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# High-Tech Terror: Al-Qaeda's Use of New Technology

JARRET M. BRACHMAN

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*"We must get our message across to the masses of the nation and break the media siege imposed on the jihad movement. This is an independent battle that we must launch side by side with the military battle."*

—AYMAN AL-ZAWAHIRI<sup>1</sup>

*"Our enemies have skillfully adapted to fighting wars in today's media age, but . . . our country has not. . . ."*

—DONALD RUMSFELD<sup>2</sup>

Despite the considerable resources that the United States has dedicated to combating *jihadi* terrorism since the attacks of September 11, 2001, its primary terrorist enemy, al-Qaeda, has mutated and grown more dangerous. Al-Qaeda today is no longer best conceived of as an organization, a network, or even a network-of-networks. Rather, by leveraging new information and communication technologies, al-Qaeda has transformed itself into an organic social movement, making its virulent ideology accessible to anyone with a computer.

Since its popularization in the mid-1990s, Internet-based activism has changed the nature of social and political movements: no longer does one need to physically relocate to support a cause—now anyone can bolster a movement at any time, virtually anywhere, using a computer. One can even pledge allegiance to Osama bin Laden by filling out an online form.<sup>3</sup> While Western governments should be concerned with who is viewing this hateful content, they need to recognize the more dangerous trend—namely,

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that *jihadis* are empowering one another to be producers, not simply consumers, of this material.

In the wake of recent attacks by *jihadi* terrorists against targets in London, Madrid, and Jakarta, the United States government has invested significant resources in the preemption and prevention of attacks at home. It should not be surprising, then, that the American counterterrorism establishment approaches the *jihadi* movement's use of technology with a primarily operational mindset. Agencies tasked with monitoring the *jihadi* movement's use of email, chat rooms, online magazines, cell phone videos, CD-ROMs, and even video games look for immediate intelligence indicators and warnings. However, there has been little directive (or bureaucratic incentive) for these agencies to situate the technological activity they monitor in a broader strategic context. Unfortunately, it is the strategic—not operational—objectives of the *jihadi* movement's use of technology that engenders the most enduring and lethal threat to the United States over the long term.

If Western governments made reading the online statements posted by al-Qaeda ideologues a priority, they would better realize how the *jihadi* movement is not simply using technological tools to recruit new members, receive donations, and plan attacks. In actuality, al-Qaeda's use of the Internet and other new technologies has also enabled it to radicalize and empower armies of new recruits by shaping their general worldview.<sup>4</sup>

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From a counterterrorism perspective, there is no easy way to cauterize the surge of *jihadi* web presence or the movement's broader exploitation of modern technologies. Dismantling radical Internet homepages, for instance, is ineffective because these sites almost always reappear at other web addresses. Additionally, the eradication of such sites is incredibly counterproductive for the analysts trying to track the content

on them. On the other hand, leaving hostile websites in place allows for those interested in learning about, thinking about, and discussing violent *jihad* to do so unabated. Either choice is problematic.

For the United States to defeat al-Qaeda and the broader *jihadi* movement, it must first gain a better appreciation of the ways in which the movement is successfully fueling itself by harnessing new technologies. This article is intended as a first step toward that objective.

## TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Throughout history, individuals, groups, and networks from across the ideological spectrum have harnessed emerging technologies in order to advance their own political and social agendas. The printing press, cassette tape, and the fax machine have, at different points in time, served to spark revolutions in thought and action. The Internet today penetrates all levels of society while being subject to relatively few constraints. By bypassing other more conventional mediums, the Internet creates not just the tools, but an entirely new forum for fostering global awareness of issues unconstrained by government censorship or traditional cultural norms. Over the past decade, various groups and movements have used the Internet to:

- Coordinate movement activities, events, and actions;
- Discuss topics of interest and news with movement participants;
- Disseminate propaganda, educational, and training materials;
- Identify, recruit, and socialize new membership; and
- Find and exploit information about their opposition.

