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From al-Zarqawi to al-Awlaki: The Emergence and Development of an Online Radical Milieu

Milieu: the physical or social setting in which something occurs or develops; syn: environment.
Merriam-Webster Online, 2012

Radical milieus have been described as specific social environments whose culture, narratives, and symbols shape both individuals and groups, and the social networks and relationships out of which those individuals and groups develop and emerge. Researcher Peter Waldmann and his co-authors attribute distinct and independent qualities to these environments, portraying them as social entities in their own right, that is, a collective of people sharing certain perspectives and a unitary identity: a “subculture” or a “community.” This does not mean that conflict is absent between any given radical milieu and the violent extremist or terrorist group(s) that emerges from within it. Milieus have their own interests that lead them not just to interact with, but oftentimes to criticise and sometimes even confront their violent offshoots. Perhaps most importantly, Waldmann’s conception of radical milieus appears not merely to have social relationships as a core characteristic, but necessitates, implicitly or explicitly, face-to-face interaction amongst the members of any given milieu.¹

Waldmann has raised the question of virtual versus “real world” interaction, and the merits or demerits of each, asking whether “the Internet and its chat forums offer a substitute to face-to-face contacts as a base of mutual support [for violent radicals]?”² While he doesn’t venture an answer, given that the internet, and Web 2.0 in particular, has been shown to facilitate the virtual establishment of strong social and personal bonds in many different contexts,³ there is no reason to believe that this should not hold true with respect to violent political extremists. The purpose of this article is therefore to expand the concept of the radical milieu to the virtual sphere by showing that many of the basic characteristics of traditional radical milieus are also apparent in their online counterparts, while acknowledging the latter’s own unique characteristics and complicating factors. The emphasis here is on the emergence of the violent jihadi online milieu, although as noted in the conclusion, this is probably not the only well-developed online radical milieu in existence.

Shared Characteristics of Online and Traditional Radical Milieus

It was the advent of Web 2.0 that offered violent radicals the means to transform their largely broadcast internet presences into meaningful interactive radical milieus.⁴ Osama bin Laden’s cadres had used the internet for communication and propaganda purposes prior to the attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, but their use of the internet increased exponentially thereafter.⁵ This had two

interrelated causes: 1) the loss of al Qaeda's Afghan base and the consequent dispersal of its leaders and fighters; and 2) the rapid development of the internet itself, the global spread of internet cafes, and the proliferation of internet-capable computers and other gadgets, such as mobile telephones.⁶ Until the emergence of Web 2.0, with its emphasis on the integration of user-generated content, social networking, and digital video, bin Laden and "al Qaeda Central" maintained some level of control over the al Qaeda narrative. It was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and the group al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) who instigated a separate online strategy in the interregnum between the sunset of the early Web and the full ascent of Web 2.0, thus marking the beginning of violent jihad's transformation from a movement with a significant internet component to a genuine online radical milieu.

Like traditional radical milieus, online radical milieus are communities within which the perpetrators of violence are a sub-group. In other words, terrorist groups and violent attacks spring from radical milieus (i.e., these are violently radicalizing environments), and therefore terrorist groups and attacks can also spring from their online variants. "What distinguishes the milieu from simple sympathizers is that within the former, there exists a form of social structure responsible for the observed in-group cohesion. It is not merely a sum of individuals holding similar political/cultural attitudes."⁷ A violent online jihadi milieu worthy of the name thus emerged when the "jihadsphere" came to encompass a wide cross-section of producers and consumers, from al Qaeda Central to the media arms of various al Qaeda franchise organisations, to the globally dispersed array of "jihobbyists" with no formal links to any violent jihadist organisation, all contributing to the everyday making and remaking of the violent jihadi narrative.⁸

