Hamas, Hasbara and Hyperlinks: Internet Use and the 2008-2009 Israel-Hamas Conflict

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Abstract

The events of the Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza over the New Year of 2008-2009 sparked a mass of discussion, protest and activism on the internet during that period. This paper describes internet activities undertaken by the political authorities (Israel, Hamas), contrasting them with grassroots actions of non-state concerned parties to the conflict. Israel’s use of the internet was superior to that of Hamas, but ‘bottom-up’ protests against Israeli actions were of greater utility in influencing international opinion. Ultimately, very little of the internet activity was of strategic utility in effecting offline change, although this may well change in the future.

Introduction

On 27 December 2008, the Israel Air Force launched a barrage of air strikes against pre-planned targets in the Gaza Strip, thus heralding the beginning of Operation Cast Lead. Air operations were augmented with a ground incursion beginning 3 January 2009. Two weeks later, Israel declared a unilateral ceasefire, with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert declaring that Israel’s mission objectives were “obtained in full”.¹ Ostensibly, the Israeli operations were intended to stem Hamas rocket attacks against Israeli settlements, but also to draw international attention to the smuggling of arms into Gaza from Egypt and elsewhere. The latter was successfully achieved, although whether Operation Cast Lead had any lasting effect on Hamas’ military capabilities or international resourcing is doubtful.²

What was clear to much of the outside world was that—despite its stated modus operandi of precision strikes and intelligence-led assassinations—Israel had also prosecuted a campaign in

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² See Anthony Cordesman, The “Gaza War”: A Strategic Analysis (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and
which many hundreds of Palestinians died. Although the exact figures and disposition of the killed and wounded continue to be disputed—as are the responsibilities of both Israel and Hamas for these casualties—Gazan civilians bore the greater burden of the stress and disjuncture of warfare in a heavily-urbanised battlespace. For all concerned parties to the dispute, casualties became an important driver in the creation and sustenance of narratives propagated through multiple communications channels to local, regional and global audiences.

This article does not deal specifically with the issue of casualties; rather, it focuses on the use of the internet by multiple actors during the period of Operation Cast Lead for the purposes of information-sharing, propaganda, operational advantage and political mobilisation. In 2001, Manuel Castells wrote that, due to the critical role of the internet in global communications, “cyberspace becomes a contested terrain.” The internet is, like the rest of cyberspace, constructed, used, and inhabited by human actors, and is, again in the words of Castells, “a global electronic agora where the diversity of human disaffection explodes in a cacophony of accents.” Operation Cast Lead spurred various actors to employ the internet as a medium for their multiple voices, and offers the opportunity to examine how the internet can be used as a tool of political influence.

The first section of the paper describes how the internet was utilised by Israel—the state—and Hamas, the de facto authority in Gaza; we may characterise these operations, crudely, as ‘top-down’. The second section describes the contrasting ‘bottom-up’ activities of internet users, organised at grassroots level in support of Israel and Hamas/Gaza/Palestine. The final section

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4 Castells, The Internet Galaxy, p.138.
5 The author has drawn principally on press reports and other open source information in the absence of available official documents. Most are available online, and every care has been taken to interpret and qualify these texts as appropriate. For an overview of this web-related methodology, see Ananda Mitra and Elisia Cohen, “Analyzing the Web: Directions and Challenges,” in Steve Jones, ed., Doing Internet Research: Critical Issues and Methods for Examining the Net (London: Sage Publications, 1999), pp.179-202.
evaluates the relative utility of these types of activity, and assesses how these forms of politicised internet activity are located within broader discussions of the political uses of communications technologies.

‘Top-down’

The timing of the Israeli attack on Gaza will continue to be disputed, although reports from within Israel suggest planning occurred at least six months before the offensive began. It is clear that Israel was better prepared in military terms for Operation Cast Lead than it had been for the Lebanon War. This incorporated an improved communications strategy including, in the context of the current enquiry, the leveraging of the internet for Israel’s own ends.