In fact, the use of the Internet for social and political activism has actually generated an entire subfield of study within the academic disciplines of sociology and political science.<sup>5</sup>

However, widespread misconceptions about the movement's use of technology have served to focus too much public (and thus policy) attention on the more sensational features of *jihadi* Internet activity, such as the online deluge of Iraqi attack videos, and not enough on its more mundane aspects, such as *jihadi* web forums. Any meaningful discussion of al-Qaeda's use of the Internet must first seek to rectify such errors.

The *jihadi* web world is structured much like that of any other movement's virtual presence, although it is significantly more unstable. Web forum sites like the *Al-Hesbah Discussion Forum* (<[www.alhesbah.org](http://www.alhesbah.org)>) or the now-defunct *Syrian Islamic Forum* serve as initial entry points from which interested viewers from around the world can read about the breaking news from Iraq, follow links to attack videos from active *jihad* campaigns, view motivational imagery of martyr operatives in heaven, and even download scripted talking points about the religious justifications for waging violent *jihad*. Some of these forums even post *jihadi* job openings.<sup>6</sup>

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However, these sites vacillate between active and inactive states, often because of disagreements with their service providers or as a result of hostile action against them. They change web addresses frequently, making them incredibly difficult to follow for one not immersed in the *jihadi* web world.

For those seeking a more accessible way to communicate with others who have a similar affinity for *jihad* and al-Qaeda, Google's Orkut software—a popular, worldwide Internet service—provides a useful tool.<sup>7</sup> This online community has helped rally support for Osama bin Laden and facilitated the sharing of *jihadi* videos as well as communication among non-Arab *jihad* sympathizers.

To get the latest news and current events from a *jihadi* perspective, interested viewers have a number of options. They can follow the links on web discussion forums to a series of al-Qaeda-friendly news broadcasts (called the “Voice of the Caliphate”) highlighting recent attacks, criticizing Arab governments for collaborating with Jews and Christians, and discussing future goals of the *jihadi* movement.<sup>8</sup> Those searching for *jihadi*-oriented news updates can easily sign up for daily email feeds from one of the many *jihadi* email listserv groups, many of which use the Yahoo! web service. They can also sign up for the free “lightning” mobile Internet service at <www.islammemo.cc/mobile>, which allows users to access selected news content via their cell phones.

Individuals interested in setting up their own terrorist cells—like those responsible for the Madrid train bombing—can find more than news updates online. *Jihadi* web forums provide links to several al-Qaeda magazines, which outline step-by-step instructions for communicating with cell members, defining tactics and procedures, and constructing explosives, among other topics. In fact, with little trouble, they can identify the *jihadi* Yahoo! Group that hosts the *Encyclopedia of Preparation*, a voluminous training manual for everything from kidnapping officials to building nuclear devices.<sup>9</sup>

Increasingly, those who monitor *jihadi* websites find detailed instructional documents and videos that explain how to use specific software packages or access certain types of files online. These tutorials are accompanied with a “*jihadi*-approved” version of the software to download, which often includes computer programs for video editing or webpage design. To this end, *jihadi* computer programmers have launched new stand-alone web browsing software, similar to Internet Explorer, which searches only particular sites. By restricting the freedom to navigate to other online destinations, such programs facilitate the intellectual separation of *jihadi* visitors from the chaos of cyberspace. These efforts to define and bound *jihadi* ideological

space, critical for *jihadi* success in light of the multiplicity of alternative viewpoints that can be accessed online, should be expected to accelerate as ideologues seek dominance over this technology.

More thoughtful visitors can read about *jihadi* ideology from the al-Qaeda library site (<<http://tawhed.ws>>), which hosts over 3,000 books and monographs from respected *jihadi* thinkers. One recent posting in a radical Islamic discussion forum, *Tajdid al-Islami*, demonstrated for participants how *jihadi*-themed books can now be downloaded onto cell phones.<sup>10</sup> In addition to books, anyone can download propaganda and recruitment videos directly onto their mobile devices.<sup>11</sup>

Similar to other web-oriented movements, the *jihadi* online world would not exist were it not for the dedicated efforts of its technical experts and webmasters who maintain these sites. As an information technology specialist, British citizen Babar Ahmad used his computer skills to maintain one of the earliest English-language pro-*jihad* websites from his south London home. His Internet homepage provided news and radical imagery about *jihad* with the goal of cultivating a deeper awareness among would-be participants about the movement's goals.<sup>12</sup> These technical experts play an important role in making the latest advances in information and computer technology available to movement participants. Al-Qaeda's use of the Internet, as evidenced by individuals like Ahmad or the virtual army of other computer-savvy *jihadi* youth, is consistent with the broader pattern of grassroots activism occurring around the world; the *jihadi* use of technology, however, has deadly consequences.

