Netwar

Jeffrey Barlow
Pacific University

Follow this and additional works at: http://commons.pacificu.edu/inter01

Recommended Citation

This Editorial is brought to you for free and open access by the Interface: The Journal of Education, Community and Values at CommonKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in Volume 1 (2001) by an authorized administrator of CommonKnowledge. For more information, please contact CommonKnowledge@pacificu.edu.
Netwar
Netwar

Posted on October 1, 2001 by Editor

By Dr. Jeffrey Barlow <barlowj@pacificu.edu>

The Electronic Journal of the Berglund Center for Internet Studies

The mission of the Berglund Center for Internet Studies is to study the impact of the Internet
upon the individual and upon society. In this inaugural editorial essay of the Journal, I intend to
take advantage of one of the primary strengths of an electronic journal, speed and ease of
publication, to address a particularly timely and tragic impact of the Internet: The terrorist attack
on New York City and other targets of September 11, 2001.

It is apparent, despite the depth of feeling in the United States and in the world at large, that
there is a wide variety of opinion on the precise nature of this attack. Some have argued that it is
the act of a tight-knit organization headed by one man, Osama (also Uusamah, Isama) bin
Laden; others suggest that it was ultimately state sponsored; still others that it is the result of a
widely distributed “Islamist” conspiracy. The dominant metaphor, certainly, is that the United
States and its many allies are engaged in a long-term “War against Terrorism.”

The consequences of these events will clearly be very far reaching. Michael Wines of The New
York Times even speculates that they may well “reshape the globe”, meaning that an alliance
structure which has remained essentially unchanged for almost sixty years (The U.S. and its allies
vs. Russia and its allies) may be totally reformed around a common enemy, international
terrorism. (Wines, 1.) The economic, and even intellectual ramifications of the events are only
beginning to unfold. (Hartocollis).

Despite the complexity of these events, and even though as of this posting we are less than one
month removed from them, some avenues of understanding are becoming clear. It is evident, for
example, that we all need to know much more about Islam in all its variants, more about the
history and culture of Afghanistan, and in particular, more about the nature of the conspiracy that
produced these events. At present, the leading suspect is the man Osama bin Laden and his
putative terrorist organization, “Al Qaeda” (also Al Qaida)
There is, we believe, a particular impact of the Internet that once understood does much to clarify these recent events. This impact is best understood through the concept of “Netwar.” In this editorial we propose to define the concept and place it into its historical context. In future editorials we will extend this analysis.

There are many concepts that relate to the impact of the Internet upon military affairs. These terms vary in their usage, as a common vocabulary among analysts is only beginning to cohere. [1] We begin by discussing some of these terms:

- **Cyberwar**: This concept is often used as vaguely as any other “Cyber-” term, but might best be defined as any form of electronic attack or defense. George J. Stein, a prolific writer in this area, attempts to narrow the definition by referring to the use of electronic tools and communications applied to military operations in the traditional sense.

- **Information Attack**: This concept is defined by the U.S. Air Force as “either directly corrupting adversary information without changing visibly the physical entity in which it resides.” Or “activities taken to manipulate or destroy an adversary’s information without visibly changing the physical entity in which it resides.” (Stein, Information Attack, Executive summary)

- **Information Warfare**: This concept appears in its general usage to embrace all forms of electronically-mediated warfare. For example, an electronic attack upon a particular website or server, and the posting of spurious electronic material intended to engender a particular psychological or policy response, would equally be termed Information Warfare (IW) (Rathmell, 1.)

- **Netwar**: This term in its origin meant, according to Arquilla and Ronfeldt, the two analysts most associated with the term, “societal-level ideational conflict waged in part through internetted modes of communications.” (Stein, Information war, Cyberwar… p 2)

While all of these concepts are useful and will be used below, all but the last are relatively familiar, whatever term we might use to define them. The last term, however, “Netwar” is very broad in its implications and is the subject of the present analysis. The concept is generally credited to an article published in 1993 “Cyberwar is Coming!” written by Rand Corporation researchers David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla (de Armond, “Netwar”, Strategies. See also Stein, “Information Attack” Chapter 2). Perhaps the clearest use of this term, imbedded in the examination of a specific instance of it, is found in Ronfeldt and Arquilla’s work, The Zapatista Social Netwar in Mexico. (Ronfeldt, Arquilla et.al) [2] Here the two define Netwar as:

... the term Netwar refers to an emerging mode of conflict (and crime) at societal levels, involving measures short of traditional war, in which the protagonists use network forms of organization and related doctrines, strategies, and technologies attuned to the information age. These protagonists are likely to consist of dispersed small groups who communicate, coordinate, and conduct their campaigns in an internetted manner, without a precise central command.
These two authorities see the defining element of Netwar as: “The use of network forms of organization and related doctrines, strategies, and technologies attuned to the information age.” (p. 9-10). [3]

As we understand “Netwar”, its essence is that it is the form of warfare best adapted to the age of the Internet and, hence, will be increasingly frequent. As suggested here, we believe that the attack on the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon can been seen as a case of Netwar. Netwar is both facilitated by the Internet as a mode of communication, and in a sense caused by the Internet as the Internet has changed not only the means of communication, but social organization as well. War invariably reflects both culture and underlying social and political organization. Hence, “netwar.”

In brief, the argument that we will develop in coming issues is that the recent terrorist attacks are, in fact, Netwar. We will then argue that the development of Netwar is one example of the impact of the Internet upon the individual and society. We will close by arguing that an appropriate response to the terrorist events depends upon an understanding of these facts.

NOTES:

[1] Even the U.S. armed forces vary widely in their understanding of Information Warfare as shown in Stein’s USAF report. See: ”The U.S. Army” and following materials in Stein’s report.

[2] Ronfeldt and Arquilla’s work has been influential in leftist circles, as well as within national defense think-tanks. For a critical discussion, see Harry Cleaver, “Computer-Linked Social Movements...” p. 9; note 11.

[3] Examples of Netwar include the Zapatista struggle, and, we think, the Tiananmen Incident. See Fenghua Wang, “Subscribing to Democracy through the Internet: The Journal of the Association for History and Computing, Vol II, No. 3. http://mcel.pacificu.edu/jahc/jahcII3/ARTICLESII3/wang/wang.html In addition, the WTO protests in Seattle were also a sort of low-level Netwar. See de Armond, “Netwar in the Emerald City.”) We believe that the activities of the Earth Liberation Front can also be seen as an example of Netwar. As we accumulate more examples of Netwar, the concept itself must change to accommodate them. Both the Chiapas example, and that of the WTO protests seem to suggest that Netwars will be characterized by some minimal level of violence. The events of September 11 show that Netwars can be horrifyingly violent.

Bibliography


http://www.albionmonitor.com/seattlewto/seattlewto2.html


Ronfeldt, David, John Arquilla, Graham E. Fuller, and Melissa Fuller. The Zapatista Social Netwar in Mexico., Rand, Santa Monica: 1998.


Wang, Fenghua. “Subscribing to Democracy through the Internet.; The Journal of the Association for History and Computing, Vol II, No. 3.  


This entry was posted in Uncategorized by Editor. Bookmark the permalink [http://bcis.pacificu.edu/interface/?p=2223].

4 THOUGHTS ON “NETWAR”

---

**Hal Dunman**  
on January 30, 2014 at 6:14 PM said:

Hi, i believe that i saw you visited my site thus i came to

---

**community**  
on February 4, 2014 at 10:17 AM said:

Hey extremely cool internet site!! Guy .. Beautiful .. Superb .. I am going to bookmark your blog and consume the feeds also…I am satisfied to discover so numerous intriguing details right here from the post, we’d like develop far more means in this regard, thanks for sharing. . . . .
**nigeria entertainment news**  
_on February 4, 2014 at 10:28 AM said:

Pretty section of content. I simply stumbled upon your website and in accession capital to say that I get in reality enjoyed account your blog posts. Any way I will be subscribing in your augment and even I accomplishment you access persistently rapidly.

---

**nigeria entertainment news**  
_on February 4, 2014 at 10:36 AM said:

After examine some of the blog content articles on your web site now, and I really like your ways of blogging. I bookmarked it to my bookmark site list and could possibly be checking back soon. Pls try my site too and allow me know what you think.