If we accept that cyberspace incorporates not just the internet but the wider terrain of technology-mediated communications, Israel tried to shape this environment prior to the air strikes. They deployed traditional psychological operations (psyops) in the form of leaflet drops, as well as more innovative communicative devices such as threatening phone calls and text messages (short message service, SMS) to Gaza residents, insisting among other things that they leave their homes or risk being killed in airstrikes. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) continued this “scare tactic” by making hostile phone calls to Gazans throughout the conflict. Hamas later also later claimed a similar capacity, with Popular Resistance Committees (PRC) spokesman Muhammad Abd al-A’al (Abu Abir) stating, “Telephone messages and breaching the enemy’s radio frequencies are just some of the surprises we have for the Israeli side. You will be very surprised by our military and technological capabilities.” Their ability to deploy such measures

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7 For a critique of Israel’s communications policy during the 2006 Lebanon War, see Thomas Rid and Marc Hecker, War 2.0: Irregular Warfare in the Information Age (Westport, CN and London: Praeger Security International), pp.114-122.
8 The Times, “Prepare to Be Bombed: Calls Mark the Start of Psychological Campaign in Gaza,” 30 December 2008.
was questioned by the IDF, whose spokesman suggested that these claims were themselves psyops, “whether they are sending the messages or not.” It is likely that Hamas and the PRCs were reminding Israel of Hezbollah’s alleged electronic warfare (EW) capabilities in 2006, but Hamas’ attempts to use text messages and cellphone calls were reportedly crude, poorly targeted, and in “terrible” Hebrew. Israel was undoubtedly superior to Hamas and other Gazan groups in both psyops and electronic warfare, with Hamas accusing Israel of disrupting its al-Aqsa radio and television transmissions, for example.

The IDF followed Hezbollah’s 2006 lead in effectively controlling the mass media element of its campaign by denying foreign journalists physical access to Gaza. This restriction remained in place until after Israel’s unilateral ceasefire declaration and was a mainstay of their campaign, allowing them to shape significantly what foreign news agencies were able to report from within Gaza itself. Organisations like the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), whose senior journalists were forced to camp out on the borders of Gaza (although one cameraman was briefly embedded with the IDF in northern Gaza), relied on local producers and agency stringers to file reports from within Gaza, most of which were understandably critical of Israel. They were briefed regularly by IDF and government spokespersons, of whom it was suggested were frequently women because of their “supposed softer image”. This tactic was replicated on the English language version of the IDF website during the offensive, whereby images of female soldiers were substituted for the male soldiers seen on the Hebrew site.

Committees are by no means identical, with the cross-factional PRC originally identified more with Fatah. In recent years, though, Hamas and the PRCs have often co-operated for operational purposes, with Hamas very much the senior partner. See Jonathan D. Halevi, “The Popular Resistance Committees: Hamas’ New Partners?,” Jerusalem Issue Brief, Vol.5, No.24, 17 May 2006.

The media blackout backfired somewhat as global news audiences turned to Al Jazeera, the only international news agency with a significant presence in Gaza. Al Jazeera even garnered significant viewing figures in the United States for its streaming web video.\(^{17}\) Within hours of the Israeli air strikes beginning on Gaza on 27 December 2008, video footage was “broadcast repeatedly in all of its chaotic intensity across the Arab world and around the globe.”\(^{18}\) More importantly, Al Jazeera, MSNBC, CBS News, Sky News and IDF combat footage, amongst others, was released onto user-generated video-sharing sites like YouTube and LiveLeak. In turn, these were linked to and further disseminated on a wide variety of blogs, chatrooms, forums, newsgroups and social networking sites.

