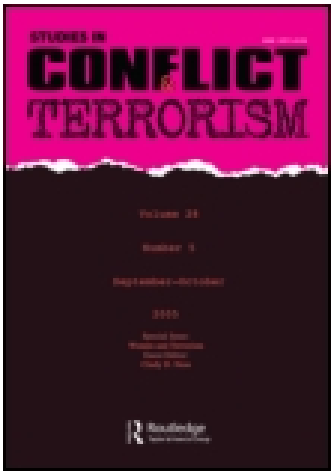

Studies in Conflict & Terrorism

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/uter20

www.terrorism.com: Terror on the Internet

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Published online: 07 Jan 2011.

To cite this article: Yariv Tsfati & Gabriel Weimann (2002) www.terrorism.com: Terror on the Internet, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 25:5, 317-332, DOI: 10.1080/10576100290101214

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10576100290101214

Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 25:317–332, 2002

1057-610X/02 $12.00 + .00
DOI: 10.1080/1057610029010121 4

www.terrorism.com: Terror on the Internet

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The nature of the Internet—the ease of access, the chaotic structure, the anonymity, and the international character—all furnish terrorist organizations with an easy and effective arena for action. The present research focuses on the use of the Internet by modern terrorist organizations and attempts to describe the uses terrorist organizations make of this new communication technology. Is the use of the Internet by terrorists different from that of other, "conventional" means of communication? How can governments respond to this new challenge? The population examined in this study is defined as the Internet sites of terrorist movements as found by a systematic search of the Internet, using various search engines. The sites were subjected to a qualitative content analysis, focusing on their rhetorical structures, symbols, persuasive appeals, and communication tactics. The study reveals differences and similarities between terrorist rhetoric online and in the conventional media.

By means of the Internet Hizbollah has succeeded in entering the homes of Israelis, creating an important psychological breakthrough.

—Ibrahim Nasser al-Din, Hizbollah military leader.
From the Internet site of the organization
(quoted in *Yediot Aharonot*, 16 Dec. 1998, p. 7)

Communication scholars conceptualize modern terrorism within the framework of symbolic communication theory (e.g., Dowling, 1986). For example, Kraber argues that "as a symbolic act, terrorism can be analyzed much like other media of communication, consisting of four basic components: transmitter (the terrorist), intended recipient (target), message (bombing, ambush) and feed back (reaction of target audience)" (1971, 529). Others have even argued that terrorism is theater, aimed not at the actual victims, but rather at the people watching on television (Jenkins, 1975; Weimann, 1986; Weimann & Winn, 1994). Thus, modern terrorism can be understood as an attempt to communicate messages through the use of orchestrated violence. With this view of terror as

Received 24 April 2002; accepted 16 May 2002.
A version of this article was presented at the 50th Annual Conference of the International Communication Association, Acapulco, Mexico 2000. The authors thank Amir Iarchy and Ceazer Hakim for assistance in the Internet searches and analysis.
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theater in mind, this article explores how terrorists use new media technologies to spread their messages.

The potential of the Internet for political purposes has fascinated many. Utopian visions of a "virtual state" in which citizens hold daily common discussions, communicate needs and demands to their representatives, and vote on various referenda (all using communication by computers) have been raised by thinkers and researchers. They believed that modern communication technology could be applied to create a Greek-polis style participatory democracy (see Downing, 1989; Jaffe, 1994). However, with the enormous growth in the size and use of the network, it became clear that the realization of this ideal was premature. In addition to the fact that this utopian vision was challenged by pornographic and racist content on the Internet, it also became apparent that radical terrorist organizations of various kinds—anarchists, nationalists, separatists, revolutionaries, neo-Marxists, and fascists—were using the network to distribute their propaganda, to communicate with their supporters, to create public awareness and sympathy, and even to execute operations.

Paradoxically, the very decentralized structure that the American security services created out of fear of a Soviet nuclear attack now serves the interests of the greatest foe of the West's security services since the end of the Cold War, namely international terror. The nature of the network, its international character and chaotic structure, the simple access, the anonymity—all furnish terrorist organizations with an ideal arena for action. The present research focuses on the use of the Internet by modern terrorist organizations and attempts to describe the uses terrorist organizations make of this new communication technology.

"The Theater of Terror"

Our analysis of terrorist organizations' web pages is guided by the dominant theory of terrorism in communication studies, the theory of the "theater of terror" (Weimann & Winn, 1994). This approach claims that modern terrorism can be understood in terms of the production requirements of theatrical engagements. As Jenkins concluded in his analysis of international terrorism:

> Terrorist attacks are often carefully choreographed to attract the attention of the electronic media and the international press. Taking and holding hostages increases the drama. The hostages themselves often mean nothing to the terrorists. Terrorism is aimed at the people watching, not at the actual victims. Terrorism is a theater. (Jenkins 1975, 4)

Terrorists pay attention to script preparation, cast selection, sets, props, role-playing, and minute-by-minute stage management. Just like compelling stage plays or ballet performances, the media orientation in terrorism requires a fastidious attention to detail in order to be effective. As Laqueur put it, "The media are the terrorist's best friend. The terrorist's act by itself is nothing, publicity is all" (1976, 104). Numerous terrorist organizations have realized the potential of media-oriented terror as a means of effectively reaching huge audiences. A study of all incidents of international terrorism during 1968–1980 revealed a significant increase in terrorist acts that victimize Western nations (though most perpetrators are non-Western) and are designed to attract the attention of the Western media (Weimann, 1986; Weimann & Winn, 1994). No wonder that Bell argued, "It has become more alluring for the frantic few to appear on the world stage of

television than remain obscure guerrillas of the bush" (1975, 89). Terrorist theory realized the potency of the mass media. Acts of terrorism were increasingly conceived as a means of persuasion, where the victim was "the skin on a drum beaten to achieve a calculated impact on a wider audience" (Schmid & DeGraaf, 1982, 14).

