

**OSCE Meeting on the Relationship Between Racist, Xenophobic
and Anti-Semitic Propaganda on the Internet and Hate Crimes**

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**Needed: Diagnostic Tools to Gauge
the Full Effect of Online Anti-Semitism and Hate**

by Christopher Wolf

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It is my great honor to participate in this important conference on the relationship between hate on the Internet and hate crimes, and I thank the OSCE for inviting me to participate.

More than half a billion people worldwide use the Internet. They sit down at their computers every minute of the day and night to communicate, to educate, to entertain and to collaborate. The reason we are gathered here today is that some of these people misuse this powerful tool. They go online to espouse racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of hate. Innocent users of the Internet inadvertently may be exposed to hate online. When uninformed or easily influenced people – particularly children – come across hate propaganda, they can fall prey to its deceptive reasoning and adopt hateful beliefs themselves, sometimes going so far as to act on what they have read. We have seen and heard hate on the Internet, and we have compelling anecdotal evidence that such content inspires criminal attacks and even terrorism. We also know that the Internet serves as a virtual meeting place for criminals and terrorists.

The overriding issue at this gathering is what can we do as a global community to combat the disease of hate that has invaded the Internet? Today and tomorrow, we are discussing the international legal framework for dealing with hate speech online. We are examining the appropriate roles of governments, NGOs, ISPs, educators, parents and citizens in the battle against the disease of online hate. And we are exchanging ideas on how to promote tolerance and understanding online, to counter the hateful and sometimes violent effect of bad actors on the Internet.

We know in our hearts, and in our gut, that hate on the Internet is a terrible and troubling condition. But gauging the effects of online hate on the vast population of Internet users presents enormous difficulties. No reliable measurement has been taken of the number of Internet users who find and read hateful material online. Nor can one safely generalize about the precise ways in which this material affects the beliefs and actions of those who read it. By its very nature, the Internet promotes anonymous collaboration, which allows hate mongers and terrorists to exchange ideas, information and plots online, out of view. How do we attack such conduct if we do not have an accurate measure of its existence?

Notice that I have referred to Internet hate as a “disease”, for that is an apt analogy. The disease of hate has infected a healthy body whose health is measured by the enormous contributions the Internet makes in society as a communications tool. As with any disease, before the best treatment can be prescribed, we want to have as complete a diagnosis as possible. How pervasive is the cancer of hate on the Internet? Where is the infection most severe? What symptom should we treat first to have the best effect overall? Will the disease respond to

treatment and, relatedly, how will various treatments affect the good tissue of the Internet – the free exchange of information and ideas?

Just because we do not today have accurate diagnostic tools, does not mean that we have not seen the symptoms of Internet hate. Indeed, the symptoms are what bring us together here today to discuss the fuller diagnosis.

When we think of anti-Semitism and hate on the Internet, each of us may have different images in mind. But none of us can forget the disgusting Internet video images of the murder of Daniel Pearl, who was killed because he was a Jew – images that were available on myriad Web Sites with the click of a mouse. Islamic fundamentalists using the Internet gleefully inter-link their sites to share virulently anti-Semitic and anti-American sites, often using the term Jew to encompass all Westerners. And they broadcast worldwide via the Internet to incite and to instruct on how to commit heinous hate crimes and terrorism.

Other symptoms of Internet hate range from computer users being verbally attacked online to terrorists exchanging plans for mass destruction. One recent example comes from the Blog Site of the American university, Brandeis University, mybrandeis.edu:

What's the deal with online antisemitism?
Posted at 02:47 PM on January 19, 2004

So I was playing a game of Savage online the other day and this guy joins the game, calling himself "JEW KILLER." Offended, I target him specifically and beat him up a few times until the game ends. Today he and some anti semite friends joined the game, but this time I wasn't the only jew there. Needless to say we grouped together to defend ourselves.

I don't see a lot of antisemitism in real life. Too much of my free time is spent online however and I see way too much of it there. I think jews get bashed on the internet more than all the other groups combined and I have no explanation as to why. If anyone could shed some light on the situation I'd appreciate it.

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I'm no expert, but IMHO it has something to do with the relative anonymity of the internet. Sure, there are ways of finding someone's IP address and from there finding their true identity, but the fact that it's not blatant allows people to do things that they wouldn't do otherwise. There's a similar theory about why people are willing to do things in a uniform that they'd never do in real life. The anonymity of a disguise or uniform masks who they really are, thus allowing them to do things that their "normal" personality would not.

Again, I'm not an expert...

As disturbing as this kind of virtual hate attack is to observe, we all know that Internet hate transcends the bounds of the computer screen.

The evidence is clear that hate online inspires hate crimes. The Anti-Defamation League has a full-time staff of Internet monitors who, working with the latest technology, watch for and report on the activities of such extremists. We have served this role for years, ever since the Internet reached the public at large. We have chronicled the electronic community of hate. Just go to the ADL Web Site archives and you will see reports such as these:

- In California, Matthew Williams and his brother Tyler were charged with murdering gay couple Gary Matson and Winfield Mowder and helping set fire to three Sacramento-area synagogues. Matthew Williams was an Internet addict. He adopted nearly every radical-right philosophy he came across online, from the anti-government views of militias to the racist and anti-Semitic beliefs of the Identity movement. He regularly downloaded pages from extremist sites and used printouts of these pages in his frequent attempts to convince his friends to adopt his beliefs. Without question, the easy accessibility to rapidly hateful content inspired Williams to go on his real-world hate rampage