Israeli military spokeswoman Major Avital Leibovich stated, “The blogosphere and new media are another war zone and we have to be relevant there.”\(^{19}\) Israeli media explained the internet engagement with reference to its inability to put across its “party line” in Lebanon 2006, and because many international media outlets were inherently “unsympathetic” to the regime, if not outright “anti-Semitic”.\(^{20}\) It has also been claimed that Israel's predominance over Hamas on the internet afforded Israel “vital breathing space” in which to keep international public opinion at bay until Israel had finished their offensive.\(^{21}\) This is somewhat disingenuous given bipartisan support for Israel's offensive in Washington, described by television satirist Jon Stewart as “the Möbius strip of issues – there's only one side”.\(^{22}\) Former Israeli Ambassador to the United

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\(^{19}\) The Jerusalem Post, “IDF Launches YouTube Gaza Channel,” 30 December 2008.


\(^{22}\) The Daily Show, 5 January 2009.
Nations Dan Gillerman was also quoted as saying that Israeli actions were largely approved of by the international community, although he did not know "how long it will last."\(^{23}\)

Time was evidently of the essence though, the IDF being quick to use its website as a multimedia vehicle. It also established a YouTube channel, providing "documentation of the IDF's humane action and operational success in Operation Cast Lead", \(^{24}\) which rapidly became the "most subscribed" Israeli site ever, attracting over 1.5 million views\(^{25}\). It was meant, as expressed by an IDF spokesman, to get the message "to as many as we can".\(^ {26}\) Some of the IDF videos were criticised by, amongst others, the BBC, on the basis of being inaccurate and fabricated.\(^ {27}\) On 30 December 2008, YouTube briefly removed some IDF footage, labelling it inappropriate for minors, and therefore breaching community guidelines. The IDF claimed to be “saddened” by YouTube’s actions, but “due to blogger and viewer support, YouTube has returned the footage they removed.”\(^ {28}\) The IDF’s public diplomacy also included a blog, which attracted several hundred thousand visitors.\(^ {29}\) Hamas retaliated by launching video-sharing site PaluTube, whose traffic peaked shortly after its launch in mid-January.\(^ {30}\)

Within hours of the first Israeli strikes on Gaza, the Israel News Agency and public relations professionals started a Facebook group, “I Support the Israel Defense Forces in Preventing Terror Attacks from Gaza”, which claimed 66,000 members as of early January 2009, and was aimed at Israelis and Gazans, whether Arab, Jewish or Christian.\(^ {31}\)

\(^{23}\) The Jerusalem Post, “Coordination Is Putting Israel Ahead In the Media War”, The Jerusalem Post, 30 December 2008.
\(^{24}\) http://www.youtube.com/idfnadesk
\(^{27}\) BBC News, “Propaganda War: Trusting What We See?,” 5 January 2009.
\(^{29}\) http://idfspokesperson.com/
On 30 December 2008, the Israeli Consulate in New York held a “Citizen’s ‘Press Conference’”, reportedly the world’s first such event using micro-blogging application Twitter. This allowed internet users to submit questions to consulate staff using the 140-character limit afforded by the Twitter platform. This led to some slightly bizarre exchanges. For example, when asked why Gaza was “different”, given that 40 years of military action had failed to bring peace to the region, the response was “We hav 2 prct R ctzens 2, only way fwd through negotiations, & left Gaza in 05. y Hamas launch missiles not peace?”

David Saranga, head of consular media relations, said, “Since the definition of war has changed, the definition of public diplomacy has to change as well.”

Whilst this is true, the choice of platform was widely criticised as inappropriate, not least by communications professor Dawn Gilpin, who wrote that Israel misunderstood the “symmetry, culture, and structure” of Twitter, and therefore failed to present themselves in the positive and transparent manner they intended.