The emergence of media-oriented terrorism led several communication and terrorism scholars to re-conceptualize modern terrorism within the framework of symbolic communication theory. Karber has pointed out that "the terrorist's message of violence necessitates a victim, whether personal or institutional, but the target or intended recipient of the communication may not be the victim" (Karber, 1971, 529). Dowling suggested applying the concept of "rhetoric genre" to modern terrorism, arguing that "terrorists engage in recurrent rhetorical forms that force the media to provide the access without which terrorism could not fulfill its objectives" (1986, 14). Some terrorist events become what Bell has called "terrorist spectaculars" (1978, 50) that can be best analyzed by the "media event" conceptualization (see Weimann, 1987 for a discussion).

The growing use and manipulation of modern communications by terrorist organizations led governments and several media organizations to consider certain steps in response. These included limiting terrorists' access to the media, reducing and censoring news coverage of terrorist acts and their perpetrators, and minimizing the terrorists' capacity for manipulating the media (Weimann, 1999). However, the new media technologies allow terrorist organizations to transmit messages more easily and freely than through the conventional mass media. The network of computer-mediated communication (CMC) is ideal for terrorists-as-communicators: it is decentralized, it cannot be subjected to control or restriction, it is not censored, and it allows access to anyone who wants it.

Given the growth of Internet research in recent years, it is rather surprising that previous research has overlooked the online activity of terrorist organizations. Who are the terrorist movements that use the Internet? What is the rhetoric of the terror sites on the Internet? Who are the target audiences addressed by the terrorists through the network? Do the organizations use the Internet to mobilize audiences for active operations? Current research leaves these questions unanswered. The aim of this article is to address these descriptive research questions.

Methodology

To study terrorism, on the Internet or elsewhere, the term "terrorist organization" must be defined. The etymology of the term *terror* begins with the Latin verb *terrere*, meaning "to arouse fear." Although terror, or strategies reminiscent of the phenomenon, was practiced long ago in the ancient world, it is generally accepted that the term itself first came into use in France after the French Revolution, under the "reign of terror" of Robespierre. But although most researchers of the subject may concur regarding the etymological origins of the term, they find it hard to reach an agreed definition of the term. More than one hundred different definitions have been offered by scholars (see Weimann & Winn, 1994, 20). Some of these definitions focus on the special nature of the victims of terror; some stress the difference between the victims and the true goal of terror; other definitions focus on the violent act itself, its abnormal nature, or the unusual character of its perpetrators (Schmid, 1983, 73–100). One early systematic study of 109 different definitions attempted to isolate the common and agreed on components of definitions of terrorism (Schmid & Jongman, 1988). From these, a 200-word definition developed, which included the following elements: an act of violence; symbolic or

chance victims (innocent people); performance by an organization; methodicalness or seriality in the operation; advance planning; criminal character; absence of moral restraints; political demands; attempt to win attention; use of fear (terror); and unpredictability or unexpectedness. This definition, employed by many studies of modern terrorism, guided our present study's search for terrorist sites on the Internet.

Content analysis was defined by Holsti as "any technique for reaching conclusions by systematic and objective identification of defined properties of messages" (Holsti, 1968, 601). In the present study, due to the small size of the sample and the descriptive nature of the research questions, the analysis was mainly qualitative. The population for this study was defined as the Internet sites of terrorist movements as they appeared in January 1998 and January 2002. The U.S. State Department's list of terrorist organizations (U.S. State Department, 1996, 2000) was used, which meets the accepted definition of terror (as elaborated by Schmid & Jongman, 1988). The major problem of reliance on this list is that it represents the official perspective. According to some critical approaches, the "real" terror organizations are the agencies and satellites of the United States (Herman, 1982; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Herman & O'Sullivan, 1989). Thus, the present study's boundaries must be restricted to those of the official and conventional perspectives.

To locate the terror sites a search of the Internet was conducted, using the names of hundreds of organizations in the sampling base. The standard search engines (Altavista, Lycos, Infoseek, Yahoo, Magellan, and Google) were used. The first search, conducted in January 1998, yielded 14 organizations and 16 Internet sites. Another search, conducted in January 2002, yielded 29 sites from 18 organizations. The 1998 search was limited to English websites, whereas the 2002 search included sites in English and Arabic. Almost all organizations active in 1998 were also online in 2002. However, many of the URL addresses used by terrorist sites in 1998 had changed by 2002 (mostly due to moves to different servers).

Who Are the Terrorists of the Internet?

Numerous organizations have entered cyberspace and created Internet sites (for detailed descriptions see Appendix 1). These include Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Movement), the Lebanese Hizbollah (Party of God), the Egyptian Al-Gama'a al Islamiyya (Islamic Group, IG), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PLFP), the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Peruvian Tupak-Amaru (MRTA) and "The Shining Path" (Sendero Luminoso), the Kahane Lives movement, the Basque ETA movement, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), "Supreme Truth" (Aum Shinrikyo), the Colombian National Liberation Army (ELN-Colombia), the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC), the Popular Democratic Liberation Front Party in Turkey (DHKP/C), the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), the Zapatista National Liberation Army (ELNZ), the Japanese Red Army (JRA), and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). One other site, that of the People's Mujahedin of Iran (PMOI-Mujahedin-e Khalq) did not have an English version in addition to that in Farsi, and thus was not analyzed. These organizations not only pursue the peaceful act of establishing Internet sites, but also engage in actual violence (some of them with a long record that includes killings, kidnapping, assaults, and bombings).

