

# Report says Internet is an important tool for extremists

By: BEVERLEY LUMPKIN - Associated Press Writer | Wednesday, May 2, 2007 6:33 PM PDT

WASHINGTON -- Extremist Islamic groups have come to value the Internet so much for its ability to spread their message that some have said the keyboard is as important as a Kalashnikov rifle, a report for Congress says.

The report, to be presented to the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee on Thursday, says terrorists have increased their use of the Internet to make their activities faster, cheaper and more secure.

Use of the Internet for communications, propaganda and research has grown to include recruitment and training, says the report prepared by a panel of experts brought together by George Washington University's Homeland Security Policy Institute and the University of Virginia's Critical Incident Analysis Group.

The report found that terrorists have used the Internet in a variety of new ways, including:

--"Dead drops": An e-mail message is saved as a draft rather than being sent. Anyone with access can log in and read the message, but it is less likely to be intercepted by authorities.

--"Parasiting": Training manuals can be hidden deep inside seemingly innocent subdirectories on legitimate Web sites.

--Research: Terrorists can research potential targets online, using both text and imagery.

--Fundraising: Terrorists can launch their appeals for donations anonymously online.

The study noted that Internet chat rooms have replaced meetings in mosques, community centers and coffee shops, making recruitment more difficult to detect and disrupt.

The Internet has served as a vehicle for spreading the radical message of a clash of civilizations that pits a monolithic West struggling against Islam since the time of the Crusades, the report says. This theme particularly resonates with disaffected Muslim youths.

"The 'killer application' of the Internet is not so much its use as a broadcast tool, but its function as a communications channel that links people in cyberspace, who then meet and

can take action in the physical world," the report says.

The report lists examples of Internet-driven radicalization. This is defined as the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use or support violence to bring about social change.

For example, Hassan Abujihaad, an American-born Muslim formerly known as Paul R. Hall, was arrested in March and charged with disclosing secret information about the location of Navy vessels to terrorist groups. Prosecutors said he had been in contact with extremists online and had ordered videos promoting violent jihad.

The train bombings in Madrid of March 2004 were committed by terrorists from North Africa who were not directly linked to al-Qaida but shared its ideology. The Internet played a role in promoting extremist ideology within the group, according to the report.

The report says the Internet has speeded the radicalization of young people, citing the disrupted plot in summer 2006 to bomb airliners bound for the United States.

They went "from what would appear to be ordinary lives in a matter of some weeks and months, not years, to a position where they were allegedly prepared to commit suicide and murder thousands of people," London Police Chief Ian Blair said.

The report also found that the anonymity of the Web can lead to people expressing more violence than they actually feel, with repetition and enthusiasm steadily increasing. There is also a primary focus on youth.

"Web sites are often flashy and colorful, apparently designed to appeal to a computer savvy, media-saturated, video game-addicted generation," said the report.

One site featured a game called "Quest for Bush" in which the player fights Americans and proceeds to different levels like "Jihad Growing Up" and "Americans Hell." Other sites include rap and hip-hop music.

The report notes a number of strategies have been launched in various countries, including Web sites for moderate Muslims and orders issued by Muslim leaders denouncing violence.

It concludes that a stronger counterstrategy is needed, possibly including the use of graphic visuals such as footage of dead children and images of other innocent victims of terrorism. "Distasteful as this may be to invoke, the power of visuals is profound," the report states.