Chapter Two

THE NETWORKING OF TERROR IN THE INFORMATION AGE

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Editors' abstract. Middle East Arab terrorists are on the cutting edge of organizational networking and stand to gain significantly from the information revolution. They can harness information technology to enable less hierarchical, more networked designs—enhancing their flexibility, responsiveness, and resilience. In turn, information technology can enhance their offensive operational capabilities for the war of ideas as well as for the war of violent acts. Zanini and Edwards (both at RAND) focus their analysis primarily on Middle East terrorism but also discuss other groups around the world. They conclude with a series of recommendations for policymakers. This chapter draws on RAND research originally reported in Ian Lesser et al., Countering the New Terrorism *(1999).*

INTRODUCTION

The information revolution has fueled the longest economic expansion in U.S. history and led to impressive productivity gains in recent years. Along with these benefits, however, has come the dark side of information technology—cyberterrorism. The idea of terrorists surreptitiously hacking into a computer system to introduce a virus, steal sensitive information, deface or swamp a web site, or turn off a crucial public service seriously concerns computer security personnel around the world. High profile attacks—such as the denial-of-service (DOS) attacks against major e-commerce sites Yahoo! and eBay in 1999 or the ongoing "cyber-jihad" against Israeli and American web sites being waged by Pakistani-based hackers in support of the Pales-

tinian "al-Aqsa" Intifadah—continue to raise the specter of cyberterrorism.

The information age is affecting not only the types of targets and weapons terrorists choose, but also the ways in which such groups operate and structure their organizations. Several of the most dangerous terrorist organizations are using information technology (IT)—such as computers, software, telecommunication devices, and the Internet—to better organize and coordinate dispersed activities. Like the large numbers of private corporations that have embraced IT to operate more efficiently and with greater flexibility, terrorists are harnessing the power of IT to enable new operational doctrines and forms of organization. And just as companies in the private sector are forming alliance networks to provide complex services to customers, so too are terrorist groups "disaggregating" from hierarchical bureaucracies and moving to flatter, more decentralized, and often changing webs of groups united by a common goal.

The rise of networked terrorist groups is part of a broader shift to what Arquilla and Ronfeldt have called "netwar."[1] Netwar refers to an emerging mode of conflict and crime at societal levels, involving measures short of traditional war in which the protagonists are likely to consist of dispersed, small groups who communicate, coordinate, and conduct their campaigns in an internetted manner, without a precise central command. Netwar differs from modes of conflict in which the actors prefer formal, stand-alone, hierarchical organizations, doctrines, and strategies, as in past efforts, for example, to build centralized revolutionary movements along Marxist lines.

This chapter assesses the degree to which—and how—networked terrorist groups are using IT, particularly in the Middle East. The analysis reviews past trends and offers a series of educated guesses about how such trends will evolve in the future. The first section discusses the organizational implications of netwar, especially the degree to which IT is enabling different forms of terrorist structures and command, control, and communications (C3). The second section examines past ev-

[1]The netwar concept is explained and discussed more thoroughly in Chapter One of this volume.

idence of terrorist use of IT for offensive netwar, such as destructive and disruptive attacks on information systems and for perception management. The third section contains a speculative look at how future terrorist uses of IT could develop in the near to medium term. The final section concludes with implications for counterterrorism policy.

ORGANIZATIONAL NETWORKING AND TECHNOLOGY ACQUISITION

In an archetypal netwar, the protagonists are likely to amount to a set of diverse, dispersed "nodes" who share a set of ideas and interests and who often are arrayed to act in a fully internetted "all-channel" manner. The potential effectiveness of the networked design compared to traditional hierarchical designs attracted the attention of management theorists as early as the 1960s.[2] Today, in the business world, virtual or networked organizations are heralded as effective alternatives to traditional bureaucracies because of their inherent flexibility, adaptiveness, and ability to capitalize on the talents of all of their members.

Networked organizations share three basic sets of features. First, communication and coordination are not formally specified by horizontal and vertical reporting relationships, but rather emerge and change according to the task at hand. Similarly, relationships are often informal and marked by varying degrees of intensity, depending on the needs of the organization. Second, internal networks are usually complemented by linkages to individuals outside the organization, often spanning national boundaries. Like internal connections, external relationships are formed and wind down according to the life cycle of particular joint projects. Third, both internal and external ties are enabled not by bureaucratic fiat, but rather by shared norms and

[2]In 1961, Burns and Stalker referred to the *organic* form as "a network structure of control, authority, and communication," with "lateral rather than vertical direction of communication." In organic structure,

> omniscience [is] no longer imputed to the head of the concern; knowledge about the technical or commercial nature of the here and now task may be located anywhere in the network; [with] this location becoming the ad hoc centre of control authority and communication.

values, as well as by reciprocal trust. Internally, the bulk of the work is conducted by self-managing teams, while external linkages compose "a constellation involving a complex network of contributing firms or groups" (Monge and Fulk, 1999, pp. 71–72).

The Emergence of Networked Terrorist Groups in the Greater Middle East

What has been emerging in the business world is now becoming apparent in the organizational structures of the newer and more active terrorist groups, which appear to be adopting decentralized, flexible network structures. The rise of networked arrangements in terrorist organizations is part of a wider move away from formally organized, state-sponsored groups to privately financed, loose networks of individuals and subgroups that may have strategic guidance but that, nonetheless, enjoy tactical independence.

For example, in the Greater Middle East, terrorist organizations have diverse origins, ideologies, and organizational structures but can be categorized roughly into traditional and new-generation groups. Traditional groups date to the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the majority were (and some still are) formally or informally linked to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Typically, they are also relatively bureaucratic and maintain a nationalist or Marxist agenda.[3] These groups have utilized autonomous cells as part of their organizational structure, but the operation of such cells is guided by a hierarchy through clear reporting relationships and virtually little horizontal coordination.

