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Local

UA researchers targeting terrorists over the Web

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TUCSON, Ariz. -
Web researchers at the University of Arizona are busy these days tracking down potential terrorist-led Web sites and following their every move.

Terrorists have been using the Internet as a university of terror, teaching their followers how to make bombs, how to set off roadside bombs aimed at U.S. soldiers and how to recruit new followers, UA researchers said.

The director of the UA's Artificial Intelligence Lab Hsinchun Chen estimates there are 50,000 terrorist-led or terrorist-related Web sites with new ones appearing every day.

Chen and his associates are working on a program called the Dark Web project that scours the Internet and listens in on terrorist chat rooms while untangling a vast network of extremist links.

In assessing potential threats, UA researchers in Tucson have assembled the worlds largest database of terrorist-generated Web sites, including a collection of more than a half billion pages, postings, images and videos.

The UA has also picked up a $1.5 million federal grant to look deeper into how the Web teaches extremists to set up improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, the roadside bombs often used against U.S. soldiers in Iraq.

"Our young soldiers, before they're being deployed, will know the IEDs through the enemies eyes," Chen said.

In cyber-terms, Dark Web is now at version 2.5 and moving toward version 3.0, Chen said, growing savvier along with its prey.

When it started, Dark Web had the capability of collecting and analyzing Internet activity in English, Spanish and Arabic. It's now branching out into other languages, with German and French already incorporated into the system, and Chinese, Farsi and Dutch among about 10 others in the works, Chen said.

"We have to increase the sophistication of our language recognition," Chen said.

In the future, Chen envisions Dark Web moving from a research prototype into a tool agencies can use independently.

Information from: Arizona Daily Star, http://www.azstarnet.com