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## WEAPONIZING THE INTERNET

Despite the fact that *jihadi* websites have only recently received widespread public attention, pro-*jihad* webmasters have been hosting websites since before the attacks of September 11, 2001. It was not until the United States and its allies unseated the Taliban in Afghanistan, however, that senior al-Qaeda leaders found themselves in a scramble to keep their movement motivated and coherent. As such, they used the Internet to replace their dismantled training camps, reconnect their weakened organization, and reconstitute their leadership. Although these virtual combat classrooms

do not render physical training camps obsolete, information technologies do change the nature of education, indoctrination, and participation.

Al-Qaeda has increasingly looked to the Internet as a way of shaping military operations on the battlefield. As Iraqi insurgents perfect their combat techniques, they communicate them to a larger audience through a variety of channels, including the Internet. Increasingly, military commanders have reported a growing trend of Iraqi insurgent tactics being replicated in Afghanistan.<sup>13</sup> The Taliban's use of remote triggered improvised explosive devices (IEDs), for example, demonstrates a notable evolution from the hard-wired detonators they had previously used.<sup>14</sup> In recent months, govern-

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ment officials in Thailand have reported a similar upsurge in the technical sophistication of tactics used by radical Islamic insurgents in the south of the country.<sup>15</sup>

Thai security forces attribute these seemingly overnight advancements, particularly in terms of how guerrillas are wiring and deploying IEDs, to a combination of the availability of *jihadi* training manuals, which they have found in safe houses in

CD-ROM and hardcopy form, and direct instruction from Thai *jihadis* with al-Qaeda training camp experience.

In recent years, a burgeoning web network of "resistance sites" has emerged to facilitate the insurgency in Iraq by providing detailed directions, advice, and maps to those looking to participate.<sup>16</sup> Suggesting routes through Syria, facilitators guide interested participants from Saudi Arabia or Europe into the heart of the battle via a winding underground railroad of safe houses and sympathetic mosques.

*Jihadi* media brigades also foster awareness about their cause through a continuous stream of emails, propaganda videos, and pictures.<sup>17</sup> Focused on turning their enemy's strengths against them, *jihadis* actively use the latest Western software—including Windows Movie Maker, Adobe Acrobat, and others—to create anti-Western products intended to inspire their followers and humiliate their enemies. These al-Qaeda affiliated or inspired media outlets have found a wealth of imagery from Western media sources, which they manipulate to craft their own propaganda products. Over the past year, this imagery has increasingly focused on profiling wounded and dead American soldiers in disturbingly graphic ways. Perhaps even more shocking to Western audiences is the black humor that often accompanies this imagery.<sup>18</sup>

One recent al-Qaeda propaganda campaign highlighting sniper operations in Iraq has fostered broad popular awareness in the West and the Muslim world of the *jihadi* movement's ideological successes. A series of videos, photos, and discussions about alleged attacks conducted by *jihadi* heroes, the "Baghdad Sniper" and the "Sniper of Fallujah," have been proliferating on hostile websites.<sup>19</sup> The videos show attacks by a sniper against American forces in Iraq, each ending with a successful hit against a soldier. The stark contrast between the imposing *jihadi* sniper and the suffering American soldier fits precisely with the goals of the movement: providing a sense of meaning and proof of victory to those sympathetic to the *jihadi* cause.

These types of propaganda products are typically burned to CD-ROM and distributed by hand not only to *jihadi* activists but also to anyone who may be curious about the movement. Available in markets and under the counters of some shops, these videos can be purchased throughout the Middle East and Southeast Asia. The sniper has become a folk hero for some Iraqis, who may not necessarily subscribe to the *jihadi* ideology, but do feel a connection with the active resistance waged by the sniper against what they perceive to be imperialistic U.S. forces.