In contrast, the newer and less hierarchical groups (such as Hamas; the Palestinian Islamic Jihad; Hizbollah; Algeria's Armed Islamic Group; the Egyptian Islamic Group; and Osama bin Laden's terrorist

[3]The traditional, more bureaucratic groups have survived partly through support from states such as Syria, Libya, and Iran. These groups—such as the Abu Nidal Organization, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and three PFLP-related splinters (the PFLP-General Command, the Palestine Liberation Front, and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine)—retain an ability to train and prepare for terrorist missions; however, their involvement in actual operations has been limited in recent years, partly because of counterterrorism campaigns by Israeli and Western agencies and the ongoing peace process.

network, al-Qaeda) have become the most active organizations (Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, 2000). In these loosely organized groups with religious or ideological motives, operatives are part of a network that relies less on bureaucratic fiat and more on shared values and horizontal coordination mechanisms to accomplish its goals.

The new and more active generation of Middle Eastern groups has operated both inside and outside the region. For instance, in Israel and the occupied territories, Hamas and to a lesser extent the Palestinian Islamic Jihad have demonstrated their strength over the last five years with a series of suicide bombings that have killed more than 100 people. In Egypt, the Islamic Group (also known as al-Gama'a al-Islamiya) carried out a 1997 attack at Luxor, killing 58 tourists and four Egyptians. Another string of terrorist attacks (and foiled attempts) has focused attention on a loosely organized group of "Arab Afghans"—radical Islamic fighters from several North African and Middle Eastern countries who have forged ties while resisting the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. One of the leaders and founders of the Arab Afghan movement is Osama bin Laden, a Saudi entrepreneur based in Afghanistan.[4]

To varying degrees, these groups share the principles of the networked organization—relative flatness, decentralization and delegation of decisionmaking authority, and loose lateral ties among dispersed groups and individuals. Hamas, for example, is loosely structured with

> some elements working clandestinely and others working openly through mosques and social service institutions to recruit members, raise money, organize activities, and distribute propaganda (Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, 2000, p. 74).

[4]Bin Laden allegedly sent operatives to Yemen to bomb a hotel used by American soldiers on their way to Somalia in 1992, plotted to assassinate President Bill Clinton in the Philippines in 1994 and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in 1995, and played a role in the Riyadh and Khobar blasts in Saudi Arabia that resulted in the deaths of 24 Americans in 1995 and 1996. U.S. officials have also pointed to bin Laden as the mastermind behind the American embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, which claimed the lives of more than 260 people, including 12 Americans, and in the bombing of the *U.S.S. Cole* in Yemen, in which 17 American sailors were killed.

The pro-Iranian Hizbollah in southern Lebanon acts as an umbrella organization of radical Shiite groups and in many respects is a hybrid of hierarchical and network arrangements—although the organizational structure is formal, interactions among members are volatile and do not follow rigid lines of control (Ranstorp, 1994, p. 304).

Perhaps the most interesting example of a terrorist netwar actor is Osama bin Laden's complex network of relatively autonomous groups that are financed from private sources. Bin Laden uses his wealth and organizational skills to support and direct al-Qaeda (The Base), a multinational alliance of Islamic extremists. Al-Qaeda seeks to counter any perceived threats to Islam—wherever they come from—as indicated by bin Laden's 1996 declaration of a holy war against the United States and the West in general. In the declaration, bin Laden specified that such a holy war was to be waged by irregular, light, highly mobile forces. Although bin Laden finances al-Qaeda (exploiting a fortune of several million dollars, according to U.S. State Department estimates) and directs some operations, he apparently does not play a direct command-and-control role over all operatives. Rather, he is a key figure in the coordination and support of several dispersed nodes.[5]

There are reports that communications between al-Qaeda's members combine elements of a "hub-and-spoke" structure (where nodes of operatives communicate with bin Laden and his close advisers in Afghanistan) and a wheel structure (where nodes in the network communicate with each other without reference to bin Laden) (Simon and Benjamin, 2000, p. 70). Al-Qaeda's command-and-control structure includes a consultation council ("majlis al shura"), which discusses and approves major undertakings, and possibly a military committee.[6] At the heart of al-Qaeda is bin Laden's inner core group, which sometimes conducts missions on its own. Most of the other

[5]It is important to avoid equating the bin Laden network solely with bin Laden. He represents a key node in the Arab Afghan terror network. But the network conducts many operations without his involvement, leadership, or financing and will continue to be able to do so should he be killed or captured.

[6]See indictment testimony from U.S. District Court, Southern District of New York, *United States of America vs. Osama bin Laden et al.,* 98 Cr. and S(2) 98 Cr. 1023 (LBS) (www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/usavhage.htm).

member organizations remain independent, although the barriers between them are permeable. According to U.S. District Court testimony in New York, al-Qaeda has forged alliances with Egypt's Islamic Group (leading to an alleged influx of bin Laden operatives into its structure), the National Front in the Sudan, the government of Iran, and Hizbollah. Media reports also indicate that bin Laden has ties with other far-flung Islamic armed groups, such as Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines, as well as with counterparts in Somalia, Chechnya, and Central Asia.[7]

Command, Control, Communications, and the Role of IT

Lateral coordination mechanisms facilitate the operations of networked groups. In turn, such coordination mechanisms are enabled by advances in information technology—including increases in the speed of communication, reductions in the costs of communication, increases in bandwidth, vastly expanded connectivity, and the integration of communication and computing technologies (see Heydebrand, 1989). More specifically, new communication and computing technologies allow the establishment of networks in three critical ways (Monge and Fulk, 1999, p. 84).

First, new technologies have greatly reduced transmission time, enabling dispersed organizational actors to communicate and coordinate their tasks. This phenomenon is not new—in the early 20th century, the introduction of the telephone made it possible for large corporations to decentralize their operations through local branches.

Second, new technologies have significantly reduced the cost of communication, allowing information-intensive organizational designs such as networks to become viable.[8] As Thompson (1967) observed,

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[7]See, for instance, Kurlantzick, 2000, and FBIS, 1997a and 1997b.

