eTerror : Journalism, Terrorism and the Internet

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ABSTRACT

The Internet has atomised the media and journalists are losing their monopoly on international news. This paper analyses the Internet presence of five US proscribed terrorist organisations – Hizballah, Kahane Chai, Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA) The Popular Front of the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and analyse how they utilise the Internet to distribute their propaganda to a wider global audience.

INTRODUCTION

Terrorist groups have embraced the Internet as a means of transmitting propaganda, raising cash, recruiting new members and communicating with their activists.

Journalists have lost their monopoly on international news. The Internet has encouraged a shift in who creates, distributes and ultimately owns the news. It increasingly shapes the ways journalists communicate, construct their stories, publish their material and interact with their audiences. But it also allows radical groups, who might have previously relied on small audience, easily censored and suppressed newspapers, radio or television stations, to by pass journalists and offer their intellectual wares directly to an international audience.

Indeed the organisation of the most notorious of the international terrorist groups, al Qaeda, can be seen to parallel the structure of the Internet. In that:

- It is transnational

- It lacks a geographic centre
- It consists of disparate nodes or activist cells,
- It depends on the software of ideas rather than the hardware of the military (eg: aircraft carriers)

As a result al Qaeda, like the Internet, is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. As national, geographically centred, hierarchical governments have found it difficult to control and censor the web, the USA has found it difficult to identify and eliminate al Qaeda.

TERRORISM?

Terrorism is politico-military strategy devoid of its emotional subtext, and as such defined as the deliberate and systematic use of violence or suggestion of violence, on a 'small' group of non-combatant victims, to inspire fear and insecurity in the target – the wider community, to undermine their faith in establishment – which in most context translates to a government or political system.

Despite its subjective nature, this paper accepts the United States active definition of terrorist groups. While recognising that in this context one person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter, it concedes that the United States' determination to deploy its overwhelming military force in this instance, has established the American definition of terrorism as the leading if not the dominant global paradigm. George Bush in his speech to the joint Houses of Congress said that every nation had to decide:

> Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbour and support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime. (Bush September 20, 2001)

Bush also said "no government should promote the propaganda of terrorists". (Bush 2001)

So who does the US consider terrorists? The US State department listed 33 "foreign terrorist organizations" in 2003. According to Secretary of State, Colin Powell, these designations make it unlawful;

- for US citizens to provide material support,
- require US financial institutions to block transactions,
- and make members or supporters ineligible for visas.

Powell said that beyond the legal ramifications of these designations, "I hope this will leave no doubt that the United States considers terrorism to be unacceptable regardless of any supposed political or ideological purpose". (Powell: 27.4.2002)

What makes a terrorist according to the US? Powell's definition is somewhat less altruistic than President's Bush's rhetoric might indicate. According to the US State Department, the definition of terrorism was explicitly linked to US national interests, in that US designated terrorist threatened:

- US nationals
- US national defence
- US Foreign relations
- US Economic Interests

EVALUATION OF SITES:

Web sites were evaluated using Cornell University Library guidelines. Five criteria were used.

Accuracy: The author of the document should be identified and be able to be contacted. Political websites may contain news releases quoting party leaders. The author should be appropriate for the material offered.

Authority: Where was the website published? The URL and domain were checked.

Objectivity: The site should contain the organisation's goals which should be consistent with goals published elsewhere. It should be a detailed site containing material with appropriate style and content.

Currency: The material on the site should be up to date. Links to appropriate similar organizations should be live. The site should be checked to se when it was produced and last updated.

Coverage: Information contained on the site should be quoted correctly. There should be a balance of text and images which should complement each other. There should be links to similar organizations.

(http://www.library.cornell.edu/okuref/research/webcrit.html)

TERRORIST WEBSITES
A search of the Internet found a series of websites promoting US designated terrorist groups. Five were selected for this paper

Hizballah *(the party of god)* is a Radical Shi'a group formed in Lebanon (1982) by a group of clerics dedicated to create an Iranian-style Islamic republic in Lebanon following Israeli invasions. Closely allied with, and often directed by Iran, but may have conducted operations that were not approved by Tehran. In October1983 Hizbullah became the first terrorist organisation to use suicide bombers, in truck bomb attacks of the US embassy and marine barracks in Beirut - killing 241 (US Department of State, 1999).

Hizbulla's on-line propaganda network consists of a series of theme specific sites. The organization's Central Press Office, a complex site mirrored on three separate web addresses - www. hizbollah .org,www. hizbulla.net, www.hizbollah.tv - to deter hackers, acts as the centre point of the groups on-line media network and contains a historical overview of the group and suggest social, cultural and religious metamorphosis from through a number of changes in the region.