In addition to using technology for education and indoctrination purposes, *jihadi* groups have also exploited these technologies to revolutionize the way in which their supporters participate in the struggle. For example, in November 2005, the information

bureau of "The Army of the Victorious Group," a Sunni insurgent group operating in Iraq, used several radical Islamic websites to announce a contest for designing the organization's website. The winner would not only have his design implemented, but he would receive a prize in the form of the opportunity to fire missiles via computer at a U.S. army base in Iraq.<sup>20</sup> The announcement emphasized that:

The winner will fire three long-range missiles from any location in the world at an American army base in Iraq, by pressing a button [on his computer] with his own blessed hand, using technology developed by the *jihad* fighters, Allah willing.<sup>21</sup>

By stressing the "opportunity for our brothers outside Iraq to join

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their brothers on the front line[s] in Iraq, the land of the frontier and of *jihad*, and to [participate in] destroying the strongholds of polytheism and heresy," the contest sponsors demonstrated their view that the very *use* of technology is an integral part of the education and indoctrination process. Such applications of technology allow those interested in supporting the insurgency in Iraq to do so from outside the actual field of battle.

Importantly, *jihadi* web users have become increasingly aware of attempts by governments to monitor their behavior. In order to enhance operational security in the use of technology, *jihadis* have recently posted protocol about safe ways to use technology. For example, a guide for using the Internet safely and anonymously recently emerged on a *jihadi* forum site.<sup>22</sup> The guide explains how governments identify users; penetrate their usage of software chat programs, including Microsoft Messenger and PalTalk; and advises readers not to use Saudi Arabian based email addresses (those that end with a ".sa" extension) because they are not secure. Rather, the author of this guide suggests that *jihadis* should register for anonymous accounts from commercial providers like Hotmail or Yahoo!.

### VIDEO GAMES AND *JIHAD*

Although counterterrorism analysts correctly focus on the ways in which *jihadis* employ new technologies to advance their operational agendas, they must also pay better attention to the strategic application of technology in cultivating widespread ideological support among Muslim youth. To date, the burgeoning *jihadi* video game industry has made relatively little impact on policymakers, but this application of technology does reflect a growing effort by radical Islamic propagandists to reach a younger demographic with their message.

Before continuing, it is important to note that many video games available to youth in the West are equally or even more violent than the *jihadi* versions. Additionally, there is no clear consensus among experts on whether playing violent games leads an individual to perpetrate violence in real life. Despite these limitations, what makes *jihadi* games uniquely problematic is the nature of the assumptions it asks players to make. Take, for instance, this paraphrased setting from a real *jihadi* video game available for download on the Internet:

The year is 2214. United under the banner of Islam, soldiers of Allah have successfully conquered the world, reestablishing the global Caliphate. No longer do infidel forces threaten the *ummah*, the global community of Islamic believers. No longer are "good"



Muslims tempted by the manipulative forces of commercialism or sexuality. By clicking on "New Game," this puritanical Islamic utopia is whisked into a state of chaos as it faces an impending attack by infidel space invaders. Only "you" can save it. . . .<sup>23</sup>

Children who play this game are supposed to accept that, at some point in history, Muslims conquered the world and killed or converted all those who opposed them. While players may understand that such games are based on fiction, the act of playing them arguably increases their propensity to accept ideologies that consist of extreme goals, such as the establishment of a global Islamic caliphate.

These types of radical Islamic video games would make most game-savvy Western youth chuckle. Their graphics are rudimentary, and their game play is stilted. When compared to any commercial action game in the West, or even video games employed by the U.S. Army to predispose youths toward military service, *jihadi* games pale in comparison. But when one peers beyond the graphic interface, a coherent and ideological world in thought comes into relief. In the *jihadi* games, Muslims are faced with a variety of aggressors—the American military, alien invaders, Israeli settlers, or even robots programmed to kill—that they must fend off for the sake of Islam. Beyond the primary plot of the game—whether assassinating Israeli political leaders, clearing Israeli settlements, or knowing trivia about early Christian invaders—would-be gamers are assumed to be steeped in the appropriate knowledge base before even approaching the game. That way, upon interacting with the game itself, the game's premise is intuitive to the player.