[8]The current IT revolution has not only increased the capacity and speed of communications networks, it has driven down telephone communication costs as well. The value and benefit of the Internet also rise as more servers and users link together online. Because the value of a network grows roughly in line with the square of the number of users, the benefit of being online increases exponentially with the number of connections (called Metcalfe's Law, attributed to Robert Metcalfe, a pioneer of computer networking). The number of users worldwide has already climbed to more than 350 million and may reach 1 billion within four years. See "Untangling e-conomics," *The Economist*, September 23, 2000.

in the past, organizations sought to reduce coordination and communications costs by centralizing and colocating those activities that are inherently more coordination-intensive. With the lowering of coordination costs, it is becoming increasingly possible to further disaggregate organizations through decentralization and autonomy.

Third, new technologies have substantially increased the scope and complexity of the information that can be shared, through the integration of computing with communications. Such innovations as tele- and computer conferencing, groupware, Internet chat, and web sites allow participants to have "horizontal" and rich exchanges without requiring them to be located in close proximity.

Thus, information-age technologies are highly advantageous for a netwar group whose constituents are geographically dispersed or carry out distinct but complementary activities.[9] IT can be used to plan, coordinate, and execute operations. Using the Internet for communication can increase speed of mobilization and allow more dialogue between members, which enhances the organization's flexibility, since tactics can be adjusted more frequently. Individuals with a common agenda and goals can form subgroups, meet at a target location, conduct terrorist operations, and then readily terminate their relationships and redisperse.

The bin Laden network appears to have adopted information technology to support its networked mode of operations. According to reporters who visited bin Laden's headquarters in a remote mountainous area of Afghanistan, the terrorist financier has modern computer and communications equipment. Bin Laden allegedly uses satellite phone terminals to coordinate the activities of the group's dispersed operatives and has even devised countermeasures to ensure his safety while using such communication systems.[10] Satellite phones reportedly travel in separate convoys from bin Laden's; the Saudi financier

[9]This is not to say that hierarchical terrorist groups will not also adopt IT to improve support functions and internal command, control, and communications. Aum Shinrikyo was highly centralized around the figure of Shoko Asahara and its structure was cohesive and extremely hierarchical; yet the use the IT was widespread within the group. See Cameron, 1999, p. 283.

[10]Afghanistan's ruling Taliban leaders have repeatedly claimed that bin Laden's movements and access to communications have been severely restricted.

also refrains from direct use, often dictating his message to an assistant, who then relays it telephonically from a different location. Bin Laden's operatives have used CD-ROM disks to store and disseminate information on recruiting, bomb making, heavy weapons, and terrorist operations.[11] Egyptian computer experts who fought alongside bin Laden in the Afghan conflict are said to have helped him devise a communications network that relies on the web, email, and electronic bulletin boards so that members can exchange information (FBIS, 1995).

This is a trend found among other terrorist actors in the Middle East. Counterterrorist operations targeting Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA) bases in the 1990s uncovered computers and diskettes with instructions for the construction of bombs (FBIS, 1996a). In fact, it has been reported that the GIA makes heavy use of floppy disks and computers to store and process orders and other information for its members, who are dispersed in Algeria and Europe (FBIS, 1996b). The militant Islamic group Hamas also uses the Internet to share and communicate operational information. Hamas activists in the United States use chat rooms to plan operations and activities. Operatives use email to coordinate actions across Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon. Hamas has realized that information can be passed relatively securely over the Internet because counterterrorism intelligence cannot accurately monitor the flow and content of all Internet traffic. In fact, Israeli security officials cannot easily trace Hamas messages or decode their content (more on this below).

In addition, terrorist networks can protect their vital communication flows through readily available commercial technology, such as encryption programs. Examples from outside the Middle East point in this direction—according to one report, Animal Liberation Front (ALF) cells in North America and Europe use the encryption program Pretty Good Privacy (PGP) to send coded email and share intelligence (Iuris, 1997, p. 64). New encryption programs emerging on the commercial market are becoming so sophisticated that coded emails may soon be extremely difficult to break. In fact, strong encryption pro-

[11]U.S. intelligence agencies recently obtained computer-disk copies of a six-volume training manual used by bin Laden to train his recruits (Kelley, 2000).

grams are being integrated into commercial applications and network protocols so that soon encryption will be easy and automatic (see Denning and Baugh, 1997). Rumors persist that the French police have been unable to decrypt the hard disk on a portable computer belonging to a captured member of the Spanish/Basque organization ETA (Fatherland and Liberty) (Denning and Baugh, 1997). It has also been suggested that Israeli security forces were unsuccessful in their attempts at cracking the codes used by Hamas to send instructions for terrorist attacks over the Internet (Whine, 1999, p. 128). Terrorists can also use steganography—a method of hiding secret data in other data such as embedding a secret message within a picture file (Denning and Baugh, 1997). Terrorists can also encrypt cell phone transmissions, steal cell phone numbers and program them into a single phone, or use prepaid cell phone cards purchased anonymously to keep their communications secure.[12]

The latest communications technologies are thus enabling terrorists to operate from almost any country in the world, provided they have access to the necessary IT infrastructure; and this affects the ways in which groups rely on different forms of sponsorship. Some analysts have argued that networked terrorists may have a reduced need for state support—indeed, governmental protection may become less necessary if technologies such as encryption allow a terrorist group to operate with a greater degree of stealth and safety (Soo Hoo, Goodman, and Greenberg, 1997, p. 142). Others point to the possibility that groups will increasingly attempt to raise money on the web, as in the case of Pakistan's Lashkar-e-Taiba ("Army of the Pure").[13]

[12]Cloned cell phones can either be bought in bulk (the terrorist discards the phone after use) or a phone number can be stolen and programmed into a single cell phone just before using it. A special scanner is used to "snatch" legitimate phone numbers from the airwaves, i.e., the Electronic Serial Number (ESN) and Mobile Identification Number (MIN). See Denning and Baugh, 1997.

[13]Lashkar and its parent organization, Markaz-e-Dawa wal Irshad (Center for Islamic Invitation and Guidance), have raised so much money, mostly from sympathetic Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia, that they are reportedly planning to open their own bank. See Stern, 2000.