Geographically, most of the organizations that have turned to the Internet are based in Third World countries (in South America, East Asia, and the Middle East), and only two are located in Europe. This finding is apparently due to the decline in terrorism in

Europe during the 1980s and 1990s and its rise in the Third World. Classification of the organizations by type (see Wilkinson in Ben-Dor, 1977, 38) shows that those on the Internet are national, revolutionary, and religious movements (or combinations of these types). As expected, terror movements of a criminal or psychotic type are absent, probably because, unlike politically motivated terrorism, they are uninterested in media exposure.

Not surprisingly, the websites of anti-regime organizations usually operate from outside the state against which they are working.[1] But geographical distance may be misleading. It is more than possible that the sites are in practice operated from a place different from that stated on the site. It is also possible that the domain and the server for the site have been acquired by supporters of the organization abroad, but the content itself is produced at the scene of the conflict. In some cases, an explicit connection to the leadership of the organization is mentioned. Some sites declare that they are not official sites of the organization, some even in their title ("The Unofficial Hamas Homepage"; "The Unofficial Hezbolla Homepage"). Yet, some connection to the terrorist organizations and their leadership is evident from the sites' contents (e.g., communiqués, interviews with leaders).

The Content of Terrorist Sites

The most common content of the surveyed sites is information. They usually include information about the history of the organization and biographies of its leaders, founders, heroes, commanders or revered personalities,[2] information on the political and ideological aims of the organization, and up-to-date news. Most of the sites give a detailed historical account of the movement or the organization, a review of the social and political background, a selective description of its notable activities in the past, and its aims. National organizations (separatist or territorial) generally display maps of the areas in dispute: the Hamas site shows a map of Palestine; the Colombian site shows a map of Colombia; the Zapatista site has a map of Chiapas and information about it; the Tamil site presents a map of Sri Lanka.

Almost all the terror sites detail their goals in one way or another. Sometimes this is done explicitly, sometimes indirectly. Sometimes it is a separate section, and sometimes intermixed with other content. The most common presentation of aims is through a direct criticism of their enemies or rivals. For example, the Hamas site presents a historical account of "the birth of the Zionist entity in Palestine;" the Shining Path site has information about "the crimes of the Fujimori regime" (supported by the United States); a considerable part of the Hizbollah site focuses on Israeli activity ("Israeli terrorism" from the Hizbollah standpoint); the Tamil site attacks the Sinhalese regime. Thus, the terrorist sites do not concentrate only on information concerning their organizations; direct attack of the enemy is the most common strategy of the Internet terrorists.

By contrast, almost all sites avoid presenting and detailing their violent activities. Although the organizations behind these sites have a record of bloodshed, they hardly ever record these activities on their sites. The exceptions are Hizbollah and Hamas. Hizbollah shows updated statistical reports of its actions ("daily operations") that display in minute detail all of the organization's operational successes. A separate page enumerates the number of dead "martyrs," along with the number of "Israeli enemies" and "collaborators" killed. The Hamas site contains lengthy discussions in Arabic of military "operations" in its news and views sections. However, this detailed depiction of violent action is unusual. Most organizations, even if they expound at length on the moral (and,

as some of them argue, legal) basis of the legitimacy of the use of violence, refrain from any reference to their violent actions or their fatal consequences. This reticence probably reflects the propaganda and image-building motives of the sites.

While avoiding the violent aspects of their activities, the Internet terrorists, regardless of their nature, motives or location, usually stress two issues: freedom of expression and political prisoners. Thus, the Tamil Tigers discuss the legislation of the Sri Lankan government that limits freedom of expression "in support of the establishment of a separate state on the land of Sri Lanka;" the Kahane Lives site calls on visitors to oppose the legal ban on activity of the organization (in the United States and Israel); the issues of freedom of expression and restrictions on political activity are central themes on the site of the Basque Hari Batsuna; and the Colombian ELN site discusses limited freedom of expression extensively ("Contrary to what official sources state, there is no freedom of the press or of expression in Colombia. . . . The Sampar government operates censorship and is tightening its hold on the media. . . . Moreover, critical journalists are victims of death and torture. . . . Every week attacks are made against the journal of the Communist Party"). It appears that anti-establishment terror enjoys representing itself as the victim, appealing to the democratic values of the Western public in general and Internet users in particular. Terrorists aim at Western audiences who are sensitive to the norms of freedom of expression and emphasize the issues that provoke sympathy in democratic societies. Restricted expression by political movements is contrary to the fundamental and sacred principles of democracy. The strong emphasis given to this issue in democratic societies helps terrorist organizations—which don the innocent cap of a "nonviolent political group"—embarrass the governments against which they are struggling. This tactic works particularly well on the stage of the Internet, the symbol of absolutely free communication.

