



Internet-based terror groups on the rise

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The Gazette

Friday, July 28, 2006

The Internet has become a haven for terrorists and hate groups, and while the number of their websites is increasing, finding the people who create them is nearly impossible, the Simon Wiesenthal Centre says in its latest report.

The 2006 Digital Terrorism and Hate study, which was made public yesterday in Montreal as part of a global campaign, puts the number of websites, blogs and newsgroups that incite hate at more than 6,000, a 20-per-cent jump over last year.

"Terrorist rhetoric online really took off after 9/11," said Leo Adler of Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Centre for Holocaust Studies.

"It's the fastest-growing type of hate."

The Internet, touted by many as a democratic medium, harbours a dark side.

Anonymity and lack of global enforcement measures allow racists and extremists to post inflammatory material while avoiding hate crime laws.

A browse through the report shows a wealth of disturbing items: a video on how to build a suicide bomber's vest; an instructional cartoon of urban guerrillas distracting a tank for a rocket launcher's benefit; a music video with pictures of corpses in Nazi concentration camps.

It's hard to trace these websites and assign responsibility, Adler said. Digital hate groups often use multiple servers in different countries to evade authorities. Others use a process called steganography to encrypt messages in text.

Adler is troubled by the number of games that espouse hate and target children, such as one where a black man kills people in drive-by shootings.

The centre works with law and security agencies to track offending sites, but concedes it's impossible to shut them all down. North American hate groups in particular keep their servers in the United States, where unfettered freedom of speech keeps authorities away.

Fo Niemi, the director of the Centre for Research-Action on Race Relations, said education is the only effective tool.

"The Canadian government has been slow to combat online hate," Niemi said. "And most parents are unaware of the problem. They're from the TV generation. They don't know what their children are seeing online."

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