Networked Organizations and IT: Mitigating Factors

To be sure, there are limits to how much reliance terrorist networks will place on information-age technology. For the foreseeable future, electronically mediated coordination will not be able to entirely supplant face-to-face exchanges, because uncertainty and risk will continue to characterize most organizational choices and interactions among individuals.[14] Moreover, informal linkages and the shared values mentioned above—which are critical enablers of networked designs—can only be fostered through personal contact. As Nohria and Eccles argue,

> electronically mediated exchange can increase the range, amount, and velocity of information flow in a network organization. But the viability and effectiveness of this electronic network will depend critically on an underlying network of social relationships based on face-to-face interaction (Nohria and Eccles, "Face-to-Face: Making Network Organizations Work," in Nohria and Eccles, 1992, pp. 289–290).

Moreover, while IT-enabled communication flows can greatly help a network coordinate dispersed activities (thus increasing its flexibility and responsiveness), they can also present a security risk. Communication over electronic channels can become a liability, since it leaves digital "traces." For instance, FBI officials have recently acknowledged that they used an Internet wiretap program called "Carnivore" to track terrorist email correspondence at least 25 times. According to *Newsweek*, Carnivore's ability to track Osama bin Laden's email was critical in thwarting several of his strikes.[15]

The case of Ramzi Yousef, the World Trade Center bomber, also provides a revealing example of how information-age technology can represent a double-edged sword for terrorists. Yousef's numerous calls to fellow terrorists during his preparation for the strike were registered in phone companies' computer databases, providing law en-

[14]In fact, ambiguous and complex situations are still better tackled through direct communications, because face-to-face interaction is generally faster at resolving outstanding issues and leaves less room for misunderstandings.

[15]"Tracking Bin Laden's E-mail," *Newsweek*, August 21, 2000.

forcement officials with a significant set of leads for investigating terrorists in the Middle East and beyond. Prior to his arrest, Yousef unintentionally offered the FBI another source of information when he lost control of his portable computer in the Philippines. In that laptop, U.S. officials found incriminating data, including plans for future attacks, flight schedules, projected detonation times, and chemical formulae (Reeve, 1999, pp. 39 and 97).

There are other examples of how electronic information belonging to terrorist groups has fallen into the hands of law enforcement personnel. In 1995, Hamas's Abd-al-Rahman Zaydan was arrested and his computer seized—the computer contained a database of Hamas contact information that was used to apprehend other suspects (Soo Hoo, Goodman, and Greenberg, 1997, p. 139). In December 1999, 15 terrorists linked to Osama bin Laden were arrested in Jordan; along with bomb-making materials, rifles, and radio-controlled detonators, a number of computer disks were seized. Intelligence analysts were able to extract information about bomb building and terrorist training camps in Afghanistan.[16] In June 2000, the names of 19 suspects were found on computer disks recovered from a Hizbollah-controlled house (see FBIS, 2000). Finally, several encrypted computer records belonging to the millennialist Aum Shinrikyo cult were retrieved by Japanese authorities after an electronic key was recovered (Denning and Baugh, 1997).

Thus, the organizational benefits associated with greater IT must be traded off against the needs for direct human contact and improved security. This makes it likely that terrorist groups will adopt designs that fall short of fully connected, all-channel networks. Hybrids of hierarchies and networks may better reflect the relative costs and benefits of greater IT reliance—as well as further the group's mission.[17] Another important factor determining the adoption of IT by terrorist groups involves the relative attractiveness of high-tech offensive information operations, to which we turn next.

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[16]"Terrorist Threats Target Asia," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Vol. 12, No. 7, July 1, 2000.

[17]In fact, strategy is likely to be an important driver of organizational form and therefore of the density and richness of communications among group members. For instance, any mission calling for quick, dispersed, and simultaneous actions by several nodes could simply not be achieved without some IT support.

NETWAR, TERRORISM, AND OFFENSIVE INFORMATION OPERATIONS[18]

In addition to enabling networked forms of organization, IT can also improve terrorist intelligence collection and analysis, as well as offensive information operations (IO).[19] The acquisition by terrorist groups of an offensive IO capability could represent a significant threat as the world becomes more dependent on information and communications flows.[20] We argue that information-age technology can help terrorists conduct three broad types of offensive IO. First, it can aid them in their perception management and propaganda activities. Next, such technology can be used to attack virtual targets for disruptive purposes. Finally, IT can be used to cause physical destruction.[21]

Perception Management and Propaganda

Given the importance of knowledge and soft power to the conduct of netwar, it is not surprising that networked terrorists have already begun to leverage IT for perception management and propaganda to influence public opinion, recruit new members, and generate funding. Getting a message out and receiving extensive news media exposure are important components of terrorist strategy, which ultimately seeks to undermine the will of an opponent. In addition to such traditional media as television or print, the Internet now offers terrorist

[18]The formal Joint Staff and Army definition of information operations is "actions taken to affect adversary information and information systems and defend one's own." See Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1998, 1996a, and 1996b; and Department of the Army, 1997.

[19]For example, IT improves intelligence collection because potential targets can be researched on the Internet. Commercial satellite imagery is now offered by several firms at 1-meter resolution, and in January 2001, the U.S. government granted at least one commercial firm a license to sell 0.5-m imagery. Satellite photos can be used to identify security vulnerabilities in large targets like nuclear reactors. See Koch, 2001.

[20]For more on the importance of information across the spectrum of conflict, see John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, "Cyberwar Is Coming," in Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1997, p. 28; also, Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1993.

[21]The following discussion draws from a variety of terrorist cases, some of which do not necessarily fit the netwar actor description (that is, they may not be networked, as in the case of Aum Shinrikyo). However, we believe they are all indicative of the trends that are starting to shape netwar terrorist offensive operations and that will continue to do so in the coming years.

groups an alternative way to reach out to the public, often with much more direct control over their message.

The news media play an integral part in a terrorist act because they are the conduit for news of the violence to the general population. As Bruce Hoffman has noted, "[t]errorism . . . may be seen as a violent act that is conceived specifically to attract attention and then, through the publicity it generates, to communicate a message" (Hoffman, 1998, p. 131). Terrorists have improved their media management techniques to the point of using "spin doctoring" tactics (Hoffman, 1998, p. 134). In fact, some groups have even acquired their own television and radio stations to take direct control of the reporting of events. Hizbollah, through its television station, has broadcast footage of strikes carried out by its operatives and has a sophisticated media center that regularly—and professionally—briefs foreign journalists. Hizbollah field units have even included specially designated cameramen to record dramatic video footage of Israeli casualties that was then aired in Lebanon and usually rebroadcast by Israeli television. (On these points, see Nacos, 1994.)