In a game called "Under Ash" and its sequel "Under Siege," players assume the identity of "Ahmed," a young Palestinian man tasked with delivering "a collection of important ideas in the history of the Palestinian Cause." As Ahmed, players follow his escalation of violence from stone-throwing to face-to-face combat. The game's website reminds prospective players that:

A nation in Palestine is being uprooted: their houses are being devastated, their establishments are being destroyed, their lands are being occupied, their trees are being pulled out, their property is being confiscated, their cities are being besieged, their schools are being closed, their sanctuaries are being violated, their sacred structures are being made permitted, [*sic*] their children are being beaten, their hands are being broken, their bones are being crushed and they are imprisoned, tortured, and slain.<sup>24</sup>

Not all games in the radical Islamic bent are so overtly violent. For instance, a package of mini-games sold under the title "The Islamic Fun!"

and produced by Innovative Minds is targeted at providing children with an alternative to secular video games.<sup>25</sup> Robert Spencer describes this CD-ROM:

Its games have names such as “Fishing Bear,” “Tree Hop,” and “Two Bunny Race.” In “Tree Hop,” a tiger bounds atop a series of trees in pursuit of a beach ball. “Fishing Bear” features a bear sporting green pajamas (complete with nightcap) and a wide grin.<sup>26</sup>

Tucked inside this package of seemingly innocuous games, however, is one entitled “The Resistance.” Players between the ages of five and seven become farmers in South Lebanon who join the Islamic resistance against invading Israelis. Their objective is to destroy all invading “Zionist forces.”

Video games, like other popular media, become part of a culture’s discourse. Different from other tools such as pamphlets, books, or websites, video games allow for two-way engagement—both intellectual and physical—

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in a simulated world. Players strike keys or click buttons to shoot, syncing physical action with intellectual and visual cues. Repeated play reinforces the connection between thought and action, between intent and implementation. Video games serve as a record of popular sentiment and therefore serve to influence the understanding of historical memories for those who play them.

Drawing selective historical lessons, highlighting particular characters, or simulating certain battles allow game developers to control the “reality” in which players engage. The more realistic these games become, the less dissonance players see between the game and the world around them. The opportunity for players to be lulled into a sense that the game harmonizes with reality is an extremely dangerous prospect, whether the game is designed for simply passing time or for radicalizing youth.

The use of websites, chat rooms, and video games cannot be seen as simply an *ad hoc* outcome of globalization or the adoption of technology by the *jihadi* movement. As shown in the next sections, al-Qaeda’s harnessing of technology has been a calculated strategic move—the goal being to catalyze awareness of the need for Muslims to “resist” and open new ways for them to participate in that resistance.

## STRATEGIC EXPLOITATION OF TECHNOLOGY

*"The revolution in communications and the global satellite channels and the Internet have opened the minds of people. . . ."*

—ABU MUSAB AL-SURI<sup>27</sup>

In recent decades, *jihadi* ideologues have devoted significant energy to promulgating an aggressive, historically informed, and universally applicable strategy for expanding their influence, both territorially and ideologically. Senior thinkers within this group of Islamic zealots publish voluminous texts outlining their agendas.<sup>28</sup> Given their obscure historical meandering and opaque style, however, these grand-strategy texts do not receive the attention they should from Western policymakers. *Jihadi* propagandists, however, eagerly consume these texts and bring their message to a mass audience by producing and applying technology in new ways as described in the sections above.<sup>29</sup>

Abu Musab al-Suri, a senior al-Qaeda thinker, can be seen as the chief architect of al-Qaeda's contemporary Internet movement. Therefore, if one is to understand the logic informing the *jihadi* use of technology, one must become intimately familiar with the man choreographing this technological movement.

