Terrorist Financing & Social Media

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Overview:
Social Media & Terrorist Finance

- Social media allows groups in isolated areas to reach the hearts, minds, and wallets of supporters
- Terrorist finance on social media overshadowed by its use for recruitment and propaganda
- Promoted as a form of “financial jihad”

“Over the past few years, charitable fundraising networks in the Gulf have collected hundreds of millions of dollars through regular fundraising events held at homes or mosques and through social media pleas. These networks then use couriers, wire transfers, hawalas, and exchange houses to move those funds to Syria, often to extremists… Constraining this flow of funds is particularly challenging in an era when social media allows anyone with an Internet connection to set himself up as an international terrorist financier… Innovations in traditional modes of terrorist fundraising, particularly through the use of social media, will continue to pose new challenges. As we have seen in the context of Syria, fundraisers can now use social media handles instead of face-to-face solicitations, and sympathetic donors can bypass a risky rendezvous in favor of a simple remote hashtag search.”

Remarks of Former US Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, David Cohen, March 4, 2014
Case Study: Hajjaj bin Fahd al-Ajmi (sanctioned by UN and US)

- August/September 2016: Sanctioned by UN and US government
- June 2012: Popular Commission in Support of the Syrian Revolution [Figure 2]
- August 2013: Al-Qaida affiliated media office directs supporters to Hajjaj al-Ajmi’s Twitter account for donations [Figure 3]
- Mid-2013: Gulf-based social media campaign with three co-facilitators [Figure 4]
Case Study:
Hajjaj bin Fahd al-Ajmi (sanctioned by UN and US)

• Used social media to publicize messages from militant groups to encourage support [Figure 5]
• Some of Hajjaj al-Ajmi’s personal accounts suspended post-sanction; co-facilitators remained active without interruption
• Quickly reemerged on the same social media platforms [Figure 6]

Figure 5. YouTube videos republished on Twitter of militants thanking Hajjaj al-Ajmi for his support

Figure 6. Hajjaj al-Ajmi’s social media accounts, active as of December 2016
Case Study: Abdallah Mohammad al-Muhaysini (sanctioned by US)

- November 2016: Sanctioned by US government
  
  “Between 2013 and 2015, al-Muhaysini raised millions of dollars to support al-Nusrah Front governance efforts in Idlib Province, Syria. As of early October 2015, al-Muhaysini had set up institutions providing financial aid to terrorist groups, including a highly successful campaign that he claimed had secured $5 million in donations to arm fighters.”

- Early 2013: Launched the “Jahid bi Malak” Campaign [Figure 7]
  
  - Donation instructions via WhatsApp numbers [Figure 8]
    
    “We do not announce [bank accounts] except to those who ask”

- July 2014: YouTube account (terminated) publicized a video of a new anti-aircraft artillery [Figure 9]
Conclusion

- Social media companies have policies that prohibit their use by terrorists and their supporters
- Success of countering social media based terrorist fundraising is challenged by:
  - Complexity of tracking fundraising activities
  - Complexity of the networks of fundraisers and co-facilitators
- Need for a network analysis-based approach
About Us

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With our global outreach and proven financial intelligence platform, we provide financial institutions, multinational corporations, and governments with the unique insights and sound guidance required to understand and manage risk.

Camstoll’s senior management team consists of former officials from the US Treasury Department’s Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, together representing decades of combined experience in global illicit finance and financial intelligence.

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