Chapter 2
Global Digital Terror

ABSTRACT

as the internet and its applications grew more sophisticated and widespread, so too did the strategy of modern terrorist groups such as ISIS and Boko Haram. The existence of the dark web adds to the online arsenal of groups using digital networks and sites to promulgate ideology or recruit supporters. This chapter will focus on developments such as Twitter and Facebook and the adept use of these tools by savvy terrorist cells (who are becoming much younger, demographically speaking).

INTRODUCTION

The networked global society that has been enabled by the internet and accompanying digital technologies and social media platforms has created an affordable, geographically and temporally unbounded, and semi-anonymous space where the exchange of dialogue, ideas, and calls to action have become increasingly more frequent. This networked space provides for both egalitarian democratic efforts as witnessed in the Arab Spring (2009-2013) as well as Hong Kong (2014) and the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States (2013-present). Yet many theorists dating back to the late 1990s have pontificated on the availability of this unbounded network to bad actors, including hacktivists, international criminal cartels, as well as terrorist groups (Conway, 2006; Hinnen, 2004; Soriano, 2008; Teich, 2013), which will be the focus of this book.

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While research on the use of the internet by terrorist organizations is available in abundance, the correlation of social media platforms, more advanced technology, the dark web, and their exploitation by much demographically younger and savvier terrorist networks has provided a new landscape for research into not only the organization of these groups in the contemporary digital age, but also their goals, intentions, and their affective persuasion online in order to accomplish their mission. This has been particularly true for the Islamic State (IS) (also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Islamic State of Syria and the Levant (ISIL), and more globally, as Daesh). According to Winter, “…Propaganda is not just important – it is intrinsic to its jihad” (2017, Pg. 7). It is therefore critical to understand not just the Islamic State as a terror organization with jihadist goals, but to dissect the group’s utilization of digital technologies and social media platforms to support their global jihad. It is the decentralized nature of the Islamic State as an organization as well as providing for communication with potential supporters that allowed the rapid advancement of the group globally. Winter notes, “Without clear differentiation between officialdom and un-officialdom enables the Islamic State to empower its diffuse supporters with minimal effort, furnishing them with ideological, theological, and emotion rewards in the place of material compensation” (2017, Pg. 9). Supporters and foreign fighters are not motivated to join or pledge allegiance to the Islamic State due to any material rewards but instead there is a clear ideological motivation, that of building a common place where Muslims of the world can congregate and live.

The foundation for the Islamic State were established in the period after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the group was formed out of Al Qaeda in Iraq, and is an unprecedented organization that combines terrorism with military capabilities. Following the U.S. invasion of Iraq Abu Musab al-Zarqawi rose to leadership of the jihadist forces in Iraq, and shortly after in 2004 pledged allegiance to Osama Bin Laden and renamed the organization, Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). The Jordanian jihadist al-Zarqawi had a long-term goal of inciting a religiously motivated civil war between Sunnis and Shiites and institute a Caliphate (Hassan, 2018). Hassan asserts that many international observers credit (or blame) al-Zarqawi for the ideology and active planning of the creation of the Islamic State as a Caliphate, however, it was actually Zarqawi’s second-in-command, Abu Ali al-Anbari who was instrumental in establishing the terror organization’s approach to building the Caliphate. Hassan notes that al-Anbari’s “influence was more systematic, longer lasting, and deeper than that of al-Zarqawi” (Hassan, 2018). The influence of al-
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