The Internet now expands the opportunities for publicity and exposure beyond the traditional limits of television and print media. Before the Internet, a bombing might be accompanied by a phone call or fax to the press by a terrorist claiming responsibility. Now, bombings can be followed—should terrorists so desire—by an immediate press release from their own web sites (at little cost). (For a hypothetical example, see Devost, Houghton, and Pollard, 1997.) The fact that many terrorists now have direct control over the content of their message offers further opportunities for perception management, as well as for image manipulation, special effects, and deception.

An Internet presence could prove advantageous for mobilizing "part-time cyberterrorists"—individuals not directly affiliated with a given terrorist group who nonetheless support its agenda and who use malicious software tools and instructions available at a terrorist web site. This scenario would closely resemble the initiatives taken by both the Israeli and Palestinian governments, which have encouraged private citizens to download computer attack tools and become involved in the conflict surrounding the al-Aqsa Intifadah (more on this below).

It appears that nearly all terrorist groups have a web presence (see Table 2.1 for a selection). As the table indicates, Hizbollah even manages multiple sites—each with a different purpose (for instance, www.hizbollah.org is the site of the central press office, www.moqawama.org describes attacks on Israeli targets, and www.almanar.com.lb contains news and information).

Web sites can also be used to refine or customize recruiting techniques. Recording which types of propaganda receive the most browser hits could help tailor a message for a particular audience. Using some of the same marketing techniques employed by commercial enterprises, terrorist servers could capture information about the users who browse their web sites, and then later contact those who seem most interested. Recruiters may also use more interactive Internet technology to roam online chat rooms and cyber cafes looking for

Table 2.1

Sample of Web Sites Belonging to Militant Islamist Groups

Group Name	Country of Origin	Web Address
Almurabeton	Egypt	www.almurabeton.org
Al-Jama'ah Al-Islamiyyah	Egypt	www.webstorage.com/~azzam/
Hizb Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimoon (Muslim Brotherhood Movement)	Egypt	www.ummah.org.uk/ikhwan/
Hizbollah	Lebanon	www.hizbollah.org www.moqawama.org/page2/main.htm www.almanar.com.lb http://almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon/300/320/324/324.2/hizballah http://almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon/300/320/324/324.2/hizballah/emdad
Hamas (Harakat Muqama al-Islamiyya)	Palestianian Authority	www.palestine-info.net/hamas/

receptive members of the public, particularly young people. Electronic bulletin boards and user nets can also serve as vehicles for reaching out to potential recruits. Interested computer users around the world can be engaged in long-term "cyber relationships" that could lead to friendship and eventual membership.

Disruptive Attacks

Netwar-oriented terrorists can also use IT to launch disruptive attacks—that is, electronic strikes that temporarily disable, but do not destroy, physical and/or virtual infrastructure. If the ultimate goal of a terrorist is to influence his opponent's will to fight, IO offer additional means to exert influence beyond using simple physical attacks to cause terror. Disruptive attacks include "choking" computer systems through such tools as e-bombs, fax spamming, and hacking techniques to deface web sites. These strikes are usually nonlethal in nature, although they can wreak havoc and cause significant economic damage.

To date, disruptive strikes by terrorists have been relatively few and fairly unsophisticated—but they do seem to be increasing in frequency. For example, in 1996, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) launched an email bomb attack against Sri Lankan diplomatic missions. Using automated tools, the guerilla organization flooded Sri Lankan embassies with thousands of messages, thus establishing a "virtual blockade."[22] Japanese groups have allegedly attacked the computerized control systems for commuter trains, paralyzing major cities for hours (Devost, Houghton, and Pollard, 1997, p. 67). In 2000, a group of Pakistani hackers who call themselves the Muslim Online Syndicate (MOS) defaced more than 500 web sites in India to protest the conflict in Kashmir (see Hopper, 2000). Finally, Pakistan's Lashkar-e-Taiba claimed to have attacked Indian military web sites in early 2000.[23]

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[22]See Dorothy Denning's discussion of virtual sit-ins and email bombs in Chapter Eight of this volume.

[23]Jessica Stern, telephone interview with author Michele Zanini, September 2000.

Disruptive rather than destructive actions take place for several reasons. For example, terrorists who rely on the Internet for perception management and communication purposes may prefer not to take "the Net" down, but rather to slow it down selectively. In addition, groups may want to rely on nonlethal cyber strikes to pressure governments without alienating their own constituent audiences. Terrorist groups may also follow the lead of criminal hackers and use the threat of disruptive attacks to blackmail and extort funds from private-sector entities (e.g., the ongoing "cyber jihad" against Israel may come to target commercial enterprises that do business with the Israelis).[24] For instance, in the early 1990s, hackers and criminals blackmailed brokerage houses and banks for several million British pounds. Money can also be stolen from individual users who visit terrorist web sites.[25]

Destructive Attacks

As mentioned earlier, IT-driven information operations can lead to the actual destruction of physical or virtual systems. Malicious viruses and worms can be used to permanently destroy (erase) or corrupt (spoof) data and cause economic damage. In the worst case, these same software tools can be used to cause destructive failure in a critical infrastructure like air traffic control, power, or water systems, which can lead to casualties. Indeed, it is likely that information operations that result in the loss of life may offer the same level of drama as physical attacks with bombs. Also, striking targets through electronic means does not carry the risks associated with using conventional weapons—such as handling explosives or being in close proximity to the target.

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[24]A survey conducted by the Science Applications International Corp. in 1996 found that 40 major corporations reported losing over $800 million to computer break-ins. This example is cited on several web sites including Don Gotterbarn's web site at www-cs.etsu.edu/gotterbarn/stdntppr.