As well as the state’s own activities in cyberspace, Israel’s Immigration Absorption Ministry claimed to be creating an “army of bloggers” by attempting to mobilise over a million Israelis with second languages to propagandise on their behalf on “anti-Zionist blogs” written in major European languages. This was endorsed by the Israeli foreign ministry, who emailed likely volunteers on 3 January 2009 with their version of Operation Cast Lead thus far and a plan for action. Targets for engagement reportedly included The Guardian, BBC, The Times, Sky News and the influential blog, The Huffington Post, as well as lists of pro-Israeli material on CNN and

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YouTube for bloggers and internet users to promote. Israeli blogs largely backed Israel’s right to self-defence and the Gaza campaign, as well as accusing the international media of bias. A counter-operation was suggested by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)’s “action alert” to all Muslims to engage with traditional and new media outlets in order to balance both media representations of the conflict and Israel’s propaganda program.

It would be inaccurate however to attribute a causal link between Israeli or Hamas themselves and most Gaza-related internet activity during the period in question. The role of nationalist sentiment in engagement in cyberspace is not new but the conflict inadvertently mobilised significant support for both sides from regular internet users.

‘Bottom-up’

Hacking—the use of computers and computing networks for the purpose of disrupting or accessing the data and systems of a chosen target—was deployed by those sympathetic to both Israel and Gaza/Palestine. Over the first weekend of the conflict, for example, it was reported that pro-Palestinian hackers defaced or took down 300 Israeli-run websites. These activities persisted and expanded over the course of the war. The hacker groups responsible were from North Africa, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Lebanon and Iran, as well as Palestine, with names like RitualistaS GrouP, Team Evil, Tw!$3r and KaSPeRs HaCKeR CreW. The global character of these actors is further shown by the fact that websites associated with these groups were registered and hosted in a variety of countries, including Denmark, Saudi Arabia, the United States and Belgium.

Targets were not restricted to Israel either. On 7 January 2009, pro-Palestinian Turkish hackers “Agd_Scorp/Peace Crew” defaced the NATO Parliamentary website, and websites of the United States Army Military District of Washington and the Joint Force Headquarters of the National Capital Region. A typical message read, “Stop attacks u israel and usa ! you cursed nations ! one day muslims will clean the world from you!” They also defaced the website of Israeli Ynetnews.com and the Israel Discount Bank, rerouting web visitors to a page displaying anti-Israel messages and images of prisoner abuse in Abu Ghraib prison, Iraq. In a somewhat more banal action in the UK, the Radio Basingstoke website was reported hacked, by persons purporting to be the “Soldiers of Allah”.

A pro-Israeli group, Help Israel Win, created and distributed a software program called “Patriot” which helped turn users’ computers into externally-controlled “zombies”. When interlinked, a zombie network’s collective computing power is harnessed in a “botnet”, then used to overwhelm “enemy” servers with communication requests, usually resulting in dependent websites being unable to function. Although a Help Israel Win spokesperson initially stated that Patriot would not be used for nefarious purposes, the group later claimed to have seriously disrupted four Hamas news websites, assisted by over 8000 volunteers. In the UK, the pro-Palestine Stop the War Coalition website was reputedly hacked, by persons unknown.

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Social networking site Facebook which, among other functionality, allows for the formation of interest groups, was the locus of a great deal of politically-motivated activity. Some of the most effective Facebook use was in Egypt where many groups, mostly supporting Palestine, translated online interest and activism into physical demonstrations and dissent. A distributed platform like Facebook enabled Egyptians to organise online without fear of the whole platform being shut down by government censors, often ruthless in their suppression of internet users critical of the Mubarak regime and its policies. Although involvement and levels of commitment were high, police actions meant that dissent did not translate into change in the physical world, with street protests broken up and several people arrested. Admitting this, one young activist tellingly stated, "It's a rehearsal for a bigger thing ... Right now, we are just testing the power of each other."50

One group, the Jewish Internet Defence Force (JIDF), a pro-Israeli advocacy group which also maintains a website outside Facebook,51 is alleged to have hijacked several Facebook groups expressing support for IDF operations in Gaza. Using a range of methods, they gained access to group administrator accounts and replaced content with material critical of Hamas and overtly pro-Israeli.52 In response, users formed groups critical of JIDF behaviour. The JIDF denied involvement in criminal activities but would not confirm or deny a role in the disruption of pro-Palestinian Facebook groups. They did, however, criticise Facebook for allowing "hateful, anti-Semitic, racist material and material which promotes Islamic terrorism and violence" to remain on the site.53