As noted earlier, another piece of information frequently found on terrorists' websites is that of political detentions. The FARC site talks in terms of "the cry of women political prisoners"; political prisoners is a subject that often appears on the site of the Kurdish movement and the Palestinian sites; the DHKP/C site deals at length with the hunger strike of political prisoners and the torture they endure (which "will not be able to break the human spirit"); a report on the condition of political prisoners in Peru and calls for their liberation may be found at the Tupak Amaru site; the Kahane site condemns administrative detentions and even presents an interview from prison with Benyamin Zeev Kahane; the Hari Batsuna site mentions the detention of party activists who distributed a cassette produced by ETA, the military arm of the movement, "calling for a peaceful solution to the crisis of the Basque region." Carlos Marighela in his manual for the urban guerrilla states that one of his strategies is to push the authorities to act in a way that will make them hated by the citizens. The themes of political detention and restricted freedom of expression are used for this purpose. The organizations' websites emphasize the antidemocratic measures employed against them. In so doing, they attempt to malign the authorities, appealing both to their supporters ("constituents") as well as to more remote audiences of "bystanders." Even among the community of their "enemies," namely the public that is naturally hostile to the organization, the terrorists try, by emphasizing the threats to democracy, to create feelings of uneasiness and shame.

The terrorist sites are made up not only of text, but are also rich in graphic and visual elements. All of them display their emblems on their homepages. Some of the sites even offer visitors the option of downloading the emblems. Although the Internet sites usually conceal the violent nature of the terror organizations and stress their allegedly peace-loving nature, this pacifist approach is not reflected in their emblems.

Symbols on the websites' homepages usually include weapons or other elements signifying the use of force. Hizbollah shows a knife with dripping blood; the Shining Path and the IRA display masked fighters brandishing weapons; at the Kahane Lives site there is a raised fist; and at the Tupak Amaru and ELN sites a rifle is held aloft. Some of these symbols originated long before the Internet and thus do not reflect the new trend of a nonviolent image. The flags of the organization (or similar national symbols) also appear regularly on the sites' front pages. (Incidentally, some sites are designed in the colors of the flags.) The 2002 sites contain many other nontextual elements—songs, speeches, and even video clips. These are usually more common on non-English sites.

A common element on the terror sites is the organization's communiqués and the speeches and writings of its leaders, founders, and ideologists. The sites often present a word-for-word series of official statements by the organizations, which the visitor can browse through, along with selected announcements arranged by date. Tupak Amaru and the Zapatistas offer such communiqués and even call on visitors to copy, translate, print, and distribute them ("They are the work of the central command and the site has no copyright"); the DHKP/C site offers speeches and translations of chapters from a book by one of its leaders; the Hamas site offers links to translations of interviews given by Sheikh Yassin to Arab radio stations and newspapers; the Shining Path offers access to pamphlets by the organization's spokespeople; the FARC site allows access to press announcements and letters; Kahane Lives gives a commentary on the weekly Torah portion by Benyamin Zev Kahane. In general, the Internet sites of terrorists tend to recycle materials distributed in the past through the mass media and other communication means. Some terrorist sites house a veritable online gift shop through which visitors can order and purchase books, video and audio cassettes, stickers, printed shirts, and pins with the organization's badges.

The Rhetoric of Terror on the Internet

As Weimann and Winn argued in their study titled *The Theater of Terror* (1994), one of the central problems facing modern terrorism is to justify the use of violence. It is clear that this problem also preoccupies the operators of the terror Internet sites. At most sites significant efforts are devoted to vindicating the use of violence. Four rhetorical structures are used on the terrorist sites to justify violence. The first one is the "no choice" motive. Most sites aver that they do not reject a peaceful solution. Violence is presented as a necessity foisted on the weak as the only means with which to deal with an oppressive enemy. Thus the Tamil Tigers argue that their use of violence is legitimized by the Sri Lankan rejection of the rights of the Tamil minority. They cite the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and various reports of external observers (usually from human rights organizations) about the right of the Tamil people to self-determination, the Geneva Convention, and UN Security Council resolutions. All these lead to the conclusion that "the armed struggle of the Tamil people is both right and legal because the rule of law for the Tamil people has ceased to exist." The site points out that the Tamil struggle developed only as a last resort after the Tamils had endeavored to realize their rights peacefully.

The ELN notes that the armed struggle is legitimate, for "with or without the guerrilla, violence reigns in our world day by day: hunger, repression, rape, crime. . . . The violence of our organization is the result, not the cause, of this reality. This is the attempt of the weak to free themselves. . . . Therefore, the ELN will not abandon the armed struggle until the causes of our struggle have passed. . . . We are fighting because

we long for a society without violence." The Hizbollah site argues that the Islamic resistance is a response to Zionist aggression and the Zionist aim of mastery over southern Lebanon, and that "as noted in the Declaration of Human Rights, it is our right to fight until our rights and our land are restored to us." Hamas argues that "just as the French resistance movement fought the Nazis in the forties, Hamas is a movement . . . composed of patriots seeking self-determination and struggling to free their homeland, Palestine."

A second rhetorical structure related to the legitimacy of the use of violence is the demonizing and de-legitimization of the enemy. The members of the movement or organization are presented as freedom fighters, forced against their will to use violence because a ruthless enemy is crushing the rights and dignity of their people or group. The enemy of the movement or the organization is the real terrorist, many sites insist, and "our violence is dwarfed in comparison to his aggression" is a routine slogan. The Hamas site directs the visitor to a page bearing the heading "Who Is A Terrorist?" showing an illustration of Israeli soldiers holding a child (caption: "We have captured a terrorist, Sir!"); another shows Israeli soldiers in an armored troop carrier, with the bodies of women and children visible through the gun sights (caption: "I have won, Levi! I shot three of those creatures"); and others of Israeli soldiers shooting and beating women and children, accompanied by cynical headings presenting the Israelis as inhuman brutes. The message is that the Palestinians are the victims of the Zionists who are the real terrorists, devoid of moral restraint and ready to hurt women and children. The Hamas site is replete with many "facts" whose purpose is the de-legitimization of Israel. These include facts about the connection between Zionist and British imperialism; quotations from Zionist leaders about "Zionist expansionist aims"; and examples of brutal and violent acts committed by Israelis.