In line with its Iranian shi'a influence, Hizbulla propaganda is rooted in fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic doctrine. Despite numerous themes quoted from the Qur'an, the Islamic view of Israel and Jews and the role of martyrs are repeated again and again in Hizbulla's online propaganda and other affiliated websites.

In addition the Home page is linked to a number of sites including, www.nasrallah.net , www.nasrollah.net, www.nasralla.net, nasrollah.org, the mirrored home pages of Hizbollah's secretary general Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, who is also the representative of Iran's shi's spiritual leader Ayatullah al-Udhma Sayyid Ali Khamenei, which is focused on providing a religious justification to the conflict and the use of specific tactics such as suicide bombings. Nasrallah's web site contains transcripts of numerous speeches given by the Secretary General sanctioning 'war' on Israel. He is quoted in the site saying "In the Name of Allah, the most Gracious, and most Merciful; to those against war is made, permission is given to fight, because they are wronged' and verily, Allah is most powerful for their aid" (Nasrallah, 2002).

Contrary to the Qur'an view of Jews as 'people of the book' who are protected under Sharia law, Hizbollah and its affiliated sites portray the Israelis as Zionist invaders who have wronged the Muslims, justifying reprisal. For further religious justification Iranian spiritual leaders including the Ayatullah are quoted and linked, approving the groups actions.

While suicide is forbidden in Islam and condemns the perpetrator to eternal hell, the religious sites portray suicide bombings as martyrdom operations in the name of Allah, which promises the martyrs heavenly bliss.

The portrayal of Israelis as Zionist invaders and their own fighters as martyrs who sacrifice their life for god, religion and their people continues in many of the other affiliated sites which include www.qana.net/janta/main1.htm - an archive of 'zionist terrorism'- a page dedicated to those who were killed by Israeli troops since 1948, and www.khiamwatch.net a site dedicated to those who were detained at the Khiam prison

www.qana.net also contains a very high number of allegedly murdered children - a visually powerful site of a well orchestrated propaganda operation, while www.khiamwatch.net - high lights alleged torture at the Khiam prison by Israeli and Southern Lebanese soldiers, and contains a large number of testimonials, letters smuggled our by prisoners. In most of these sites, the web's ability to deliver colour images is used to immortalise martyrs in cyberspace.

All sites effectively utilise the internet's technical capabilities in disseminating audio and video clips, which include speeches delivered by numerous shi'a spiritual leaders and scholars. The sites are also linked to pro-resistance Al-Manar TV (www.manartv.com/), Al-Nour Radio (www.alnour.net, www.al-nour.net), Al-Intiqad NewsPaper (www.alahed.org, www.intiqad.com) and the Baqiatollah Islamic Magazine (www.baqiatollah.org).

Kahane Chai campaigned to restore the biblical state Israel. The Kach group was founded by radical Israeli-American rabbi Meir Kahane. Kahane Chai was founded by Meir Kahane's son Binyamin following his father's assassination in the US. Both groups were declared as terrorist organisation by the Israel cabinet in march 1994 following the al-ibrahimi Mosque attack (US Department of State, 1999).

Kahane.org was the most technically sophisticated of the terrorist sites surveyed. Aiming to promote Jewish identity across geographically and linguistically diverse Zionist communities, it deployed the widest range of multi media technology, encouraging interaction thorugh polls, emails and even games. It included a version in Russian, serving conservative Zionist émigrés from that country, as well as a Hebrew version. Audio tapes were available in English, Hebrew, Arabic and Spanish.

The site actively engaged in merchandising with items such as "Special sale of the day"; in this case a Kahane.org video reduced from the regular price of $25.00 to $18.00. The eCommerce section included a T shirt sale. Books, audio tapes, stickers and jewellery were also available. In addition to chats and forums there were also ePolls, similar in style to those operated by CNN. Eg: Should Israel allow International Investigators to enter Israel and investigate Jenin battle?.

Children were encouraged to interact with the site through games which included "Welcome Arafat" which required the player to shoot a pistol at a rapidly moving Arafat target. Hits were scored and players are invited to email Kahane.org. In *Whack a Barak*, "It is your difficult (and almost unachievable) task of whacking some sense into [former Israeli Prime Minister] Barak's tiny Brains. Just Whack him with the plastic hammer and maybe he'll just come to his senses!" The game noted that it was not advocating violence against fellow Jews. Visitors to the site were urged to email the US Senate (contacts linked) to demand that the Kahane group no longer be listed as a terrorist group. There were also cartoons and jokes.[1]

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[1] Chaim: I think they should erect a statue of Arafat in Times Square. Yankel: A statue of Arafat? Are you crazy? Why? Chaim: Three reasons: It will give shade in the summer. It will give shelter in the winter. It will give the pigeons a chance to speak for everybody else.

