained, and even launched on social media platforms.

The terrorist migration to new online resources challenges the counterterrorism agencies, as well as the academics who research terrorism. The meteoric rise of social media has let radical groups and terrorists freely disseminate ideas through multiple modalities, including websites, blogs, social networking websites, forums, and video-sharing services. Counterterrorism is certainly lingering behind terrorists' manipulative use of the new channels. Despite the growth of Internet research in recent years, it has not yet provided efficient strategies or fruitful countermeasure devices or tactics. As William McCants of the Center for Naval Analysis asserted during his December 2011 testimony before the US House of Representatives Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence:

> *There is little research to go on, which is striking given how data-rich the Internet is. In hard numbers, how widely distributed was Zawahiri's last message? Did it resonate more in one U.S. city than another? Who were its main distributors on Facebook and YouTube? How are they connected with one another? This sort of baseline quantitative research barely exists at the moment.*[18]

The security community has to adjust counterterrorism strategies to the new arenas, applying new types of online warfare, intelligence gathering, and training for cyber warriors. The National Security Agency, the Department of Defense, the CIA, the FBI, the Defense Intelligence Agency, other US and foreign intelligence agencies, and some private contractors are already fighting back. They are monitoring suspicious websites and social media, cyberattacking others, and planting bogus information. The virtual war between terrorists and counterterrorism forces and agencies is vital, dynamic, and ferocious. Researchers around the world from disciplines such as psychology, security, communications, and computer sciences are coming together to develop tools and techniques to respond to terrorism's online activity. The challenge has spawned an

interdisciplinary research topic—intelligence and security informatics, also known as cognitive security—for studying the development and use of advanced information technologies and systems for national, international, and societal security-related applications.

Recognizing the online threat, the White House's counter-radicalization strategy, published in August 2011, acknowledged "the important role the Internet and social networking sites play in advancing violent extremist narratives."[19] The strategy's implementation plan, which came out in December 2011, stated that "the Internet has become an increasingly potent element in radicalization to violence" and that new "programs and initiatives" had to be "mindful of the online nature of the threat."[20] Crucially, it also committed the administration to formulating a strategy in its own right: "[B]ecause of the importance of the digital environment, we will develop a separate, more comprehensive strategy for countering and preventing violent extremist online radicalization and leveraging technology to empower community resilience."[21]

No such online strategy has yet been formed. In April 2013, the Bipartisan Policy Center's Homeland Security Project, co-chaired by former 9/11 Commissioners Gov. Tom Kean (R-NJ) and Rep. Lee Hamilton (D-IN), released the *Countering Online Radicalization in America* report, which identifies shortcomings in US online counter-radicalization strategy and recommends improvements.[22] According to the report, approaches aimed at restricting freedom of speech and removing content from the Internet are not only the least desirable, but also the least effective. Instead, government should play a more energetic role in reducing the demand for radicalization and violent extremist messages. In her February 2014 *Los Angeles Times* op-ed article on "Future Terrorists," Wilson Center president Jane Harman argued that "we need to employ the best tools we know of to counter radicalizing messages and to build bridges to the vulnerable. . . . Narratives can inspire people to do terrible things, or to push back against those extremist voices."[23] To implement such a strategy, a political Internet campaign against terrorism must use tactics which have proven successful and that can be applied to the counterterrorism arena.

The new media represents "an increasing continuation of war by other means," to adapt von Clausewitz's famous phrase. Cyberspace, with its numerous and emerging online platforms, presents new challenges and requires dramatic shifts in strategic thinking regarding national security and countering terrorism. Strategic thinkers should look beyond current challenges to future developments and emerging social media resources, and the problems of anticipating and preempting terrorist abuse of these tools.

Endnotes

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COMMONS LAB

The Commons Lab of STIP advances research and policy analysis of emerging technologies and methods—such as social networking, crowdsourcing, and volunteered geographic information—that empower individuals ("citizen sensors") to collectively generate actionable scientific data, to augment and support disaster response and recovery, and to provide input to government decision-making, among many other activities.

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