Abu Musab al-Suri is the *nom de guerre* of the Syrian *jihadi* Mustafa 'Abd al-Qadir Mustafa Husayn, also known as Umar 'Abd al-Hakim and Mustafa Setmariam Nassar. He is a career *jihadi* who spent much of his life fighting, training, and writing about violent *jihad*.<sup>30</sup> Suri's unique personal background shapes his approach to fomenting social change, particularly regarding the role of strategic communication and propaganda. He is reportedly proficient in multiple languages, including Spanish, French, English, and his native Arabic. He is known to hold a black belt in judo (a martial arts approach that relies on turning an enemy's strength against them) and possesses advanced expertise in guerrilla warfare.

Having lived in both Arab and Western cultures, his perspective on spreading the *jihadi* movement is global in scope. Suri argues that *jihad* should be understood as a comprehensive war, where its soldiers employ military, political, media, civil, and ideological tools. For Suri, the Internet

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and other media resources should be used to help establish what he calls “resistance blockades” in order to keep the enemy (Western culture) from further corrupting Islamic institutions, organizations, and ideas through this technology. Suri advocates that *jihadis* reclaim technological tools of communication and use them to radicalize the Muslim masses—a guerilla war of ideas as well as of violence.

Suri is both student and master in the propaganda business. In the early 1990s, he moved to England to help establish the media wing of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). He wrote articles in the publications of a variety of *jihadi* groups, including the Algerian *Al-Ansar* newsletter, the Libyan *Al-Fajr* newsletter, and the Egyptian *Mujahidun* newsletter, which were all published in Europe during that period. He was reportedly detained by Algerian security forces, but denied his involvement with the GIA, condemning the group for killing Muslims in their attacks. Fearing future arrest, Suri then decided to dedicate his time to literary work and independent journalism, earning the nickname “pen *jihadist*” from U.S. counterterrorism officials.<sup>31</sup>

In 1996, Suri reportedly established the Bureau for the Study of Islamic Conflicts in London.<sup>32</sup> The office is perhaps most well known for facilitating two press interviews with Osama bin Laden for the BBC and CNN. At that time, Suri reportedly planned to pursue university studies in journalism and political science in Britain, but due to pressure from British security agencies he fled to Afghanistan in 1997, where he stayed until the country’s collapse in December 2001. From 1997 to 2001, with the help of the Taliban’s Ministry of Defense, Suri established the Al-Ghurabaa terrorist training camp in the infamous Qarghah Military Base in Kabul. It was here that he pledged allegiance to the Taliban leader, Mullah Muhammad Omar, in 2000. Suri worked in the Taliban’s Ministry of Information and wrote for the Taliban’s official newspaper, *Shari’ah*. He also participated in preparing the Arabic-language programming of Kabul’s radio station. During that period, Suri established a new “Al-Ghurabaa” (known as the “Center for Islamic Studies and Information”), issued the *Concerns of the Defenders of Truth* magazine, and wrote a number of books, including a 1,600-page tome dedicated to launching a “Global Islamic Resistance.”<sup>33</sup>

Suri’s lifelong goal has been to bring *jihad* to the people. The establishment of al-Qaeda and its attacks around the world—particularly those on September 11, 2001—were critical, but not necessarily sufficient, steps toward catalyzing the global Islamic revolution he envisions. Drawing upon the operational, tactical, and strategic lessons of past *jihadi* move-

ments, including his experience working with the Algerian *jihad* and several attempts to overthrow the Syrian government in the 1980s, Suri has gained a very clear sense of what the movement needs to do in order to be successful.<sup>34</sup> The obvious next step for Suri is to cultivate an intellectual, cultural, and military guerrilla movement around the world.

### SURI'S METHOD: ESTABLISH A CULTURE OF PREPARATION

Although Suri used the Internet and new technologies in a limited way himself, he was acutely aware of their potential to empower the masses to conduct their own research, communicate with one another, and identify with an idea larger than themselves.

In his most recent work, *A Call to Global Islamic Resistance*, Suri frequently characterizes the Internet and satellite television, as well as computers in general, as critical vehicles for inciting a global resistance.<sup>35</sup> Such incitement, he argues, can only happen once the masses understand the problems they face and why their help is needed to overcome them. But Suri takes a curiously process-based approach to defining incitement, arguing that people cannot fully understand the political repression and economic exploitation they face unless they participate in resistance activities, which could include anything from accessing and distributing *jihadi* propaganda to actively fighting against the West.