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49 It is worth noting that Israeli-Palestinian Facebook ‘conflict’ was reported throughout 2008; see The Guardian, "Israel-Palestine Dispute Moves On to Facebook," 20 March 2008.
51 http://www.thejidf.org/
53 BBC, “Gaza Crisis Spills Onto the Web"
Facebook has internal mechanisms through which users flag and report inappropriate or offensive material. A spokesperson said, “We are just a platform and the discussions that are taking place online are also taking place offline ... We are not taking sides.” Much Facebook activity was described as “virulent”, with substantial hostility emanating from both sides. Participants on both sides claimed to have received death threats on account of views expressed. This concerned the French government enough that Prime Minister François Fillon announced that authorities would increase monitoring of the internet for hate speech of “incredible violence”.

Blogs were set up by Gazans, publishing real-time news and opinion from within the territory. These faced significant difficulties from within Gaza due to electricity blackouts and the conflict environment. One of the most active countries in support of Palestine was Saudi Arabia, whose internet users ignored the repressive media regime to run blogs as alternative news sources, and started online petitions condemning Israel which gathered hundreds of thousands of signatures. These were determinedly multi-lingual, with 13 different interfaces including Spanish, French, Chinese and Russian. A campaign to boycott US firms also became part of a very active internet-using population.

Within days of the Israeli incursion, Muslim website IslamOnline.net created a Palestinian Holocaust Memorial Museum in virtual world Second Life. This became the venue for daily anti-Israel demonstrations and protests, as well as fundraising activities. Although its utility may be

54 Ibid.
disputed, one of the organisers said, “Some may say that this is nonsense because this is “just” Second Life. But in my opinion it’s also one way of many to raise awareness and try to help.”

Awareness was also high outside the region, of course, with social networking groups, blogs and micro-blogging services very much related to the organisation of physical protests and demonstrations in countries like the United Kingdom.

**Discussion**

In 1997, David Resnick defined three types of internet politics. Those within the net, dealing with internal politics of internet communities; those which impact the net, such as control, regulation, and censorship; and political uses of the net, for the purposes of effecting social and political change in the physical world. The actions and policies of both ‘sides’ in the Gaza conflict fall into the third category. Stephen Marmura acknowledges that in the Middle East the internet is a useful information resource and organisational tool, but indicates the lack of evidence for its efficacy in effecting real change in state policies and actions. The principle reason for this is the deeply-entrenched ideologies in Israel and Palestine – activist networks face the same challenges in accessing political outlets as they did before the internet. This would apply to the current analysis, for which there are few indicators of real and lasting success of online activism in influencing the course of the war.

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65 Ibid.
The manipulation of physical space is a matter of record in Israel’s domination of the Palestinian territories since 1948.\(^{66}\) It seems likely therefore that Israel would also seek to exert control over the less tangible information space of communications, especially having failed to do so in Lebanon in 2006. The evidence from the Gaza war suggests they attempted to do this, through the continuation of an international *hasbara* campaign (see below) but also as a direct operational requirement of the conflict principally mediated by the IDF. Although Israel attempted to enlist bloggers and social technologies to their advantage, it is difficult to assess the success of these activities on the internet. What is clear is that most of their attempts were definitively ‘top-down’, although a number of grassroots initiatives did also emerge.