Al-Zarqawi's Online Exploits as Turning Point

In a little over four weeks in April and May 2004, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi shot to worldwide fame—or more appropriately, infamy—by a strategic combination of extreme violence and internet savvy. In early April 2004, al-Zarqawi posted online a thirty-minute audio recording that explained who he was, why he was fighting, and details of the attacks for which he and his group were responsible. Researcher Paul Eedle described the latter as "a comprehensive branding statement."⁹ The internet allowed al-Zarqawi to build a brand very quickly: "Suddenly this mystery man had a voice, if not a face, and a clear ideology to explain his violence." But what was AQI's purpose in building a brand and establishing a public profile in this way? The answer, according to Eedle, clearly was to magnify the impact of their violence.¹⁰ Prior to the initiation of his internet-based public-relations campaign, each of al-Zarqawi's attacks had to kill large numbers of people in order to get noticed amid the chaos and mounting daily death toll in Iraq. By going online however, al-Zarqawi was able to both control the interpretation of his violent message and achieve greater impact with smaller operations. In May 2004, al-Zarqawi pushed the internet's force-multiplying effect to the maximum by having himself filmed personally cutting off the head of American hostage Nicholas Berg, and posting the footage online.¹¹ The purpose of this beheading was precisely to videotape it. The images gripped the imaginations of AQI's allies and enemies alike. Al-Zarqawi risked nothing in the endeavour, while making himself a hero to jihadis worldwide.¹² It was only after these online exploits that al-Zarqawi was actually endorsed by Osama bin Laden as "Emir" (i.e., leader) of al Qaeda in Iraq.

Government officials' and policymakers' fears of the potential for the internet to act as a vehicle for violent radicalisation spring from the alleged effects of extreme political violence like al-Zarqawi's, combined with the advantages of the cyber world (e.g., potentially vast audience, geographical reach, and multimedia capabilities). Al-Zarqawi was, however, a terrorist who migrated some of his activity to the internet, rather than himself emerging out of an online radical milieu. It was the legions of fans inspired by

al-Zarqawi's online activity who took up the banner of violent jihad online, thus generating more of the same, in a spiral effect that eventually coalesced into the contemporary violent jihadi online milieu.

Changes in the Internet Landscape Leading to the Emergence of the Violent Jihadi Online Milieu

Al-Zarqawi's exploitation of the internet wasn't the only catalyst for heightened concern regarding violent online radicalization. The emergence of the violent jihadi online milieu was also influenced by changes in the internet landscape, in terms of both access and technologies, that were gaining pace at around the same time al-Zarqawi's publicity strategy came to the world's attention. First, large numbers of people gained cheap and easy access to the internet. Today, always-on mobile internet access is speedily becoming the norm, especially among youth who increasingly go online using mobile telephones and other mobile devices. Second, online social networking, an integral part of Web 2.0, took off in the mid-2000s. Consider that Facebook was established in 2004 and is now thought to have a billion regular users,¹³ while YouTube, which only came into existence in 2005, currently has 72 hours of video uploaded to it every minute.¹⁴ It was these changes that caused Time magazine to name "You" as their 2006 "Person of the Year,"¹⁵ and it was the same changes that ushered in the violent jihadi online milieu instigated by al-Zarqawi. These developments had transformed the internet environment by the time al-Zarqawi's most prominent online successor, Anwar al-Awlaki, appeared in 2008.¹⁶

No figure immediately emerged from within the ranks of al Qaeda-affiliated groups to fill the cyber-gap left by al-Zarqawi's death in June 2006. But such a figure was no longer integral to the buoyancy of al Qaeda's online presence. Official and semi-official websites were no longer the only important jihadi cyber spaces.¹⁷ Increasing numbers of violent jihadi websites and amounts of content began to be available in English, French, German, Spanish, and Dutch, signifying both the rise of violent jihadism in the West and growing efforts by violent jihadist voices to reach Western (Muslim) populations online.¹⁸ Changes in the nature of the internet encouraged increasing numbers of supporters of violent jihad to post and re-post articles and analyses, exchange information, voice opinions, and debate ideas on blogs, websites, and forums that they themselves established. The proliferation of fan sites acted as free publicity for the violent jihadi cause. Today, new websites appear—and also disappear—frequently, popular chat rooms have stringent admission policies, and most sites display technical savvy on the part of their producers, including all the latest internet tools and gadgetry. Al Qaeda did not and does not provide financing or have any management role in these sites; nonetheless, they act as an invaluable force-multiplier for the group's cyber-based incitement strategy.

