Virtual Diasporas: A New Frontier of National Security

Recommended Citation

Michel S. Laguerre, "Virtual Diasporas: A New Frontier of National Security", Global Problem Solving, April 25, 2002, https://nautilus.org/global-problem-solving/virtual-diasporas-a-new-frontier-of-national-security-2/

v i r t u a l d i a s p o r a s

and global problem solving project papers

Virtual Diasporas:

A New Frontier of National Security

(Op-ed)

Michel S. Laguerre

With the advent of the information technology revolution, the recent mass migration of the “Rest” into the “West”, the continuing diasporization of the American metropolis, and the evolving globalization process, concerns are emerging in various quarters about the role of virtual diasporas in national security. The focus on the relations between diasporas and US foreign policy is not new, but reached its peak of interest during the period of the cold war whose context shaped our understanding of the issue. Some view diasporas as maintaining their loyalty more to the homeland than the hostland; others argue that they are committed to both countries; and still others see them as assimilated individuals who care exclusively about the welfare of their country of residence. While the mechanisms of their participation in American politics—whether the emphasis is on their ethnic interests or their transnational orientation—are well known, the role of virtual diasporas—in their relations to real diasporas, the homeland, hostland, or American security—is, however, less known.

By virtual diaspora, we mean the use of cyberspace by immigrants or descendants of an immigrant group for the purpose of participating or engaging in online interactional transactions. Such virtual interaction can be with members of the diasporic group living in the same foreign country or in other countries, with individuals or entities in the homeland, or with non-members of the group in

the hostland and elsewhere. By extension, virtual diaspora is the cyberexpansion of real diaspora. No virtual diaspora can be sustained without real life diasporas and in this sense it is not a separate entity, but rather a pole of a continuum.

The same way diasporas form diverse communities of interests, virtual diasporas are not monolithic either. Every diasporic group tends to generate a plurality of virtual diasporas around areas of interest such as religion, politics, gender, professions and the like. Since the membership comes from the same pool, these virtual diasporas tend to be made up of intersecting circuits that crisscross one another while maintaining their distinct focuses.

The following examples are presented to highlight the importance of virtual diasporas in the management and resolution of transnational conflict, in general, and national security, in particular. No single group is identified here to underscore the widespread reality of the phenomenon.

Virtual diasporas add a cyberdimension to the resolution of national problems and through their participation and contribution to the debate, they transnationalize such conflicts.

As national governments spend an ordinate amount of money to engineer telecommunications policies, to create and maintain web sites and in some cases provide online services to netizens, they are also concerned about online diasporic activities that may undermine their political basis of support. New positions are being developed to monitor these activities and gather intelligence.

Virtual diasporas use the Internet to develop strategic alliances with grassroots activists, thereby allowing them an opportunity to apply global pressure on the hostland or homeland's government.

Virtual diasporas achieve their highest levels of efficiency when they combine their efforts—consciously or unconsciously—with real diasporic groups to reach a specific goal, such as, for example, lobbying government officials in the hosltand on behalf of the homeland. One side may strengthen or revive the position of the other because they may target different aspects of the problem and one side may sustain its efforts longer than the other, thereby making it possible for the latter to recoup its interests in the issue.

.Diasporic cyber attacks are the new source of conflict in the diasporic community. Web sites of pro-government and opposition groups are destroyed to prevent the participants from enlarging the size of their group and from spreading the news and views of their organizations. These attacks force such groups either to abandon their enterprise, to seek the help of volunteer technicians, or else to ask the community for funds to help defray these unforeseen expenses.

Virtual diasporas, by engaging in the domestic and foreign policies of the hostland while participating via the Internet in the political affairs of the homeland, add a new dimension to the transnational or even global architecture of national security.

View this online at: https://nautilus.org/global-problem-solving/virtual-diasporas-a-new-frontier-of-national-security-2/

Nautilus Institute
608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email: nautilus@nautilus.org