

OSCE Background Note

JIHADIST USE OF THE INTERNET: LESSONS FOR 'THE FAR RIGHT'?

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Introduction

In 2005, UK police raided the home of two violent extremists who were planning to carry out a terrorist attack using ricin gas. The men operated a closed extremist forum online, encompassing hundreds of active members, which they used to raise funds and discuss tactics and targets. The materials and instruction manuals used in the production of the gas were sourced online. The two men were father and son Ian and Nick Davidson of the so-called 'Aryan Strike Force'. Although much academic attention has been lavished on the 'cyber caliphate' and jihadist use of the internet, the far right has also been revolutionised by the dawn of the internet, as evidenced above. Below are some general lessons that we have learnt over the past few years which also apply to the far right.

Geography of online extremism

The jihadist movement's online presence can be broken down into three broad levels:

- **Level One:** This level is public and involves the use of social media outlets such as Twitter, Facebook or YouTube to post propaganda videos and publications.
- **Level Two:** This level is semi-public, consisting of dedicated websites for the dissemination of propaganda and some

web forums with both public and private sections.

- **Level Three:** This level is often referred to as the 'deep' or 'dark' web and consists of password-protected forums which are often hidden using file repositories and storage sites.

Propaganda is generally developed in the third level and pushed upwards through to level two and then level one. The far right use of the internet adheres to a similar layered structure. Recent years have seen far right use of the first level expand, with an abundance of social media methods employed by the extreme right. An example is the 'Immortal' group in Germany, which organises exclusively through Twitter and other social media outlets to stage unregistered rallies, and uses YouTube to disseminate footage of the gatherings. Semi-public forums such as 'Stormfront', founded by a former Ku Klux Klan leader in the 1990s, make up the second level. The third level is made up of password-protected forums such as www.legion88.com.

Jihadist use of the internet

Several key points have emerged concerning jihadist use of the internet:

- Virtual media organisations have been major sources of dissemination of jihadist publications and audiovisual materials.
- These websites have sought to narrow the credibility gap between established news media and themselves by mirroring mainstream and established media sites.
- The use of new social media by extremists and terrorist networks is becoming more common and significant to these groups. There is some evidence to show that jihadists are employing social media as part of a formal strategy.
- Online activities need to be understood in conjunction with offline events. Though the internet is a key component of the radicalisation process, it is a weak tool for actual recruitment of terrorists into an organisation and for training. This nearly always takes place offline and face to face.
- The internet has allowed the proliferation of instruction manuals for the jihadi movement, detailing everything from how to build an IED to how to produce poison gas.
- There are cases of jihadists who are known to have engaged in online credit card fraud, identity theft and other illegal activities to fund their operations.
- The internet offers greater opportunity for women to become active within jihadist circles than simply offline engagement.

For more information, see the Institute for Strategic Dialogue’s working paper [***Radicalisation: The Role of the Internet***](#).

Far right use of the internet

Right-wing extremist use of the internet exhibits several key similarities to that of jihadists:

- Extreme right websites are sophisticated, and are often hosted outside their target jurisdictions to avoid legal sanctions.
- The online proliferation of instruction manuals has been used extensively by the jihadi movement but, as the Davidson case

illustrates, the far right is just as likely to use the internet to spread this kind of knowledge.

- There are reasons to believe that women are more likely to engage with right-wing extremist sites and become active within far right circles than they might in the offline space, though there is less data to evidence this.

There are, however, some distinct characteristics unique to far right use of the internet:

- Rather than mirroring established media news outlets to gain credibility, extreme right websites heavily target youth, reflecting a young lifestyle and employing recognisable styles, slogans, and symbols.
- The extreme right capitalises on relationship-building mechanisms online, and the emergence of new social media and other such tools has become far more important than static websites. Building a sense of comradeship or family is key.
- The far right radicalisation process online is focused largely on promoting racial narcissism, building indifference towards potential victims, and fostering a sense of credibility and power among fringe groups.
- The online space is a major source of funding for right-wing movements. Many websites merchandise white power and Nazi paraphernalia, and right-wing internet shops are on the rise.

Conclusion

The internet revolution has touched all aspects of modern life, extremism included. Those wishing to understand far right use of the internet should leverage the extensive research which has been carried out on jihadist internet usage, as there are many commonalities.

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