In the summer of 2006, Israel pursued Hezbollah militants into southern Lebanon in Operation Change of Direction, an exercise which many consider to have been a military failure.\(^{67}\) The subsequent Winograd Commission concluded there were deep, systemic flaws in the Israeli military.\(^{68}\) Israel also suffered a significant loss in the sphere of public relations and propaganda. Despite the short time available for defensive preparations Hezbollah fought well but also understood that manipulation of media space was an essential component of their overall strategy. Their control of foreign journalists and therefore the stories emanating from Lebanon – principally intended to portray Hezbollah as freedom fighters, and Israel as murderers of civilians – allowed them to propagate their chosen narrative. By contrast, the Israeli media strategy was – perhaps reflecting an overall confusion as to strategic ends – poorly managed and ultimately counter-productive.\(^{69}\) Information leaks were endemic due to several factors,


including the close familial ties between the IDF and Israeli citizens. This was exacerbated by the simple fact that most serving military were within range of their home mobile telephony networks, and images of soldiers and events quickly found their way onto blogs and social networking sites. Of most concern to government and military was the leaking of operational information by officers to journalists, which resulted in top-level enquiries and the curious use of polygraphs to detect whether officers were telling the truth about their activities during the conflict.

Since 2006, Israel has invested more energy and resources in the communications components of their military and state planning. It is hard to disassociate military activities from those of Israel as a state, and the key concept to consider is that of hasbara. With its roots in the early Israeli state, hasbara is a “propaganda of integration” program, intended to positively promote the ends of the Israeli state by engaging with Jews in Israel and the diaspora, as well as non-Jews globally. It is therefore a form of public diplomacy, defined by its reliance on ‘positive’ messaging and cohesive intent, rather than the more negative connotations of the term, ‘propaganda’. The office responsible for hasbara is located within the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and is but one of several agencies tasked with communicating policy to the media. Although Israel’s attempts to harness the potential of new media were criticised in some quarters, it should be remembered that states worldwide are struggling to come to terms with the same issue. It is nearly impossible to quantify how effective their efforts were, but they were evidently well-received in some quarters, and less so in others. As with all attempts at public diplomacy, one of the main barriers to ‘success’, howsoever understood, is the difficulty of breaking into the “echo chambers” of opinion and self-reflexive dialogue that characterise much

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70 Rid and Hecker, War 2.0, pp.119-120.  
71 Ibid., pp.118-119.  
of online politicised discourse. The attitudes of Middle Eastern audiences, and many further afield, towards Israel do not need to be rehearsed here, but any attempts by Israel to promote its own interests through traditional or non-traditional means are likely to encounter significant resistance. Despite this, Israel did succeed in using several different platforms as means of message dissemination; the accuracy or otherwise of their messages is beyond the scope of this analysis.

By contrast, Hamas were less proficient in controlling their own communications, let alone propagating their message to the outside world, despite a long history of internet presence and access to Al Jazeera. Hamas had some success but were ultimately hampered by lack of capacity. Also, some outlets, such as al-Aqsa television and radio, were compromised by Israeli electronic warfare. However, pro-Palestinian, rather than pro-Hamas, efforts were many and varied, and derived from a groundswell of support mediated by the internet.

Historically, the effective physical lockdown by Israel of Palestine at the beginning of the second Intifada in September 2000 drove massive growth in Palestinian use of the internet as a vehicle of protest and resistance, circumventing physical restrictions and curfews. Makram Khoury-Machool describes the internet as “the only true boundary breaker under siege conditions in the occupied territories.” This, combined with the Israel-imposed media blackout, made it all but inevitable that the internet would become important during the conflict.

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77 Ibid., p.31.
Many of the recorded pro-Palestinian actions were forms of “political cracking”, one of three types of "hacktivism" theorised by Alexandra Samuel.\(^{78}\) Undertaken by non-state actors, this can be an effective form of protest given minimal economic outlay and maximal media attention.\(^{79}\) Graham Meikle has further suggested that hacktivism is "an engaged politics which seeks solutions in software, in the search for a specific technological fix to a social problem."\(^{80}\) These observations are bolstered by, for example, a Help Israel Win spokesperson, who stated, "We started the group the day the war started in Gaza. We couldn’t join the real combat, so we decided to fight Hamas in the cyber-arena."\(^{81}\) Yoav Keren, chief executive of Israeli domain name registry DomainTheNet, said of pro-Palestinian hacktivism, "It's clear that it is a result of what [is] happening in Gaza ... We see it as part of the war."\(^{82}\)