Recognising this benefit, al Qaeda assured its "internet brothers" early on that "the media war with the oppressive crusader enemy takes a common effort and can use a lot of ideas. We are prepared to help out with these ideas."¹⁹ From this came al Qaeda's official media production arm, largely audio and video, known as as-Sahab or "the Clouds" in 2001. Violent jihadi online content takes three major forms: basic text, including forum postings, magazines/journals, books, and written statements; audio, such as statements by leaders, sermons by violent jihadi preachers, *nashid* (chants); and video. Genres of video include political statements, by al Qaeda leaders and Western "spokesmen;" attack footage; "pre-martyrdom" videos, such as that made of 7/7 bomber Mohammed Siddique Khan; instructional videos, of

both theological and military-operational sorts; memorial videos commemorating persons and/or events; music videos; and beheadings. With the advent of easy digital video composition and fast download, huge amounts of violent jihad-supporting video began to be produced, distributed, and consumed. Between 2002 and 2005, for example, as-Sahab issued a total of 45 tapes; there was an exponential increase in 2006, which saw the distribution of 58 productions.²⁰ 2007 too was a banner year, with 97 original productions.²¹ As-Sahab began to lose ground from 2008, however, as both the quality and volume of their productions decreased. This slack was taken up by a host of new producers, including both formal production outfits and individual “jihobbyists.” Together these contributions added up to a tremendous input into what Osama bin Laden repeatedly said was his, and remains al Qaeda’s, top priority: the instigation to violent jihad of as many Muslims globally as possible.²²

This violent jihadi content increasingly migrated to global portals such as YouTube, which had the effect of making the content much easier to locate for anyone, regardless of Arabic language skills or level of internet literacy. Consider too that these global portals are known and attractive to young people in particular, and that multi-media content, especially moving images, is thought to be more convincing than text in terms of its ability to influence. Couple this with the internet’s crowd-sourcing properties, and the violent jihadi online milieu is born. Masses of violent jihadi texts that were originally produced in Arabic began to be translated into a multitude of other languages. Large amounts of violent jihadi video began to have subtitles, again in multiple languages, added by fans. All of this modified material is then re-uploaded for consumption online, or easy copying and dissemination via links embedded in emails and Tweets, instant messages, SMS/text messages, etc., but also through VHS tapes, CDs, DVDs, and mobile phones.²³ The spread of such content across multiple platforms and in multiple formats means that it is increasingly difficult to counter, especially because portals such as YouTube and Twitter generally cannot be shut down in the same way as, for example, jihadi online forums.

Critical Voices

It is important to note here that while radical milieus can be largely characterized as that segment “of a population which sympathizes with terrorists and supports them morally and logistically,”²⁴ this support is not wholly uncritical:

[N]otwithstanding their shared experiences and perspective and their general approval of violent action, radical milieus do not unconditionally support or approve of terrorist groups and their violent campaigns. What emerges is a complex and ambivalent relationship, which may include interactions and close social ties as well as dynamics of separation and isolation; and entails solidarity and support as well as controversies and confrontation.²⁵

The same holds true for online radical milieus. At least one function of al-Zarqawi’s original audio statement mentioned above, for example, was to alert audiences that he viewed the world rather differently from Osama bin Laden, conceiving the enemy to be not just American troops, but also Kurds and Shi’ite Muslims. On a different occasion, Ayman al-Zawahiri criticised the young online followers of al-Zarqawi for their preoccupation with the staging of blood-soaked media spectacles, writing:

Among the things which the feelings of the Muslim populace who love and support you will never find palatable, also, are the scenes of slaughtering the hostages. You shouldn’t be deceived by the praise of some of the zealous young men and their descriptions of you as the Sheikh of the Slaughterers.²⁶

Clearly, the effort put into the production and circulation of “images signifying Muslim suffering, Western hypocrisy, Jihadist heroism and so on was intended to create effects; to legitimise violence and recruit and mobilise supporters,” facilitated by what some analysts term the “new media ecology.”²⁷ As the latter also point out, however, the very openness of this new ecology led to a loss of control over the “core message” or “single narrative,” as new and differing interpretations and conflicting versions of the violent jihadi message began to appear, and new figures emerged to explicitly challenge the position of al-Zawahiri and others.²⁸ This explains al-Zawahiri’s rebuke of al-Zarqawi’s independent, implicitly competing, online strategy.