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Suri argues throughout his works that a truly effective grassroots campaign relies on technology, exploited in small-scale, directed operations by a large number of people. The circulation of propaganda, for instance, should be sent to personal email contact lists. *Jihadi* movement participants, he argues, should also use computers, CD-ROMs, and DVDs to circulate large quantities of *jihadi* information—in the form of books, essays, brochures, photographs, and videos—in a highly compressed fashion. For Suri, those who recognize the need to participate in the Global Islamic Resistance should work within small propaganda cells in order to:

- Deploy written statements that call on Muslims worldwide to join the Global Islamic Resistance in every possible publication;
- Publish works on military and training curricula to inform the popular resistance;

- Translate those works into Turkish, Urdu, Indonesian, and other languages spoken in Muslim-majority countries; and
- Disseminate any scholarly writing that supports the spirit of resistance, including senior scholarly opinions regarding the enemies of *jihad* and writings identifying unbelievers and boycotting cooperation with them.

For Suri, Muslim youth ought to develop computer proficiency so that they can access and disseminate information using the latest technology from an early age. The Internet, Suri notes, is one of the most useful ways to craft a historical record of the *jihadi* movement across the military, social, media, and ideological fronts. By making *jihadi* videos readily accessible, Suri suggests, the Internet helps aspiring *jihadis* to learn how to deliver speeches in the “appropriate” manner.

## CONCLUSION

This article has sought to introduce readers to the various ways the *jihadi* movement leverages communication and information technologies. Its aim was to demonstrate the strategic significance of these technologies for advancing an organic, global *jihadi* movement that can adapt to environmental changes, including enhanced counterterrorism policies.

The examples provided here are only a few of the ways this growing army of *jihadi* propagandists—proficient in the use of computers and acutely

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aware of the power of the Internet—uses technology to communicate their ideology around the world. Sites like al-Qaeda’s library offer a tremendous resource to scholars and researchers who want to gain a better understanding of the strategic goals of various thinkers in the movement. The discussion forums provide a valuable resource for monitoring how

conceptual thinking is translated into popular action.

It seems clear that senior *jihadi* strategists like Abu Musab al-Suri, who have urged propagandists not only to spread the ideology, but to actually educate others about how to become propagandists themselves, are having an influence on the way the movement leverages technology. *Jihadi* use of new technologies must therefore be monitored by bureaucracies tasked with combating *jihadi* terrorism, not just to obtain the operational

information that is available, but also to obstruct this larger process of indoctrinating a generation of young *jihadi* soldiers worldwide.

Unless the United States crafts a strategy that stymies long-term ideological radicalization among large numbers of Muslim youth, America's "Long War" against terrorism is likely to be just that. ■

