



Bundeskriminalamt

Crime Scene Internet – A Global Challenge for Internal Security

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Terror on the Internet

Summarised presentation

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Terrorists fight their wars in cyberspace as well as on the ground. However, while politicians and the media have hotly debated the dangers that cyberterrorism poses to the Internet, surprisingly little is known about the threat posed by terrorists' use of the Internet.

Today, as this report makes plain, terrorist organizations and their supporters maintain thousands of websites, exploiting the unregulated, anonymous, and easily accessible nature of the Internet to target an array of messages to a variety of audiences. Our study identifies no fewer than eight different ways in which terrorists are using the Internet to advance their cause, ranging from psychological warfare to recruitment, networking to fundraising. In each case, the report not only analyzes how the Internet can facilitate terrorist operations but also illustrates the point with examples culled from an extensive exploration of the World Wide Web.

Today, all active terrorist groups have established their presence on the Internet. Terrorism on the Internet is a very dynamic phenomenon: websites suddenly emerge, frequently modify their formats, and then swiftly disappear – or, in many cases, seem to disappear by changing their online address but retaining much the same content. Using these websites, online terrorists target three different audiences: current and potential supporters; international public opinion; and enemy publics. Finally, while we must better defend our societies against cyberterrorism and Internet-savvy terrorists, we should also consider the costs of applying counterterrorism measures to the Internet. Such measures can hand authoritarian governments and agencies with little public accountability tools with which to violate privacy, curtail the free flow of information, and restrict freedom of expression, thus adding a heavy price in terms of diminished civil liberties to the high toll exacted by terrorism itself.