In fact, in 2006, the violent jihadi media production outlet al-Boraq Media Institute published what could be called a “policy document” on this issue, entitled *Media Exuberance*, which sought to curb the uncontrolled and “exuberant” production and distribution of violent jihadi fan content.²⁹ Similarly, the posting guidelines for the al-Faloja online discussion forum “primly exhort posters to avoid material likely to give offense or create *fitna* (division) in the community, as well as, interestingly, information on subjects such as how to make bombs.”³⁰ Many violent jihadi discussion forums are, in fact, tightly controlled in this way.³¹ One researcher provides the example of a conversation on the English-language Islamic Awakening forum, in which a member complains of having been ejected from the al Qaeda-affiliated forum Al-Ikhlās, after commenting on al Qaeda in Iraq’s tendency to kill Muslims. To this another poster responded that the disbarred member deserved it, and that the mujahedeen must be dismayed at the persistence of such questions.³² This illustrates another vitally important aspect of the contemporary violent jihadi online milieu: It was not intentionally constructed, and thus has aspects that are lamented by some users, especially those elements of the movement directly affiliated with al Qaeda, but also some of the grassroots.³³ Having said this, the concept of the online radical milieu draws our attention to the way in which “official” voices must now co-exist with “unofficial” ones, or those seeking to seize the mantle of officialdom within the jihadisphere. The violent jihadi online milieu is not— despite the best efforts of some—“owned” or controlled by any one group, but encompasses a plurality of overlapping, and sometimes clashing, cyber spaces and voices, which contribute to making it a milieu.

Precursor or Credible Alternative to “Real World” Activism?

Over time, online jihadist activity came to have standing in its own right through popular texts such as Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Salim’s *39 Ways to Serve and Participate in Jihad*, which extolled “performing electronic jihad” as a “blessed field which contains much benefit.”³⁴ In fact, the success of violent online jihad led some analysts to contend that, “The virtual or media Jihad has not only gained prominence and credibility as a wholly legitimate alternative to traditional conceptions of jihad, but has also progressively outpaced the militaristic or physical Jihad in the modern era.”³⁵ In other words, all of this online activity had the effect of constituting a powerful new community, here termed the violent jihadi online milieu, that had to be acknowledged by al Qaeda leaders and, indeed, any individual or group that wished to play a prominent role within violent jihadism. It was by dint of these virtual jihadis’ efforts, at least as much as those purveying solely “real world” violence, that violent jihadism continued to prosper from the mid-2000s onward. Thence, for example, al-Zawahiri’s agreement to an online question-and-answer session in 2007–2008;³⁶ it also explains the emergence of Anwar al-Awlaki as a major figure within violent jihadism, at least in the West (he does not seem to have been personally known to Osama bin Laden).³⁷ Al-Awlaki, an English-speaking Yemeni-American cleric, was considered by some, largely because of his video-taped speeches, which were distributed online, and his involvement in the publication of *Inspire* magazine, to be “Terrorist No. 1” in terms of the threat he posed to the United States;³⁸ this at least partially explains his targeted killing by a U.S. drone attack in Yemen in September 2011. This is a

significant development when one considers that al-Awlaki was not known to have ever personally engaged in political violence. In fact, the killing of al-Awlaki raises a matter of ongoing debate: the ability of online radical milieus to produce “real world” terrorists.

Arguments against a prominent role for the internet in violent radicalization processes take two main forms. One position holds that claiming violent extremist online content radicalizes individuals into committing violence makes no sense given that other consumers of the same content do not commit violent attacks. Alternatively, it may be argued that while such content can buttress an already sympathetic individual’s resolve to engage in violence, it is not generally the originating cause of such a commitment.³⁹ The second position suggests that most, though not all, contemporary violent online extremists are dilettantes, in the sense that they restrict themselves to using the internet to support and encourage violent extremism, but pose no “real world” threat. Put another way, there is the possibility that the “venting” or “purging” political extremists engage in online satisfies their desire to act. Their internet activity, rather than becoming an avenue for violent radicalization and leading to potential offline action such as, in the most extreme instances, large-scale terrorist attacks, instead becomes for many a mechanism to dissipate the desire for violent action.⁴⁰

