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Project seeks to track terror Web posts

Arizona team's tool could help law enforcement link online postings and track down terrorists

By ARTHUR H. ROTSTEIN Associated Press Writer | AP
Nov 11, 2007

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The quivering images and militant writings are frightening: an exploding Humvee blankets passing cars with dust; a lab technician makes explosives, step by step; hatred oozes from "A guide to kill Americans in Saudi Arabia."

Tens of thousands of Web pages are now devoted to terrorist propaganda designed to attract followers. On the surface, the messages and videos reveal little about their creators. But programmers and writers leave digital clues: the greetings and other words they choose, their punctuation and syntax, and the way they code multimedia attachments and Web links.

Researchers at the University of Arizona are developing a tool that uses these clues to automate the analysis of online jihadism. The Dark Web project aims to scour Web sites, forums and chat rooms to find the Internet's most prolific and influential jihadists and learn how they reel in adherents.

Lab director [Hsinchun Chen](#) hopes Dark Web will crimp what he calls "al-Qaida University on the Web," the mass of Web sites where potential terrorists learn their trade, from making explosives to planning attacks. Experts said they are not aware of any comparable effort, though some said the project may have only limited applications.

The project in the university's Artificial Intelligence Lab will not identify people outside cyberspace "because that involves civil liberties," Chen said, preferring to let law enforcement and intelligence analysts take over from there. Instead, it will help identify messages with the same author and reveal links that aren't obvious.

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"Our tool will help them ID the high-risk, radical opinion leaders in cyberspace," Chen said.



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