However, the efficacy of the internet is open to question. Pro-Palestinian hackers would like to have conducted more serious cyberattacks but lacked the capabilities to do so.\(^{83}\) Low- to medium-level disruption occurred with denial of service attacks and website defacements that, whilst inconvenient and embarrassing, were temporary disruptions.\(^{84}\) This may not always be the case; if hacktivists can access critical national infrastructure networks and compromise their operation, these might perhaps be used as tools of strategic influence. Presently, Israel's information warfare capabilities are limited to traditional propaganda and psyops, albeit utilising some tools of internet and mobile telephony, as well as jamming technologies. Hamas were also unable to utilise information technologies effectively, although this may be a function of limited resource access. Israel's cyberspace activities were more orientated to propaganda

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\(^{79}\) Ibid., p.52.


\(^{81}\) *The Guardian*, "Israel-Palestine Conflict Spills Into Cyberspace"

\(^{82}\) BBC, "Gaza Crisis Spills Onto the Web"

operations than towards hacking and network disruption. What hacking did occur was undertaken by nationalist grassroots activists, similar to a long Chinese tradition, for example, and of Russian hackers in 2007-2008. Whilst Russia may have condoned, if not directly supported, hacker attacks there is little suggestion either Israel or Hamas were involved in this fashion. There is also no evidence of the cyber “kill-chain” and training procedures identified in the Georgian example.\footnote{See Hyung-Jin Woo, “Propaganda Wars in Cyberspace: A Content Analysis of Web Defacement Strategies Among Politically Motivated Hacker Groups”, paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Marriott Hotel, San Diego, CA, May 27, 2003.}

Also, the utility of the internet to the organisation of real-world demonstrations is clear but whether this activism translated into pressure on Israel to halt its operations seems unlikely. Stephen Blank asserts that harnessing these different strands of “information war” may constitute a new form of conflict in the case of Russia-Estonia\footnote{Russia/Georgia Cyber War – Findings and Analysis, Project Grey Goose Phase I Report, October 2008, available at \url{http://www.scribd.com/doc/6967393/Project-Grey-Goose-Phase-I-Report}.} but this was not the case with Israel-Hamas. Although the strategic value of these quasi-military initiatives has been questioned,\footnote{Stephen Blank, “Web War I: Is Europe’s First Information War a New Kind of War?,” \textit{Comparative Strategy}, Vol.27, No.3 (May/June 2008), pp.227-247.} there is little doubt that states and non-state actors increasingly view cyberspace as a legitimate and significant arena of influence and conflict.

Ethan Zuckerman said of internet use during the Gaza conflict, “I think what has become really interesting is that in an era when you have armed conflict between states, you now have people online looking to see how [they] can become part of that conflict without leaving their computers.”\footnote{Aaron Mannes and James Hendler, “The First Modern Cyberwar?,” \textit{The Guardian}, 22 August 2008.} Israel partly succeeded in leveraging this through their \textit{hasbara} and propaganda operations; Hamas less so. In the final balance, pro-Palestinian participants may prove to have been more successful in raising the profile of Gaza in global internet media, although these efforts had little effect on the course of the war. These actors were more successful in
developing solidarity networks, as part of what Douglas Kellner terms “globalisation from below”. 89

As Rebecca Grant has noted, “Cyberspace may be a single medium, but it has multiple theaters of operation”, 90 and the variety of methods utilised during the conflict supports this idea. However, cyberspace as a landscape of perception produced no real winners, especially as hacktivism most energetically undertaken by pro-Palestinian parties was of little strategic effect. As battlespace in the Gaza conflict, cyberspace continued to be one of influence, rather than concrete outcomes, although it might mark a significant step in its evolution as “contested terrain”.

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