The alternative view, of course, is that the violent extremist cyber-world is a progressively more important staging post for “real world” violence. Security personnel and policymakers appear increasingly swayed by this argument, as it relates to violent jihadists in particular. Europol has, for example, described the internet as “a crucial facilitating factor for both terrorists and extremists.”⁴¹ Europol’s director general emphasized his belief that the “Internet has replaced Afghanistan as the terrorist training ground, and this should concern us the most.”⁴² The British government also underscored that:

Al Qa’ida and some Al Qa’ida affiliates have increasingly encouraged acts of terrorism by individuals or small groups independent of the Al Qa’ida chain of command and without reference to, or guidance and instruction from, the leadership. The internet has enabled this type of terrorism by providing material which encourages and guides radicalisation and instructions on how to plan and conduct operations. In practice some attacks have been conducted or attempted by groups or sole individuals seemingly at their own initiative; in other cases they have had some contact with other terrorist networks.⁴³

Manfred Murck, head of the Hamburg branch of Germany’s domestic intelligence service, has made similar comments: “The tradition of terrorism is more or less a tradition of groups. But now we see that the group is not always necessary and that the Internet functions as a kind of virtual group.”⁴⁴

Such concerns have been stoked by a rash of both successful and thwarted terrorist attacks in which the internet played a role, including the failed July 21, 2005 London bomb attacks, the shooting deaths of two U.S. airmen at Frankfurt Airport in March 2010, and the so-called “Irhabi007” and “Jihad Jane” cases.⁴⁵ These cases and others have involved internet users who run the gamut, from prominent figures in the “jihadisphere” who spent large portions of their lives networking, and consuming and producing jihadi online content, to youths who entered the violent jihadi online milieu, consumed its products—largely or entirely in isolation from other denizens of the milieu—and acted on the basis of what they absorbed.

An example of the former type was Abu Dujana al-Khurasani, a well-known administrator of the al-Hesbah jihadi forum, who launched a suicide attack at U.S. Forward Operating Base Chapman in

Afghanistan in December 2009, killing seven CIA operatives and a member of Jordan's General Intelligence Directorate.⁴⁶ He was described by his wife as "constantly reading and writing. He was crazy about online forums."⁴⁷ Al-Khurasani was immortalized online after his death in videos, photo montages, and poetry, including an ode entitled "Our James Bond."⁴⁸ British Muslim student Roshonara Choudhry is an example of the other type. She was jailed for life in November 2010 for attempting to murder a British M.P. Ms. Choudhry claimed she was radicalized over the course of just a few weeks after navigating from YouTube to a stream of videos featuring extremist preacher Anwar al-Awlaki.⁴⁹

Al-Awlaki was implicated in a number of additional attacks and plots, including Major Nidal Hasan's shooting spree at Fort Hood in 2009, and the attempted Times Square car bombing in 2010. Both Hasan and Faisal Shahzad, the Times Square bomber, were thought to have been in online contact with the preacher prior to their attacks. For many, including policymakers and security practitioners, these cases and others like them illustrate the violent radicalizing properties of radical online milieus. For others however, they raise more questions than answers. Up until recently, al-Awlaki's sermons were widely available on mainstream Islamic websites. At the time that it came to the attention of U.S. authorities in 2008, for example, his popular lecture "Constants on the Path of Jihad" was available on Ummah.com, a mainstream site that, according to U.S. authorities, was receiving approximately 48,300 visits per month from the United States alone.⁵⁰ Some of these visitors must surely have viewed "Constants," but presumably never acted on al-Awlaki's advice to carry out attacks within the United States and abroad. Are direct contacts with violent extremists therefore more important than simply consuming violent extremist content? Can this factor explain the attacks carried out by Hasan and Shahzad? If so, what about Roshonara Choudhry and the influence of al-Awlaki's video sermons on her decision to assassinate a member of the British parliament?