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Ayman al-Zawahiri, "Knights Under the Banner of the Prophet," *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 2, 2001.
- 2 BBC News, "U.S. Losing Media War to al-Qaeda," February 17, 2006, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4725992.stm>> (accessed February 24, 2006).
- 3 *Now Online: Swear Loyalty to Al-Qaeda Leaders*, The Middle East Media Research Institute Special Dispatch 1027, November 18, 2005, <<http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=subjects&Area=jihad&ID=SP102705>> (accessed March 27, 2006).
- 4 Senior *jihadi* strategist Abu Musab al-Suri dedicated his most recent book, *Da`wah lil-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah al-Alamiyyah (A Call to Global Islamic Resistance)*, to catalyzing a global Islamic revolution via new media technologies, particularly through the Internet and satellite television. He published the book online in 2004 at the culmination of his career directing and thinking about *jihad*. The book can be accessed online at <[www.fsboa.com/vw/index.php?subject=7&rec=27&tit=tit&pa=0](http://www.fsboa.com/vw/index.php?subject=7&rec=27&tit=tit&pa=0)> (accessed March 29, 2006).
- 5 See Steven Hick and John G. McNutt, eds., *Advocacy, Activism, and the Internet: Community Organization and Social Policy* (Chicago: Lyceum, 2002); Martha McCaughey and Michael D. Ayers, eds., *Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2003); and Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).
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- 12 In October 2004, a U.S. federal grand jury indicted Ahmad for providing material support to terrorists through his homepage, azzam.com, among other charges. See <[www.usdoj.gov/usao/ct/Press2004/20041006.html](http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/ct/Press2004/20041006.html)> (accessed April 10, 2006) for the indictment. He has yet to be extradited to the United States.
- 13 Sami Yousafzai and Ron Moreau, "Unholy Allies," *Newsweek*, September 26, 2005, <[www.msnbc.msn.com/id/9379240/site/newsweek/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/9379240/site/newsweek/)> (accessed March 26, 2006); and David S. Cloud, "Insurgents Are Continually Getting More Sophisticated with Their Devices," *The New York Times*, August 3, 2005.
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- 16 For example, on June 16, 2005, "Al-Muhjhir al-Islami," a participant in the online radical discussion forum "Firdaws," described in great detail how "the central border area between Syria's Dir al-Zur province and Iraq's al-Anbar province is the entry point most used by the mujahadeen," in a posting entitled, "The way toward the country of the two rivers." See <<http://siteinstitute.org/bin/articles.cgi?ID=publications56205&Category=publications&Subcategory=0>> (accessed March 27, 2006).
- 17 The most popular of these media groups is known as Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF). Its propaganda is among the most sophisticated and pervasive in online *jihadi* media.
- 18 Goafalaldyn.com, "The Sarcastic Bloody Comedy Video Tape Hidden Camera of the Mujahideen in Iraq," September 6, 2005, <[www.goafalaldyn.com/vb/showthread.php?t=5324](http://www.goafalaldyn.com/vb/showthread.php?t=5324)> (currently inaccessible).
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- 20 The *Al-Hesbah Forum* is currently inaccessible but had been found at <[www.alhesbah.org](http://www.alhesbah.org)>. The Flash document had been posted at: <<http://heretic.maid.to/cgi-bin/stored/serio0835.swf>>.
- 21 *Islamist Website Design Contest: Winner Fires Missiles U.S. Army Base in Iraq*, The Middle East Media Research Institute Special Dispatch 1038, December 1, 2005, <<http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP103805>> (accessed March 26, 2006).
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- 23 This is a paraphrased summary of the opening scenes in a video game called: "Ummah Defense." One can receive the game "Ummah Defense" and "Ummah Defense 2" as a bonus when they purchase the game "Maze of Destiny" from the website <[www.simplyislam.com/iteminfo.asp?item=54854](http://www.simplyislam.com/iteminfo.asp?item=54854)> (accessed March 26, 2006).
- 24 This explanation can be found on the game's website at <[www.underash.net/emessage.htm](http://www.underash.net/emessage.htm)> (accessed March 25, 2006).
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- 26 Robert Spencer, "Jihad For Kids," June 7, 2002 <[www.freecongress.org/commentaries/2002/020607RS.asp](http://www.freecongress.org/commentaries/2002/020607RS.asp)> (accessed March 26, 2006).
- 27 Al-Suri, *A Call to Global Islamic Resistance*.
- 28 See the *jihadi* strategic library at <[tawhed.ws](http://tawhed.ws)>.
- 29 The now dead terrorist propagandist, Yusuf al-Ayiri, is one of the most well-known jihadis with the ability to engage in high-level ideological discussions and translate his ideas into propaganda directed toward the Muslim masses. This influential Saudi served as an ideologue, recruiter, and webmaster for al-Qaeda's first website, al-Neda.com, until his death in June 2003. He is generally considered a model within the *jihadi* movement for bridging the gap between the deep thinkers and fighters on the ground.
- 30 The biography that informs much of this discussion was posted originally on Suri's own homepage, <[www.fsboa.com/vw](http://www.fsboa.com/vw)> in March 2005. That site is currently unavailable and is now located on al-Qaeda's library site, <[tawhed.ws](http://tawhed.ws)>, (accessed March 30, 2006), which was down at the time of writing.
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- 35 Ibid.