The Hizbollah site similarly stresses that the Israelis are the terrorists. The site shows lurid pictures of the killings in the Kana disaster, deaths that in fact were caused by a mistake by Israeli artillery. A historical survey of the "development of the Islamic resistance" quotes from speeches of Zionist leaders (including Herzl) who held that to ensure water sources for the Jewish state, its northern border had to be the Litani river (today deep in Lebanese territory). The site presents detailed information about "Israeli terrorism": information about the "birth of the Zionist entity," "Israel's daily aggression," and "Israeli acts of slaughter."

The argument at the Turkish DHKP/C site is that

> the ruling classes have adopted a policy of terror and slaughter, hardly to be found anywhere in the world. . . . Every day thousands of revolutionaries are murdered by the fascist forces of the state. . . . In the prisons hundreds of prisoners are tortured. Villages and forests are wiped out and thousands of people are driven off their land and herded into concentration camps. Almost every day the state raids the unions and workers' organizations. . . . At the same time, members of the ruling class are found almost every day involved in corruption or other scandals. Most of the senior officials of the state, including the president and the prime minister, depend on and are under the thumb of the Mafia and are linked to acts of bribery and corruption.

The Shining Path site gives information about "the crimes of the Fujimori regime, supported by the United States." According to this site, "from the start the popular struggle was obliged to face the most evil brutality that the Peruvian government could apply—

from the slaughter and annihilation of whole villages to the execution of hundreds of revolutionaries and of the Chairman of the organization Gonzalo. . . . The Peruvian army conducted a campaign of genocide. . . . For all that, the revolution continued to advance." Terrorist rhetoric tries to shift the responsibility to the opponent, displaying his brutality, his inhumanity, and his immorality. The violence of the "freedom" and "liberation" movements is dwarfed in comparison with the cruelty of the opponent.

The third rhetorical tactic is to emphasize weakness. The organizations attempt to substantiate the claim that terror is the weapon of the weak. As noted earlier, despite the ever-present vocabulary of "the armed struggle" or "resistance," the terror sites avoid mentioning or noting how they victimize others. On the other hand, the actions of the authorities against the terror groups are heavily stressed, usually with words such as "slaughter," "murder," "genocide," and the like. The organization is constantly being persecuted, its leaders are subject to assassination attempts and its supporters massacred, its freedom of expression is curtailed, and its adherents are arrested. This tactic, which portrays the organization as small, weak, and hunted down by a power or a strong state, turns the terrorists into the underdog. Hizbollah differs somewhat from other organizations in that it highlights its military achievements, gloating over enemy victims (showing pictures of funerals of murdered Israelis), and publishing detailed statistics about its military successes. The motive for this unique approach has been Hizbollah's attempt to influence the public debate in Israel about withdrawal from Lebanon. The organization has stated explicitly that its aim has been to exert pressure in Israel in favor of withdrawal. The organization knows that many Israelis visit the site, whose address is published in Israeli media. Hizbollah publishes its records of murdered Israelis, maintains electronic mail connections with Israelis, and appeals to Israeli parents whose sons serve in the Israeli army, all with the aim of causing demoralization.

Finally, some of the terror sites are replete with the rhetoric of nonviolence, messages of love of peace, and of a nonviolent solution. Although these are violent organizations, many of their sites claim that they seek peaceful solutions, diplomatic settlements, or arrangements reached through international pressure. Two organizations state that they are not violent at all—the Basques, who present themselves as searching for a peaceful resolution, and the ELN. The latter does indeed call for armed struggle, but the site writers argue that their organization is not militarist and that talk of the goal of the organization being a military revolution is idle gossip put about by the authorities.

Terrorist rhetoric on the Internet tries to present a mix of images and arguments in which the terrorists appear as victims forced to turn to violence to achieve their just goals in the face of a brutal, merciless enemy, devoid of moral restraints. Demonizing the enemy, playing down the issue of terror victims, shifting blame for the use of violence to the enemy, and proclaiming peace-loving messages are strategies used on most terror sites. Is this rhetoric qualitatively different from that of terror organizations in other communication channels? It appears that the terror organizations that have turned to the Internet use patterns of rhetoric similar to those used by their spokespersons in the conventional media. The justification of violence, the demonizing and de-legitimization of the enemy, and the rhetoric of weakness were all found in press releases by the terror organizations, in the broadcasts of their radio and television stations, and in speeches and books by their leaders (see Cordes, 1988; Weimann & Winn, 1994).

The online version of terrorist rhetoric, however, differs from the conventional media strategy of terrorists in that in the latter, the organizations took responsibility for violence, and did not avoid it. The rhetoric used by media-oriented terrorism in the early 1970s threatened the existing order altogether and did not hint at the possibility of

diplomatic or peaceful solutions, as so many of the current organizations do in their websites. It is probable that perceptions of the medium (the Internet) and of the target audience (web surfers) dictate this more pacifist rhetorical strategy.