[25]A related criminal case reveals the potential for this threat. In 1997, a group known as the Chaos Computer Club created an Active X Control, which, when downloaded and run on the user's home computer, could trick the Quicken accounting program into removing money from a user's bank account. See "ActiveX Used as Hacking Tool," CNET News.com, February 7, 1997, http://news.cnet.com/news/0,10000,0-1005-200-316425,00.html.

Offensive IO: Mitigating Factors

The extreme case where the use of IT results in significant human losses has yet to occur. The lack of destructive information attacks is arguably influenced by the relative difficulty of electronically destroying (rather than disrupting) critical infrastructure components—the level of protection of existing infrastructure may be too high for terrorists to overcome with their current IT skill set. In fact, a terrorist organization would first have to overcome significant technical hurdles to develop an electronic attack capability. Concentrating the necessary technical expertise and equipment to damage or destroy targeted information systems is no easy task, given the computer security risks involved. In developing and increasing their reliance on electronic attacks, terrorist organizations may be assuming risks and costs associated with the relative novelty of the technology. Terrorists wishing to expand the scope of their offensive IO activities would have to continue upgrading and researching new technologies to keep up with the countermeasures available to computer security experts and systems administrators. This technology "treadmill" would demand constant attention and the diversion of scarce organizational resources.[26]

Another important determinant in netwar terrorists choosing low-level IT is that such conventional weapons as bombs remain more cost-effective. In fact, most terrorism experts believe that existing groups see their current tactics as sufficient and are not interested in branching into computer network attacks. Since current tactics are simple and successful, there is no built-in demand to innovate: bombing still works.[27] As long as current tactics enable these groups to accomplish their short-term goals and move toward their long-term goals, there will be no strong incentives to change behavior. In addition, the fragility of computer hardware may make a physical attack on these targets more attractive because such an attack is signifi-

[26]These points are also elaborated considerably in unpublished RAND research by Martin Libicki, James Mulvenon, and Zalmay Khalilzad on information warfare.

[27]As one article puts it, "the gun and the bomb continue to be the terrorists' main weapon of choice, as has been the case for more than a century." See Hoffman, Roy, and Benjamin, 2000, p. 163.

cantly less challenging from a technical standpoint than attempting a virtual attack (Soo Hoo, Goodman, and Greenberg, 1997, p. 146).

Disruptive attacks may be easier to carry out, but because of their very nature they do not produce the same kind of visceral and emotional reaction that the loss of human life does. Indeed, some terrorism analysts argue that it is unlikely that terrorist groups will turn to disruptive attacks as the primary tactic. Brian Jenkins points out that IT-enabled disruptive strikes

> do not produce the immediate, visible effects. There is no drama. No lives hang in the balance . . . . Terrorist intentions regarding cyberterrorism are even more problematic. Linking the objectives of actual terrorist groups to scenarios of electronic sabotage that would serve those objectives is conjecture.[28]

In addition, many computer security experts believe that even disruptive attacks remain technologically challenging for most terrorist groups and too undervalued by the media to make them attractive for terrorists (Soo Hoo, Goodman, and Greenberg, 1997, pp. 145–146).

EVALUATING PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE TRENDS

Given that information technology brings drawbacks as well as benefits, the terrorist groups examined here have not chosen to rely exclusively on IT to coordinate their operations and execute attacks. The available evidence suggests that netwar terrorists have embraced IT for organizational purposes, especially to facilitate C3, but they have been either unable or unwilling to attempt more ambitious offensive IO. However, the benefits clearly outweigh the risks when it comes to utilizing IT for perception management and propaganda. See Table 2.2 for a summary.

[28]Email correspondence from Brian Jenkins (at RAND) October 2000, who is quoting a forthcoming manuscript by Paul Pillar.

Table 2.2

Benefits and Drawbacks of IT Use for Netwar Terrorists (facilitating and mitigating factors)

IT Use	Facilitating	Mitigating
Organizational	Enables dispersed activities with reasonable secrecy, anonymity	Susceptibility to wire and wireless tapping
	Helps maintain a loose and flexible network	Digitally stored information can be easily retrievable unless well protected
	Lessens need for state sponsorship	Cannot by itself energize a network; common ideology and direct contact still essential
Offensive	Generally lower entry costs	Current bombing techniques already effective
	Eradication of national boundaries	Significant technical hurdles for disruptive and destructive IO
	Physically safer	Unique computer security risks impose recurring costs of "technology treadmill"
	Spillover benefits for recruitment/fundraising	

Future Developments in Information-Age Terrorism

Were the trends described above to persist, one could speculate that future netwar actors will continue to consolidate their IT use primarily for organizational purposes, with some emphasis on perception management on the offensive IO side. Under these conditions, networked terrorists would still rely on such traditional weapons as conventional bombs to cause physical violence. But they will also transmit information on how to build such weapons via CD-ROMs or email, use chat rooms to coordinate their activities, and use web sites to publicize and justify their strikes to a global audience.

The al-Aqsa Intifadah in the West Bank and Gaza highlights how protracted IO campaigns could be waged in conjunction with a campaign of conventional violence. Mirroring the real-world violence that has resulted in hundreds of casualties, a conflict has also been waged in cyberspace over economic and propaganda stakes. Palestinian hackers who support the al-Aqsa Intifadah have been waging a cyberjihad against Israeli government and commercial targets, defacing web sites and conducting DOS attacks. More than 40 Israeli sites have

been hit, including the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange and the Bank of Israel. Israeli hackers have counterattacked, hitting more than 15 different Palestinian targets, including Hizbollah, Hamas, and the Palestinian National Authority. As the disruptive attacks have escalated, individuals and groups have joined both sides, from professional hackers to "script-kiddies" (relative amateurs who rely on off-the-shelf and easy to use tools). (See Lemos, 2000.)

That said, the swift and unpredictable changes associated with technology suggest that other outcomes are possible. The question is, will terrorists have the desire and opportunity to significantly increase their reliance on IT—primarily for offensive purposes—in the future? Several factors could influence such a shift, including the degree to which new technology will serve their main strategic goals in a safe and effective manner.[29] For instance, the introduction of easy-to-use, "unbreakable" encryption programs to support email and file exchange will encourage netwar terrorists to adopt such techniques. Moreover, terrorist access to technologies that can be readily employed without extensive internal development efforts[30]—by group members and part-time "volunteers" or through "hackers for hire"[31]—will be a critical facilitating factor. Equally important, the relative vulnerability of the information infrastructure plays a role in this calculus (more on this below).