While such questions cannot yet be adequately answered, outright denials of a role for the internet in the process of violent radicalization, such as the following quote from Jason Burke, seem to be premature:

Twitter will never be a substitute for grassroots activism. In much of the Islamic world, social media is only for super-connected local elites or supporters in far-off countries. Neither are much use on the ground, where it counts. Social media can bring in donations or some foreign recruits. It can aid communication with some logistics and facilitate propaganda operations, but it is not much use in a firefight with Saudi, Iraqi or Pakistani security forces. Twitter won't help al-Shabaab retake Mogadishu or the Taliban reach Kabul in any meaningful way.⁵¹

Burke thus seems to dismiss out of hand all those preparatory steps—donations, foreign recruits, logistics, propaganda—and the potential role of violent online radical milieus in facilitating these that together culminate in "firefights." Burke also draws attention to issues of access; in large parts of the Muslim world, he says, online social networking is restricted to elites and is thus not "much use on the ground, where it counts."⁵² It is certainly true that home-based internet penetration rates are low in, for example, the Middle East as compared to the West, but internet cafes are widely popular and the region is seeing soaring rates of mobile phone usage.

While widespread fast, always-on internet is doubtless preferable in terms of instituting a durable Web-based political violence strategy, it is not crucial. The internet, and Web 2.0 in particular, facilitates small contributions—whether of money, content, or other types of virtual labour—by large numbers of people, along with large contributions by small numbers of people, that together can constitute a significant

whole. Nor is it necessary for all those engaged in any activist project, violent or non-violent, to be themselves internet users. Internet-based content can circulate not only online, but can also be disseminated via photocopying, audio tapes, VHS and CDs, text-messaging, and plain old word-of-mouth, depending on its nature. In the context of the present analysis, the violent jihadi online milieu is a component of the wider jihadi milieu, with ideas and content from each penetrating the other in multiple ways. The same can be said of the events of the so-called “Arab Spring,” in which internet tools played an important— though not determining—role “on the ground” for users and non-users alike. The wider Middle Eastern social-political environment is presently undergoing seismic changes, which will doubtless also influence the jihadi milieu, including its online component, in ways which may or may not be conducive to the violent jihadi agenda in the longer term.

Concluding Remarks

One does not radicalize oneself in cyberspace, any more than one becomes radicalized by oneself in the “real world.” The concept of the violent online radical milieu emphasizes that although so-called “lone wolf” terrorists— from Robert Hasan and Arid Uka to Roshanara Choudhary and Anders Breivik—may act alone, oftentimes they are at least partially the product of some radical online milieu. Hasan, Uka, and Choudhary, as exemplar products of the jihadi online milieu, raise a further important concern: the likelihood that the internet plays a greater role in violent jihadi radicalization processes in Western countries than in other parts of the world. This would seem to make sense on the basis not just of widespread access in the West to cheap—often free—fast, always-on internet with less content restrictions than in most parts of the Muslim world, but also because it seems less likely that persons on the ground in “hot” conflict zones become radicalized via their online content consumption and interactions. Their personal experiences are likely to be far more of a catalyst, versus those of people living in stable Western countries who come to share the same violent jihadi commitments. This hypothesis needs testing, however.

It is important to underline that violent radicalization is not something that should be explored only in the context of jihadism; thence the mention of Anders Breivik, the Norwegian right-wing radical who massacred dozens of young people at an island retreat in 2011. What is happening in the Middle East or the Muslim world more widely, and how this may affect violent jihadism, both off- and online, should not be our sole consideration. If the internet has a role in some violent jihadis’ radicalization processes, then it follows that it could play a role in other violent political extremists’ radicalization, too. The online strategies of these other violent political extremists, including so-called “old” terrorist organizations (e.g., national-separatists and ethnic-separatists) and the extreme right wing, therefore need to be explored in much greater depth and at much greater length than they have been to date. Do these other violent extremist online spaces also constitute radical milieus as described herein? If so, why; if not, why not? Consistent cross-comparative research of this sort is crucial if we are to accurately characterize the role of the internet in violent radicalization. ❖

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NOTES

1 See Peter Waldmann, "The Radical Community: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Background of ETA, IRA, and Hezbollah," *Sociologus* vol. 55, no. 2 (2005); Peter Waldmann, "The Radical Milieu: The Under-Investigated Relationship between Terrorists and Sympathetic Communities," *Perspectives on Terrorism* vol. 2, no. 9 (2008); Peter Waldmann, Matenia Sirseldoudi, and Stefan Malthaner, "Where Does the Radicalisation Process Lead? Radical Community, Radical Networks and Radical Subcultures," in Magnus Ranstorp, ed., *Understanding Violent Radicalisation: Terrorist and Jihadist Movements in Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

2 Waldmann, "The Radical Milieu," 27.

3 Nancy K. Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), chapter 6; Emese Csipke and Outi Horne, "Pro-Eating Disorder Websites: Users' Opinions," *European Eating Disorders Review* vol. 15, no. 3 (2007): 196–206; Ayumi Naito, "Internet Suicide in Japan: Implications for Child and Adolescent Mental Health," *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry* vol. 12, no. 4 (2007): 583–597.