Who Are the Target Audiences?

Whom do the Internet terrorists target at their sites? Are they appealing to potential supporters, to their enemies (namely the public who is part of the opposing sociopolitical community in the conflict), or are they targeting international public opinion? Although it is impossible for us to identify the actual users of the sites,[3] an analysis of their contents indicates an attempt to approach all three audiences. Reaching out to supporters is evinced from the fact that the sites offer appropriate items for sale, including printed shirts, badges, flags, and video and audio cassettes. The slogans at these sites also appeal strongly to the supporter public. Of course, the sites in local languages target these audiences more directly. These sites include much more detailed information about recent activities of the organizations and elaborate in detail about internal politics (the relationship between local groups).

But an important target audience, in addition to supporters of the organizations, is the international "bystander" public and surfers who are not involved in the conflict. This is evident from the presentation of basic information about the organization and the extensive historical background material (with which the supporter public is presumably familiar). Similarly, the sites make use of English in addition to the local language of the organization's supporters. Most of the sites offer versions in several languages in order to enlarge their international audience. The Basque movement site offers information in Castilian, German, French, and Italian; the MRTA site offers Japanese and Italian in addition to its English and Spanish versions. The Uzbeki site offers information in Arabic, English, and Russian.

Judging from the content of many of the sites, it might also be inferred that journalists constitute another bystander target audience. Press releases by the organizations are often placed on the websites. The detailed background information might also be useful for international reporters. One of Hizbollah's sites (Hizbollah's press office) specifically addresses journalists and invites them to interact with the organization's press office via e-mail.

Approaches to the "enemy" audiences are not as clearly apparent from the content of many sites. However, in some sites the desire to reach this audience is evident by the efforts to demoralize the enemy or to create feelings of guilt. When the terror sites show pictures of their enemies performing acts of killing, enemy police aiming their weapons at women and children, or evidence of torture of detainees by those enemies, they are meant not only to mobilize support and to promote sympathy among neutral visitors, but also to arouse feelings of unease, guilt, and remorse in audiences belonging to the opposing political or social group. The organizations try to use the websites to change public opinion in their enemies' states, to weaken public support for the governing regime, to stimulate public debate, and of course, to demoralize the enemy.

From the words of the Hizbollah leader quoted at the beginning of this article it can be gathered that the movement indeed wishes to enter "the homes of Israelis, creating an important psychological breakthrough." In 1999, Hizbollah succeeded in this goal when, on its Internet site, it showed details about the return of the bodies of Israeli marine commandoes who had fallen in Lebanon. The organization stated that the one returned coffin contained not only the body of one of the fallen soldiers, Itamar Ilya, but also

body parts of other fighters. The statement aroused a furor among the families of the dead soldiers and a bitter confrontation with the IDF authorities. The "dialogue" that the Hizbollah organization wants to open with the Israelis by means of the Internet is also evident in the inclusion of appeals to the parents of Israeli soldiers stationed in Lebanon (with publication of an interview originally aired in Israel with four mothers of Israeli soldiers in Lebanon, under the headline "I don't want my son to die in Lebanon"). In an article in *Yediot Aharonot* (16 December 1998, 7) many Israelis, particularly parents of soldiers serving in Lebanon, reported that they visit the Hizbollah site to get an update on the news ("I regard these sites as a legitimate source of information," said one Israeli father). The Hizbollah site even offers to answer anyone who sends questions by e-mail, and does indeed reply to Israeli questioners, sending information and news to their e-mail addresses.

Do the terror organizations try to enroll supporters through the network? Analysis of the sites revealed a few attempts to enlist new recruits into an active circle of support, but there was no attempt to mobilize visitors for any actual violence. Kahane Lives (in which the suggestion appears under the title "How can I help the struggle: A few suggestions"); the Shining Path ("Action alert: What you can do"); the Basque movement; and the IRA site seeking economic support (including a page for contributions through credit cards) are examples of pages seeking readers' active support. The Zapatista site calls on its visitors to assist the struggle in several ways: to approach members of the Mexican government (the site offers links to the e-mail address of the president of Mexico), and to "send letters of support to ENLZ or local refugees. Educate your friends. . . . Join protest marches outside embassies or diplomatic missions of Mexico near you, or organize such a rally yourself. . . . Send humanitarian aid to Mexico (link to humanitarian organizations). . . . Donate money to the organization." In contrast to the absence of appeals for active violence, there is a highly conspicuous effort at many terror sites to obtain supporters for nonviolent activity, especially through the signing of petitions.

Though no direct calls for violence were found, some of the content on the websites could be viewed as encouraging violence indirectly. The Hamas site included calls for Jihad ("Jihad is victory or martyrdom," "an eye for an eye," "the Jihad will continue till judgment day"). Of course, the legitimization and justification of violence can also be interpreted as an indirect call for violence. Glorification of martyrs (and the very use of the word "martyr"), for example, signals that the perpetrators of violence are rewarded. However, as mentioned earlier, this is only the subtext. Most sites' contents ignore violence, and some of the organizations even imply that they seek nonviolent solutions.

Another activity frequently suggested by the terror sites to their visitors is to navigate to other web pages through links appearing on the site. The sites provided are usually those ideologically close to the organization (its journals, its solidarity groups, etc.). In addition, links can be found to organizations offering information on subjects related to topics of interest to the terror groups—human rights bodies in the case of some of the revolutionary organizations; Islamic groups in the case of the Islamic and Palestinian sites; nationalist movements in the case of groups engaged in political struggle (e.g., the Hamas site to the Pal-Net Palestinian site).