- Benjamin Nathaniel Smith went on a racially motivated shooting spree in Illinois and Indiana targeting Jews, Blacks, and Asians. He killed two people and wounded eight. As law enforcement officers prepared to apprehend him, he took his own life. "It wasn't really 'til I got on the Internet, read some literature of these groups that...it really all came together." Benjamin Smith told documentary filmmaker Beverly Peterson months before his spree. "It's a slow, gradual process to become racially conscious."
- Pittsburgh gunman Richard Baumhammers murdered members of several minorities in April. He was convicted of killing five people and sentenced to death. His victims were a Jewish woman, a Black man, two Asian-Americans, and two Indian men. Before his shooting spree, Baumhammers visited Tom Metzger's WAR Web site. (Metzger later characterized him as "a white man" who "decided to deliver Aryan justice in a down home way.") Baumhammers joined the E-mail mailing list of the hate rock band Aggressive Force, repeatedly visited the popular white supremacist site Stormfront, and downloaded material from hate sites created by members of the neo-Nazi National Alliance. He also hosted his own Web Site to further disseminate the teachings of hate and intolerance.
- British neo-Nazi David Copeland planted nail bombs in a Black neighborhood, an Indian area, and a gay pub in London, killing three and injuring more than a hundred. Copeland later wrote, "I bombed the blacks, Paki's [sic], [and] Degenerates," and he boasted, "I would of [sic] bombed the Jews as well if I got a chance." A court handed Copeland six life sentences for his crimes. He had learned how to build his bombs by visiting a cybercafe, where he downloaded The Terrorist Handbook and How to Make Bombs: Book Two from the Internet
- The Better than Auschwitz WebSite includes pictures of bombing victims and detailed bombmaking instructions. In addition, Better than Auschwitz features instructions for using knives and brass knuckles in fights against minorities, as well as tips for hand-to-hand combat. A "Nigger Baiting Made Easy" section describes "the various methods of selecting muds and queers, and getting them to fight, or throw the first punch." Such material resembles the instructions White Aryan Resistance gave the skinheads of East Side White Pride before their violent rampage in Portland.
- Online, extremists may find guidance not only on how to attack, but also who to attack. Anti-government sites frequently post

information about judges, law enforcement officers, and other government officials. Alongside graphics dripping with blood and links to sites calling the murder of abortion providers "justifiable," The "Nuremberg Files" Web site supplied detailed personal information about doctors who allegedly provide abortions, including their social security numbers, license plate numbers, and home addresses. The list of doctors reads like a list of targets for assassination. Names listed in plain black lettering are still "working"; those printed in "Greyed-out" letters are "wounded"; and those names that are crossed out ("Strikethrough") indicate doctors who have been murdered ("fatality"). At the site, the name of Dr. Barnett Slepian, who was murdered in his upstate New York home by a sniper in 1998, was crossed-out within hours of his death, indicating that he had become a "fatality." The U.S. Courts found the Nuremberg Web Site did not qualify for protection under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution and imposed millions of dollars in damages against its creators. The Site no longer exists.

While we may not have a precise diagnosis of hate on the Internet, these examples teach us a great deal, and we do know from our work at the ADL that there are three important, measurable respects in which the "electronic community of hate" strengthens the work of right-wing extremists offline. The Internet provides instant and anonymous access to propaganda that inspires and guides criminal activity. It helps to more effectively coordinate their activities. And it offers new ways to make money, legally and illegally.

Joining right-wing extremists online are terrorists; indeed, there likely is some substantial overlap between these two categories. The scope of Internet activities of terrorists and their supporters continues to develop both quantitatively and qualitatively. These activities include commanding, coordinating and controlling terrorist operations from far away; disseminating propaganda and raising money, as well as recruiting young people to the a culture of death. The Internet is attractive to terrorists as it is cheap, difficult to monitor and knows no borders.

The Internet allows groups that are spread across the globe to quickly and efficiently get messages out to adherents; and the use of cryptography and other privacy tools allows groups to do so covertly. Because access to the Internet is so fast, cheap and flexible, the complexity of deciphering and tracking covert operations is compounded by the ease with which sites become known and shared; and can then be folded and restarted under different names using different addresses. The techniques and diverse means to keep messages and information hidden online are a practice that these groups will continue to improve upon and refine in the future. Because a troubling web site is gone, doesn't mean that Jihad has been abandoned. On the contrary, constant monitoring is required to track and trace the war that's been declared on the non-Islamic world in both the electronic and real world.

NGOs like the ADL and governmental entities deserve much credit for monitoring and reporting on the misuse of the Internet by hatemongers and terrorists. But an enhanced and better coordinated effort clearly is required. We are at the point in the history of the Internet and in the post-9/11 world where we need more accurate measures of who is misusing the Internet and what effect they are having.

Therefore, I call on those meeting here to consider the following:

- There should be better international cooperation and coordination of monitoring the use of the Internet for hateful and terroristic purposes. A central repository for reports of Internet hate should be established, with appropriate synthesis, cataloging and indexing. Care should be taken that such an inventory is not used as a "search engine" for the haters of the world but is used only for the purpose of combating hate online.

- Studies should be conducted on the ways in which vulnerable people, especially children, become exposed to hate sites and content, and the ways in which such content affects that audience. There should be an examination of the link between hate speech and hate crimes. Only with such knowledge will we be able to attempt an antidote.
- We should seek to answer this question: In countries that allow for the banning of certain hate speech *qua* speech, what is the effectiveness of such censorship on the reduction in physical world hate crimes?
- Annual reports should be prepared on the “State of Hate on the Internet” setting forth trends and describing where there has been progress in fighting such hate. Such a report should contain an analysis of racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic propaganda on the Internet and the Internet tools used by the authors.

Of course, there are many other steps to be taken to better understand, and to try to counteract, the relationship between racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic propaganda on the Internet and hate crimes. But let us resolve here to start to create better diagnostic tools to deal with the disease of hate that has invaded the body Internet.

Thank you for your attention.

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