

Visual Diasporas Background

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As we begin to understand the emerging post-September 11th world order, it becomes clearer that global networks of ethnic communities, linked together by information technologies, will play an increasingly important role in international conflict and cooperation. In the last twenty years, globalization and the information revolution have combined to produce transnational connections that differ in fundamental ways from those maintained by immigrants a century ago. Today, information communication technologies bind global diaspora communities with their homeland, facilitate new and efficient economic networks in both the host and home countries, and increase identity and belonging to a greater transnational community.

This has led some observers to suggest that virtual diaspora networks, by virtue of their global orientations, socialization and experience, represent an emerging, and largely untapped resource for global problem solving. Yet in the wake of the September attacks on America, others contend that virtual diaspora networks are an emerging source of global conflict as they facilitate transnational terrorist and criminal activity, finance wars in "home states," and most importantly, cultivate a particularistic and fragmenting nationalism throughout the online diaspora community. Indeed, some argue, terrorist networks have operated on a global scale, facilitating transactions, and sharing information utilizing the same technological tools, information networks, and working within the same communities as have global diaspora networks.

How are we to balance a growing need for national security and increased intelligence gathering with the need to respect the privacy, civil liberties, and freedom of non-state transnational networks? How will this first ever "war against networks" impact transnational diaspora communities? How can states work with these global diaspora networks to further their aims?

The Nautilus Institute is began the process of understanding these challenges with the Virtual Diasporas and Global Problem Solving Project. The project, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, examined the growing impact of global diasporas, and their use of information technologies, on international conflict and cooperation. Specifically, this effort explored a number of issues ranging from global diaspora communities as an increasing source of conflict to the positive contributions that emerging cosmopolitan diaspora organizations are making to global problem-solving.

The project is divided into three stages:

Exploration

First, beginning in the fall of 2001, the project commissioned a series of expert papers on the emerging relationship between virtual diaspora communities, the information revolution, and international conflict and cooperation. [Click here to view authors](#)

Workshop

On April 25-26 2002, in partnership with the World Affairs Council, the project convened an international assembly of key academic, government, diaspora organization, and NGO representatives to initiate a focused dialogue integrating the results of this research. The workshop had four distinct objectives: 1) explore the growing impact of global diasporas and their use of information technologies on international conflict and cooperation; 2) develop a network of key academic, government, Bay Area Diaspora organization, and NGO representatives to begin examining this challenging issue; 3) educate global problem solving groups on the importance of this issue to their work; and 4) isolate and develop 3-5 “applications” whereby we can closer study this phenomenon.

The Road Ahead

Lastly, in the summer of 2002, the project published a final report summarizing the insights of the dialogue and commissioned papers, and provide recommendations and strategies for governments, NGOs, and private organizations.

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Nautilus Institute
2342 Shattuck Ave. #300, Berkeley, CA 94704 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email:
nautilus@nautilus.org