Discussion

This analysis reveals differences and similarities between the rhetoric used by terrorists online and elsewhere. A central issue for terrorist rhetoric, regardless of the medium it uses, is the need to justify and legitimize violence. Many of the arguments used by

terrorists online—the "last resort" argument, the "legal" argument and shifting the responsibility to the use of violence to the enemies of the terrorists—are found elsewhere in terrorists' materials. The similarity between the materials used by terrorist groups online and in the conventional media is further manifested by the fact that much of the content of the sites actually makes use of materials that have been previously circulated elsewhere (e.g., press releases).

However, the content of terrorist organizations' Internet sites is different in many ways from the content of mass-media coverage of terrorism. First and foremost, news coverage of terrorists is almost always related to violence, whereas violence can easily be concealed over the Internet. Thus, the sites try in many ways to appear like the websites of legitimate political organizations. In other words, the Internet terrorist rhetoric seems much more "pacifist" than the rhetoric used by media-oriented terrorism. Some Internet pages deny the use of violence (which is the exact opposite of the typical terrorist strategy of taking responsibility). Others simply try to ignore it. Instead, the creators of the sites highlight issues like political detention and freedom of expression, probably with the intent of winning the sympathy of human rights and free speech–oriented web surfers.

A second difference between the content of the sites and media coverage of terrorists is that the sites contain extensive information and background, not possible on mass media channels that operate with more limited space constraints. An abundance of background information and documents characterize the websites of a variety of other nonterrorist political organizations. Like political parties, nongovernmental organizations, and interest groups, the creators of the sites perceive the Internet as an opportunity to supply interested surfers with an information storehouse. Indeed, this capability might be more important for terrorists than for other political users of the Internet because the access of adherents of the groups to such materials is often restricted by authorities.

A third difference between CMC and conventional media is that by using the sites, the organizations can mobilize people into action, something they cannot do through the mainstream media because of journalistic standards. However, although the sites offered visitors ample and varied possibilities to action, violence was rarely one of the advocated approaches. The sites call visitors to donate, disseminate the organizations' messages, and protest. Call for violent action, if at all present, was only indirect (e.g., through calls for Jihad in Islamic sites).

The reasons for the differences between terrorist sites and the coverage of terrorism in the mainstream media have to do with the communicators, the channel, and the audience. The communicators of online information are probably more educated and more familiar with the nature of the Internet than other members of the terrorist organizations. The channel—the Internet—is a central venue for free speech. The communicators try to accommodate the message to the values and norms of the medium. In addition, they are probably influenced by existing Internet formats; thus, the similarity to the Internet sites of political organizations and the more pacifistic nature of the messages, compared to regular terrorist rhetoric. The communicators' perceptions of the audience probably also influence the contents. Web users are perceived to be international, educated, and mostly liberal; thus, the human rights discourse and the references to international organizations.

How should governments respond? Should societies try to restrict the online presence of terrorist groups? Future prevention of distribution of terrorist content on the Internet is technologically problematic, legally complex (Karniel, 1997; Oberding & Norderhaug, 1996), and ethically intricate. Moreover, it does not seem at all probable that the

effort here is worthwhile for the authorities, as the damage inherent in the sites, in terms of public relations, is less than the possible damage arising from attempts to restrict them (limitation of freedom of expression, invasion of an "open" channel such as the Internet, etc.).

Attempts by individual hackers as well as by governments to block the organizations from using the Internet were reported (Shahar, 2001), especially after the 11 September 2001 attacks. While monitoring the websites of terrorist organizations in the past four years the authors found that many of them change addresses frequently. Some sites disappeared from the network for a while (as happened to all Hizbollah sites in October 2000 after an attack by Israeli hackers in response to the kidnapping of three Israeli soldiers); however, these attacks affected the sites' presence on the Internet only temporarily. The fact that most of these sites reopened after a while demonstrates the futility of attempts to block terrorists or their supporters from using the Internet to communicate their messages.

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Notes

1. The Tamil Tigers operate from London. The supporters of the Shining Path work out of Berkeley, California; the address of the operators of the Kahane Lives site is the Rav Meir Yeshiva in Brooklyn, New York; the English version of the Tupak Amaru site is operated by an organization called "Arm the Spirit," located in Canada. The Spanish version of the site operates from Europe; the PKK is also helped by Arm the Spirit, and also by pro-Kurdish movements situated in Holland. The DHKP/C site also works out of Holland. The Zapatista site is operated from Santa Cruz, California. Although the Sinn Fein site operates from Dublin, that part of the site concerning the IRA is located at an American University.

2. For example, the al-Qassam site provides the biography of Izz a-Din al-Qassam and information about other *shahids*; the Kahane Lives site presents biographies of Rabbi Meir Kahane and his son Benyamin Zev Kahane.

3. It is also impossible to estimate the extent of exposure of the sites. Some sites provide counters, ranging between a few hundred to 200,000 entries. However, these are not reliable reports.