These possible developments would likely prompt the evolution of current netwar terrorist groups toward greater reliance on IT for offensive purposes and could also encourage the emergence of new and completely virtual groups that exclusively operate in cyberspace. Each possibility is described briefly below.

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[29]From a strategic perspective, the more that terrorist groups emphasize swarming doctrines to conduct dispersed and simultaneous operations, the greater the need for a sophisticated IT infrastructure.

[30]One example is Netcat, a free hacking tool made available in 1996. See Soo Hoo, Goodman, and Greenberg, 1997, p. 141.

[31]Rumors persist that people proficient in network attacks are available for hire. Press reports indicate that hacker groups have been approached by anonymous users claiming to be terrorists who have requested help gaining access to government classified information networks such as SIPRNET. For example, one teenage hacker was said to have received a $1,000 check. See McKay, 1998.

The Evolution of Current Groups

As Brian Jackson notes, the introduction of new technologies in an organization follows a complex and often lengthy process. Not only do innovative systems have to be developed or acquired, but organizational actors have to become familiar with new systems and be able to use them effectively (Jackson, unpublished). Given the challenge, terrorist groups are likely to channel their scarce organizational resources to acquire those IT skills that have the greatest leverage for the least amount of cost and effort.

This line of reasoning can help explain terrorists' recent emphasis on using communications technology for organizational purposes: Having access to the Internet and cellular telephones is not overly complicated, and it plays a significant role in enabling dispersed operations, a key goal of netwar groups. This reasoning also suggests that over time terrorist groups might begin to experiment more aggressively with information-age technologies for offensive information operations, as they become more familiar with such innovations. Indeed, some may follow a "migration" pattern as illustrated in Figure 2.1: The knowledge of IT issues gained by relying on technology to fa-

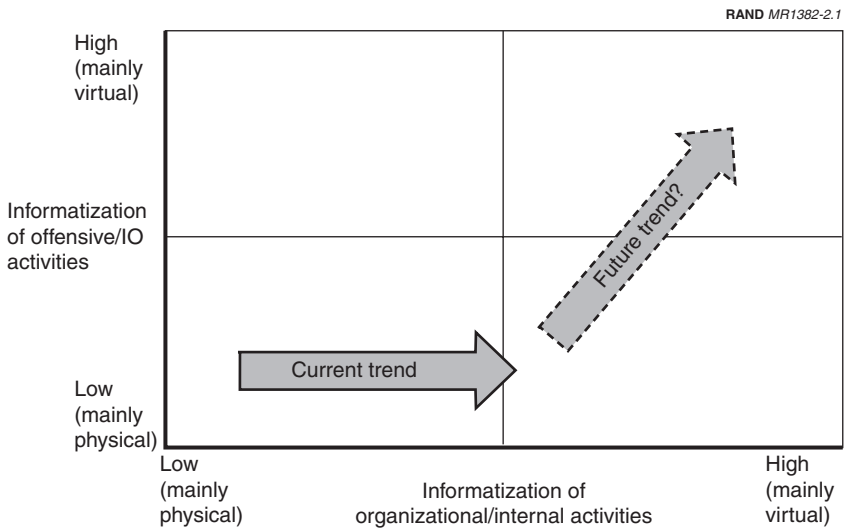

Figure 2.1—Possible Shifts in the Use of Technology

cilitate interactions among group members, or to gain a web presence, might eventually be expanded and harnessed for increasingly offensive uses.

The pace with which current groups move through such a path is also dependent on the degree of cooperation and information exchange among netwar terrorists. Such cooperation has often occurred in the past—for instance, Islamic radicals have organized "terror conferences"(Kushner, 1998, p. 41), while European terrorist groups such as the Irish Republican Army entered into joint ventures with counterparts across the globe to learn from one another and disseminate knowledge (such as designs of booby traps and radio-controlled bombs). (See Wilkinson, 1986, p. 40.) Given the loose and reciprocal nature of ties between actors in networks such as al-Qaeda, it is entirely possible that those with IT skills would be leveraged globally and placed at the disposal of the organization's various members.

Lastly, as leading-edge groups begin to move toward the upper-right quadrant of Figure 2.1, other groups may be tempted to follow suit: Terrorists that hitherto had decided to adopt a low-technology profile for their offensive operations could be emboldened by successful instances of IT attacks by others (Jackson, unpublished).

The Emergence of New Groups

An alternative hypothesis to the notion that existing terrorist groups should be watched for signs of movement toward cyberterror is that qualitative improvements in the informatization of networked terrorists will only be witnessed with the emergence of newer, and more technologically savvy, groups. Just as Hamas and al-Qaeda have overshadowed the PFLP and other Marxist groups formed in the 1960s, new-generation groups may further advance the trend toward networked and IT-reliant organizations. New groups could even be led by individuals who are technically skilled, suggesting the rise of a hybrid breed of "terrorists cum hackers." Like hackers, they would undertake most of their attacks in cyberspace. Like terrorists, they would seek to strike targets by both disruptive and destructive means to further a political or religious agenda.

The possibility that innovation will take place only with the advent of new groups finds support in previous work by such terrorism experts as Hoffman, who describes most groups today as operationally conservative (Hoffman, "Terrorism Trends and Prospects" in Lesser et al., 1999, p. 36). Aside from organizational inertia, current groups may also be hesitant to further rely on IT for offensive purpose because of large, "sunk costs" in traditional tactics, training, and weapon stockpiles. Existing groups wishing to "amortize" such capital cost may be unwilling to direct scarce resources toward the development of new and radically different offensive techniques.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The acquisition and use of information-age technology by terrorist groups are far from certain. Indeed, the scenarios painted above are not mutually exclusive. It is conceivable that current groups will acquire new IT skills over time and adopt more-offensive IT strategies. New hacker/terrorist groups may also emerge to compound this problem. Some terrorist networks may even become sophisticated enough to sustain and coordinate offensive campaigns in both the virtual and physical realms.