ETA - Basque Fatherland and Liberty was founded in 1959, seeking to establish a Basque homeland in northern Spain southern France. It finances its activities through robberies, kidnapping and extortion. Initially opposed to the Spanish authorities, ETA is believed to have killed more than 800 people in bombings and executions.

In a sense the Basque struggle could be see as a last gasp of the nineteenth century revolutions. A cultural grouping nestled between France and Spain is struggling to create a nation in a post modernist Europe where late capitalism is destabilizing the very notion of statehood.

The Basques who share religion and ethnic appearance with the their fellow French and Spanish citizens, have been attempting to use cultural identity rooted in a re-interpreted history to justify their independent statehood.

The diverse construction of the ETA sites reflected the political concerns of the radical communist, but anarchist influenced, independence movement. The style and structure of the site indicated ETA's need to establish a unique political and cultural identity. Consequently the sites made excellent use of the web's capacity to deliver a combination of art/photography, text, animation and music. Some animations seemed more concerned with aesthetics than overt political message, relying on a sometimes obscure cultural subtext.

The Online Euskal Heria Journal was perhaps the most visually sophisticated of the terrorist supported sites. The Journal adopted the style of an eMagazine rather than the more common eNews presentations.

It included a series of papers tracing the evolution of Basque politics from the defeat of the Basques by Carolingian knights in 781 AD to the present day, ironically using a pre nation state event as a basis for the establishment of a nation state. This section opened to a sound file of nationalistic Basque music.

There was heavy use of modern multi media production techniques, such as a virtual gallery of art and photographs, accompanied by a sound track. The shockwave movie, "Go Navarre Go" features a naked woman running across the screen, followed by the state of Navarre rising from the sea on a rubber tube. The movie was mixed under the sound of seagulls.

The site, BASQUE RED NET was composed of individuals who described themselves as radical communists, Basque nationalists, ecologists and feminists. Members of the collective included local politicians such as Lourdes Cerrato Ocerin who was imprisoned in 1997 on charges of collaboration with ETA. It also includes academics, journalists, Basque activists and alleged torture victims. The site maintained a reading list of publications produced by collective members and included photos and reports of incidents of alleged torture.

The Popular Front of the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) is the second largest group within the Palestinian Liberation Organisation. It is a Marxist-Leninist group founded by a PLO member George Habash (al-Hakim) in 1967. The Group is suspected of a number of international terrorist attacks including the 1972 Telaviv airport attack, and since 1978 attacks on Israel and moderate Arab targets (US Department of State, 1999).

The PFLP operated a text heavy site with only minimal graphics. It's wordy and worthy style resonates with the newspapers produced by similar Marxist groups. Indeed its approach could be seen as reflecting the characteristics of the Communist press, outlined by VI Lenin in the leaflet "What is to be done" in 1902:

> A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and collective agitator, but also a collective organiser. In this respect it can be compared to the scaffolding erected around a building under construction; it marks the contours of the structure and facilitates communication between the builders, permitting the them to distribute the work and view the common results achieved by their organised labour. (Lendvai: 1981 p21)

The PFLP sought "Marxist interpretation and dialectical materialism in its understanding and analysis of social reality". (http://www.pflp-pal.org/about.html) Propaganda was distributed on the PFLP site through media releases rather than leaflets, including PFLP Political Bureau sanctioned accounts of assassinations, imprisonments and anniversaries of the current Intefada. The releases were archived back to 7.10.2000, providing a progressive and unfolding account of PFLP responses to political developments.

The site agitated for political change and in a concession to modern internet technology, containing a Frequently Asked Questions page which included interactive hyper links. There were also transcripts of interviews; but with questions asked by activists such as the Centre for Palestinian Return rather than by journalists.

Party members were kept informed by the inclusion of key PFLP documents, including leader George Habash's speech to the PFLP's sixth annual conference.

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam is a Sri-Lankan rebel group fighting for Eelam - a separate state since 1976, and has adopted a battlefield insurgent strategy against the Sri Lankan Army and the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (1987-1991). The only terrorist group to have killed heads of state in two countries - Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa. The tigers have used highest number of suicide bombers (US Department of State, 1999) - nearly 200 suiciders since the first attack by captain Millar (1987)- and Gandhi's assassin Dhanu the world's first female suicide killer (1991).

The LTTE operated one of the most extensive web based propaganda networks used by any terrorist organisations. The tiger's web based propaganda net-work consists of LTTE official pages, tiger front organizations and pro-eelam groups based in more than 50 countries including the US, Britain, Canada, Australian and a number of other European and Asian countries. For more than a decade Eelam House, LTTE's London based press office has operated the heavily text based www.eelam.com. The site contains LTTE

press releases from 1985 and other publications supporting the Tamil claim for separate homeland. However the Eelam web network extends far beyond the limits of the groups official site.