Appendix 1: Terrorist Organizations on the Internet

Hamas: Islamic Resistance Movement. Founded in 1987 as a Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brothers. Its goal is the establishment of an Islamic Palestinian state instead of the state of Israel.

http://www.hamas.org/ (1998)
http://www.palestine-info.net/hamas/index.htm (1998)
http://www.palestine-info.com/index_e.htm (2002)
http://www.qassam.org/ (2002)

Hizbollah: Radical Shi'ite group founded in Lebanon. Its aim is to establish an Islamic state in Lebanon and to remove non-Islamic influences from the region.

http://www.Hizbollah.org/ (1998, 2002)
http://www.moqawama.org/ (1998)
http://www.moqawama.tv/ (2002)
http://www.almanar.com.lb/ (2002)

Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso): Peruvian guerrilla organization connected to the Peru Communist Party (PCP). Has a Maoist-Marxist ideology and opposes the continuation of the American presence in Peru.

http://www.blythe.org/peru-pcp/ (1998, 2002)
http://www.csrp.org/index.html (1998, 2002)

Kahane Lives: Extremist right-wing Jewish group whose declared aim is the reconstitution of biblical Israel. Suspected of violent acts against Palestinians and threats against Israeli politicians.

http://www.kahane.org/ (1998, 2002)
www.kahane.net (2002)
http://www.newkach.org/ (2002)

Hari Batsuna (ETA): Founded in 1959 with the goal of establishing an independent Basque state in the Basque region of Spain. Although it acts as a political party, it has a military arm that carries out terror acts against French and Spanish targets.

http://web.access.net.au/~axxs/abrc/html/hb3.html (1998)
http://www.contrast.org/mirrors/ehj/html/hb3.html (1998)
http://free.freespeech.org/askatasuna/ (2002)
http://www.basque-red.net/homei.htm (2002)

IRA and Sinn Fein: The IRA is an Irish organization founded in 1969 as the armed wing of Sinn Fein, a political party, with the aim of achieving British withdrawal from Northern Ireland and union with the Irish Republic

http://www.utexas.edu/students/iig/archive/ira/history/irahist.html (1998)
http://www.sinnfein.org/ (1998)

Supreme Truth (Aum Shinrikyo): A sect formed in 1987 by Asahara Shoko in Japan. Its goal is to take control of Japan and then the world. In March 1995 members of the group carried out a sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway.

http://Aum-internet.org/ (1998)
http://Aum-shinrikyo.com/english/ (1998)
http://info.aleph.to/index_en.html (2002)

Colombian National Liberation Army (ELN–Colombia): Rural guerrilla group, anti-American, with a Maoist-Marxist ideology, active in Colombia.

http://www.voces.org (1998)
http://www.berlinet.de/eln/engindex.html (1998)
http://www.eln-voces.com/frame-dere.html (2002)
http://www.web.net/eln/ (2002)

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE): Represents the largest Tamil group in Sri Lanka. It goal is to establish an independent Tamil state on the island.

http://www.eelam.com/ (1998, 2002)
http://www.eelamweb.com/ (2002)

Armed Forces of the Revolution of Colombia (FARC): Revolutionary, anti-American organization, founded in 1966 as the military wing of the Colombian Communist Party.

http://www.contrast.org/mirrors/farc/ingles.htm (1998)
http://www.farc-ep.org/pagina_ingles/ (2002)

Tupak Amaru (MRTA): Peruvian Leninist-Marxist revolutionary organization, founded in 1983.

http://burn.ucsd.edu/~ats/mrta.htm (1998)
http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/mrta/ (2002)
http://www.voz-rebelde.de/ (2002)

Popular Revolutionary Liberation Party/Front (DHKP/C): Turkish Marxist organization founded in 1978 under the name Deverimisi Sol (Dev Sol). It has xenophobic, anti-American, and anti-NATO views. It acts against Turkish government officials and military personnel and American targets.

http://www.ozgurluk.org/dhkc/ (1998)
http://www.dhkc.org/ (2002)

Kurdish Workers Party (PKK): Founded in 1974 as a Marxist-Leninist group of Turkish Kurds with the goal of establishing an independent Kurdish state in southeast Turkey. Its main targets are the Turkish government and its agencies in Western Europe; it attacks tourist sites in Turkey and kidnaps foreign tourists.

http://www.pkk.org/ (1998 and 2002)

Zapatista National Liberation Army (ELNZ): Guerrilla movement acting against Mexican army and police forces in the Chiapas region. Its actions include bombings, attacks on installations, and damage to the infrastructure.

http://www.ezln.org/ (1998 and 2002)

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU): Coalition of Islamic militants from Uzbekistan and other Central Asian states opposed to Uzbekistani President Islom Karimov's secular regime. Goal is the establishment of an Islamic state in Uzbekistan. Believed to be responsible for five car bombs in Tashkent in February 1999.

http://www.ummah.net/uzbekistan/

Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (Islamic Group, IG): Egypt's largest militant group, active since the late 1970s; specialized in armed attacks against Egyptian security and other government officials, Coptic Christians, and Egyptian opponents of Islamic extremism.

http://www.ummah.org.uk/ikhwan/index.html

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP): Marxist-Leninist group founded in 1967 by George Habash. Committed numerous international terrorist attacks during the 1970s. Since 1978 has conducted attacks against Israeli or moderate Arab targets, including the assassination of the Israeli tourism minister in 2001.

http://www.pflp-pal.org/about.html

The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ): Committed to the creation of an Islamic Palestinian state and the destruction of Israel through holy war, this group has carried out several attacks against Israeli targets.

http://www.jihadislami.com/

Japanese Red Army (JRA): An international terrorist group formed about 1970 after breaking away from Japanese Communist League-Red Army Faction. The JRA's historical goal has been to overthrow the Japanese Government and monarchy and to help foment world revolution.

http://www.geocities.com/comlb/JRA.htm