Incitement and propaganda of Islamic terror organizations on the internet -Islamic Jihad, Hizbullah, Hamas and Fatah / Yair Sade

Abstract

In this research we wanted to examine the following question: **How do terrorist organizations use the internet for the purpose of spreading propaganda to their target audiences?** For this purpose we have examined the following criteria: what is the difference between the internet and other communication mediums? What are the purposes of the terrorist organizations' internet sites? Who are the terrorist organizations' target audience? What rhetoric is used by terrorists' sites? How can the virtual war against the terrorist organizations be conducted on the internet?

The research is a **qualitative one, based on two research methods**: qualitative content analysis and evaluation of Islamic terrorist sites. The first method, qualitative content analysis, is based on material from the terrorist sites like: addresses, posters, pictures, video clips and audio files, all of which are divided into a number of rhetorical patterns that repeated themselves throughout the research period.

Another method is evaluation of Islamic terrorist sites. The method is based on criteria for the evaluation of terrorist organizations' internet sites. The criterions are: 1) Site quality. 2) Site objectives. 3) Authority. 4) How updated the site is. 5) Types of membership. 6) Target audience. 7) Links to other terrorist sites. 8) Language. 9) Multimedia content. 10) Support of violence.

For this purpose, four terrorist sites were chosen from the internet: the Islamic Jihad's site, the Hizbullah site, the Hamas site and the Fatah site, all of which are Islamic terrorist sites. The research was conducted from November 2005 every day, six days a week till August 2006. During this period, text, audio and visual materials were gathered from these sites.

The research findings indicate a number of interesting conclusions. The terrorist organization's internet sites are characterized by rhetorical patterns which repeated themselves consistently throughout the research period. The main subjects which characterized the terrorist sites were: "astashad" (sacrificial) operations and justifying the use of violence, demonizing and de-legitimizing the enemy, the issue of security detainees, the security fence, Zionism, Israeli leaders and the Israeli occupation. Through these current subjects, the terrorist organizations try to improve their international image and even publicize their humanitarian problems. Furthermore, it was found that the terrorist organizations' internet sites are characterized by the use of pictures, posters, news reports, caricatures, symbols, audio files, video files (clips) and links to other sites of the organization or links to other organizations' sites. These tools assist the terrorist organizations to publicize their ideology for the world to see. Similar information and symbols were found in all of the terrorists' sites. The following symbols and information were found in all of the sites: the organizations background, the organizations' method of operations in the military-political arena, ideology, current events and their war against the enemy.

Furthermore, it was discovered that the terrorists' internet sites in English contained messages of incitement and propaganda which were less blunt than on the Arabic sites. The reason for this stems from the fact that terrorist organizations are interested in "marketing" themselves as a legitimate organization working for positive ends, therefore, the terrorists' sites in English, which were meant for an international audience, contain messages of incitement and propaganda which are less blunt than the sites in the Arabic tongue. On the other hand, terrorist sites in Arabic contain blunter messages of incitement and propaganda than on the English sites. The reason for this is that terrorist sites in Arabic were meant for the Arab speaking audience – mainly for activists of the organizations and the populace of terrorist supporting countries.

This research also introduces **recommendations** for the virtual war against the terrorist organizations on the internet: 1) Censoring the terrorists' internet sites. 2) International legislation against the construction of terrorist organizations' internet

sites. 3) Anti-terrorist software using computerized databases. 4) Creating a body to supervise the internet. 5) Confiscation of funds by authorized bodies.

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