The interlinked, muti-server sites recognises and reflected the disparate yet critically important nature of the Tamil Diaspora. The Tamil tigers rely heavily on expatriate communities for their fund raising activities the internet allows tigers to link regional specific expatriate sites which cab contain information on sporting activities, social events, and even immigration regulations. As such there web sites are hosted from numerous servers in Europe, America and even Australia.

The Canadian based pro-tiger web pages www.tamilcandian.com offers the most comprehensive database of pro-LTTE literature available on the internet (Canadian Intelligence report, 2001). The site also provides the basis of the Eelam ideology which identifies Tamil speaking people as one community, citizens of the Tamil nation irrespective their geographic location. While there are more than 50 million Tamils throughout the world less than two million physically live with in the boundaries of Eelam in Sri Lanka. Therefore in its propaganda tamilcanadian views Tamils as a linguistically defined translational group.

> The Tamil Language has been spoken basically in its present form in the island for the last two thousand years and it continues even now to be the living language for forty to fifty million people - about forty million people in India, more than two million people in Sri Lanka and over two million people living scattered over Malaysia, Figi, Mauritius, South Africa, Vietnam and Indonesia and even Trinidad (Tamilcanadian.com, 2002).

As a group the Tamil sites utilise web to communicate with sympathisers and to distribute physical media products such as videos, audio CDs, magazines and newspapers. A second Canadian based www.eelamweb is home to one of the largest pro-tiger on-line stores, sells arrange of products form the Eelam flags to monthly videos

produced by LTTE'S infamous suicide camera crews of military attacks on Sri Lankan troops.

In recent times the Tamil sites have attempted to diversify their propaganda network by mimicking on-line news sites. Their coverage is both regular and prolific, resembling a conventional news agency more than a sectional political site. www.tamilnet.com which operats form America with a front base in Norway offers daily news updates from Sri Lanka. Since 1997 the site has been the largest web based Tamil news source.

www.tamilguardian.com the pro-eelam news paper distributed from three distinct geographic locations Toronto Canada for a North American audience, Victoria Australia for Australasia and London UK for Europe. The newspaper is available on-line on pdf format.

Cyber Counter Terrorism

Websites The US White House, FBI, State Department, and CIA all have extensive sites with sections devoted to counter terrorism. The FBI even features specific sites aimed at primary and secondary school children. The US Defence Department site includes a photographic section on the war on terrorism, which is regularly used without attribution by the mainstream press. All of these sites contain recent speeches and media releases aimed at journalists.

Hacking For at least two years there has been a continuing cyber war between Israeli and Arab websites. Israeli flags and Hebrew slogans were placed on Hizbulla sites forcing the Party of God to diversify its site locations . In November 2000, Arab hackers attacked a number of Israeli sites including the Defence Ministry, the Tel Aviv stock exchange and the Immigration, Trade and Religious Affairs ministries. The sites had to be revived after crashing. (Middle East Intelligence Bulletin. 2000 Vol2. No 10.)

Spamming As far back as 1997, Euskal Heria Journal was overwhelmed by a virulent "e-mail bombing" attack promoted from Spain by political forces who opposed it's reports on the Basque resistance movement and claimed it was part of the Basque armed

organization Euskadi Ta Askatasuna itself. The Journal was forced to adopt six mirrored sites to stay on the web. (http://www.ehj-navarre.org/html/prmirror.html)

Closure The US shut down a Somali internet company which had been accused of funnelling money to al Qaeda. The company had previously linked to the web through the Emirates. BBC World Service reported the incident on 23.11.2001.

Espionage In *Networks and Netwars*, John Arquilla, claimed that intelligence agencies could treat terrorist sites as "honeypots" so that activists who's used them could be identified by super "cookies"; programs which would penetrate the activists computers and monitor their information and activities. (http: //www.Washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A41015-2001Sep16.htm) In May, US Attorney General. John Ashcroft announced that as part of the US anti-terrorist drive, FBI agents would begin to surf the web. (http://abc.net.au/news/newsitems/s570137.htm)

Conclusion

The internet is atomising influence in international communications. The metropolitan centred news systems must now compete with locally produced globally distributed information. The primary difference between the two products may be credibility.

The Internet provides journalists with unprecedented variety and depth of sources. Yet it already allows their intended audiences to check journalists' interpretation against the original. New technology allows journalists to communicate immediately with home bases, transmitting stories over great distance via satellite or land landlines. Increased speed of delivery can be expected to allow reporters less time for reflection. Meanwhile, their subsequent reports can be quickly distributed back to the sources, beyond western journalists traditional metropolitan audiences. This will allow media critics to immediately interact on what they consider misreporting.

Terrorists are already developing their own news networks, deploying sophisticated multi media techniques which match and sometimes surpass mainstream media.

The traditional values of accuracy and speed will become even more important for mainstream reporters competing with these partisan voices on the internet.

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