What is certain, however, is that counterterrorism policy will be able to counter the dangers associated with terrorist IT use only if it becomes attuned to the information age. Counterterrorist policies and tactics could even alter the speed with which terrorists become informatized—groups facing a robust counterterrorism campaign may have less time and resources to acquire new technologies (see Jackson, unpublished). For such reasons, it seems advisable that counterterrorism policymakers and strategists bear in mind the following recommendations.

First, monitor changes in the use of IT by terrorist groups, differentiating between organizational and offensive capabilities. Counterterrorism policies will have to take into account the type of IT capabilities developed by each group, targeting their specific technological vulnerabilities. Evaluating how IT shapes a group's organizational processes and offensive activities will remain a critical component of the threat assessment. Monitoring the shift in capabilities for each type of

IT use and then examining trends in the aggregate can also help forecast future terrorist behavior.

Among the most significant trends to be carefully examined is the possible emergence of a new, and potentially dangerous, breed of terrorists—groups that are highly informatized along both the organizational and offensive axes. In this regard, a number of "signposts" should be identified and tracked. These would include significant increases in the level of technical expertise of known leaders and their subordinates, increases in the frequency of disruptive attacks, increases in the seizures of IT equipment owned by terrorists, the presence—and successful recruiting—of "hackers for hire," and the availability of effective and relatively secure off-the-shelf information technologies (including those that facilitate hacking).

Second, target information flows. Since network designs are inherently information intensive, counterterrorism efforts should target the information flows of netwar groups. Intercepting and monitoring terrorist information exchanges should remain a top priority, and the implementation of "Project Trailblazer" by the National Security Agency—to develop a system that can crack new encryption software, fiber-optic cables, and cellular phone transmissions—represents a useful addition to America's signals intelligence capability (Kitfield, 2000).

Equally important, policymakers should consider going beyond the passive monitoring of information flows and toward the active disruption of such communications. To the degree that erroneous or otherwise misleading information is planted into a network's information flows by what are seemingly credible sources, over time the integrity and relevance of the network itself will be compromised. This in turn could breed distrust and further cripple a group's ability to operate in a dispersed and decentralized fashion—essentially eliminating a netwar group's key competitive advantage.

Increased emphasis on targeting information flows should not exclude nonelectronic efforts to gather intelligence and undermine the network. Indeed, human intelligence will remain an important tool for intercepting (and injecting) information not transmitted through

electronic means of communication.[32] This is an especially pressing concern, given that several intelligence observers have pointed to a lack of U.S. capability in this area.

Third, deter IT-based offensive IO through better infrastructure protection. Changes in the vulnerability of critical infrastructures can significantly alter a terrorist's IT calculus. If such infrastructures, such as those that manage air traffic control, were to become relatively more vulnerable, they might become more attractive as targets: Terrorists could strike at a distance, generating as much—if not more—destruction as would have been caused by the use of traditional weapons. U.S. policy should identify specific vulnerabilities to expected threats and develop security techniques that mitigate each. An analysis of these issues is beyond the scope of the current chapter, but there are numerous studies that explore this process, including RAND's *Securing the U.S. Defense Information Infrastructure: A Proposed Approach* (Anderson et al., 1999). The FBI's National Infrastructure Protection Center and other newly created organizations represent useful steps in this direction. Counterterrorist agencies may also want to consider the option of employing a large number of hackers and leveraging their knowledge for defensive and possibly even retaliatory purposes.

Fourth, beat networked terrorists at their own game: "It takes networks to fight networks." Governments wishing to counter netwar terrorism will need to adopt organizational designs and strategies like those of their adversaries. This does not mean mirroring the opponent, but rather learning to draw on the same design principles of network forms. These principles depend to some extent upon technological innovation, but mainly on a willingness to innovate organizationally and doctrinally and by building new mechanisms for interagency and multijurisdictional cooperation. The Technical Support Working Group (TSWG) is a good example of a nontraditional government interagency group with more than 100 member organizations from at least 13 federal agencies and a growing number of local and state agencies. Its principal aim is to help develop and deploy technologies

[32]After Osama bin Laden noticed that his satellite phone connection was no longer secure, he began to use human couriers to pass information and instructions to his operatives.

to combat terrorism.[33] Another example is the Counter-Intelligence 21 (CI-21) plan, a set of reforms that seek to increase the level of cooperation between counterintelligence personnel at the CIA, FBI, and the Pentagon (Kitfield, 2000). If counterterrorism agencies become ready and willing to rely on networks of outside "ethical hackers" in times of crisis, the need to coordinate beyond the boundaries of government will increase.[34]

Supporters of these initiatives rightly recognize that the information age and the consequent advent of netwar have blurred the boundary between domestic and international threats, as well as between civilian and military threats. This in turn demands greater interagency coordination within the counterterrorism community. As terrorist groups evolve toward loose, ad-hoc networks that form and dissipate unpredictably, so must counterterrorism forces adopt a more flexible approach that crosses bureaucratic boundaries to accomplish the mission at hand. While militaries and governments will never be able to do away with their hierarchies entirely, there is nevertheless much room for them to develop more-robust organizational networks than they currently have—a change that may offset some, if not all, of the advantage now accruing mostly to networked terrorist groups.

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[33]TSWG received $48 million in fiscal year 2000. Traditional terrorist threats such as bombs still generate the greatest concern, and most of TSWG's budget covers needs such as blast mitigation. See Stanton, 2000, p. 24.

[34]In some cases, hackers may be spontaneously driven to aid law enforcement officials in defending against particularly objectionable crimes. For instance, a group called Ethical Hackers Against Pedophilia has been created to identify and urge punishment of people who publish child pornography on the Internet (see www.ehap.org). The government could take the lead in mobilizing existing ethical hackers in the private sector to help in times of crisis. This would be different from deliberately organizing a virtual militia composed of relatively unsophisticated citizens armed with off-the-shelf hacking tools—something the Israeli government *has* experimented with during the al-Aqsa Intifadah. Given this option's potential to become a double-edged sword—as well as lack of information on its efficacy—more research on this topic is warranted.

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