4 Maura Conway, "Terrorist Web Sites: Their Contents, Functioning, and Effectiveness," in Philip Seib, ed., *Media and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Palgrave, 2005).

5 Maura Conway, "Reality Bytes: Cyberterrorism and Terrorist 'Use' of the Internet," *First Monday* vol. 7, no. 11 (Nov. 2002); Philip Seib and Dana M. Janbek, *Global Terrorism and New Media: The Post-al Qaeda Generation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 26.

6 Michael Scheuer, *Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terror* (Washington D.C.: Brassey's, 2004), 78.

7 Peter Waldmann, "The Radical Milieu," 25.

8 Jarret M. Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 19.

9 Paul Eedle, "Al Qaeda's Media Strategy," in Karen G. Greenberg, ed., *Al Qaeda Now* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 124–125.

10 Ibid.

11 Al-Zarqawi himself is on record stating that he was Berg's killer. The CIA also identified al-Zarqawi as the likely executioner: see "Zarqawi Beheaded US Man in Iraq," *BBC News* (Middle East), May 13, 2004. Others have raised doubts as to the authenticity of the beheading video and the likely perpetrator of the beheading, however; see, for example, Richard Neville, "Who Killed Nick Berg?" *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 29, 2004, 33.

12 Eedle, "Al Qaeda's Media Strategy," 126.

13 Of these, 543 million are said by Facebook to access the site through mobile devices. See Facebook's "Key Facts" page at: <http://newsroom.fb.com/content/default.aspx?NewsAreaId=22>; accessed August 29, 2012.

14 Further, over 4 billion videos are viewed on YouTube each month, three hours of video are uploaded per minute to the site from mobile devices, and 70% of YouTube traffic comes from outside the United States. See YouTube's "Statistics" page at: http://www.youtube.com/t/press_statistics; accessed August 29, 2012.

15 Lev Grossman, "You—Yes, You—Are TIME's Person of the Year," *Time Magazine*, 25 December 2006.

16 Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, "As American as Apple Pie: How Anwar al-Awlaki Became the Face of Western Jihad," International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, Kings College London, 2011, 56, 70.

17 Seib and Janbek, *Global Terrorism and New Media*, 36.

18 Madeline Gruen, "Terrorism Indoctrination and Radicalization on the Internet," in Russell D. Howard and Reid L. Sawyer, eds., *Terrorism & Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security Environment*, second ed. (McGraw Hill/Dushkin, 2006), 363–364; see also Europol, "TE-SAT 2011: EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report," European Police Office, The Hague, 2011, 10.

19 As quoted in Scheuer, *Imperial Hubris*, 81.

20 Hanna Rogan, "Abu Reuter and the E-Jihad: Virtual Battlefronts from Iraq to the Horn of Africa," *Culture & Society* (Summer/Fall 2007): 91.

21 Seib and Janbek, *Global Terrorism and New Media*, 32.

22 Ibid., 29.

23 Ibid., 35.

24 Waldmann, "The Radical Milieu," 25.

25 Stefan Malthaner, "The Radical Milieu: Conceptualizing the Social Environment of Radicalization and Terrorist Violence," unpublished paper, University of Bielefeld, Germany, November 2010, 3.

26 As quoted in Akil Awan, Andrew Hoskins, and Ben O'Loughlin, *Radicalisation and Media: Connectivity and Terrorism in the New Media Ecology* (London: Routledge, 2011), 31.

27 Ibid., 128.

- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid., 54.
- 30 Gilbert Ramsay, "Relocating the Virtual War," *Defence Against Terrorism Review* vol. 2, no. 1 (2009): 35.
- 31 For more on the characteristics of these websites, see "Rethinking the Role of Virtual Communities in Terrorist Websites," by Dana Janbek and Paola Prado, in this issue.
- 32 Ramsay, "Relocating the Virtual War," 42.
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- 52 Ibid.