



Bundeskriminalamt



**Crime Scene Internet –
A Global Challenge for Internal Security**

BKA-Autumn Conference, 20 – 22 November 2007

**The Internet as an Open University
and Virtual Training Camp**

Summarised presentation

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1. From Afghanistan into Cyberspace

For Al Qaeda, the war in Afghanistan following the September 11 attacks meant a nearly complete loss of infrastructure. The terrorist network reacted by opening up to sympathisers from outside: From that time on, those willing to fight would not need to travel to Afghanistan – the training would take place wherever they were. The first step for the implementation of this strategy was the publication of the “Encyclopaedia of Jihad” on the Internet. The publication was accompanied by the request that readers should apply the know-how contained therein at their own discretion. This is how Al Qaeda & Co. started making use of the Internet as an Open University and virtual training camp.

2. The Internet as an Open University and Virtual Training Camp

Since that time, sympathisers have modified, updated and amended the original encyclopaedia a countless number of times. Material created by Hezbollah, Hamas, etc. was added. New methods like training videos and new topics like hacking, steganography or dirty bombs were included as well. Hundreds of websites, chatrooms and mailing groups have by now specialised in this kind of “preparation for Jihad”.

3. The Limits of Terrorist E-learning

For several attacks, the attackers have used know-how from the WWW; the dangerousness of the Jihadist Open University is beyond doubt. However, the quality of the manuals for mixing explosives, manufacturing bombs or producing chemical and biological weapons varies considerably. It is also questionable whether a virtual training camp can ever be a substitute for a real one. As for Al Qaeda & Co., they prefer real training camps and set up new camps wherever and whenever possible. Frequently, attackers do not rely on the WWW either: they rather travel to Pakistan or Afghanistan in order to undergo training in real camps.

4. Conclusions

Making strategic use of the Internet has helped Al Qaeda overcome the consequences of September 11. At the same time, the WWW has also changed Al Qaeda. It has, for instance, created a new type of activist: the “terrorist volunteers”, who significantly shape the current image of Al Qaeda, evade any centralised control by Al Qaeda and maintain activities on the Internet that cannot be effectively suppressed. In the virtual space, Al Qaeda has thus long been on its way to becoming a kind of Wiki-Qaida: an Internet-based Jihadist project, where anybody can become an editor and contributor.