



ASSOCIATION OF CHIEF POLICE OFFICERS

Younes Tsouli (Cyber Terrorist)

Younes Tsouli is a Moroccan-born resident of the United Kingdom who, in 2007, was found guilty of incitement to commit acts of terrorism (a crime introduced in the Terrorism Act 2006) and sentenced to 16 years in prison. His crimes were carried out via the internet, where he was known by several pseudonyms based on variations of **Irhabi 007**; "Irhabi" being the Arabic word for "terrorist", and "007" a reference to the fictional British secret agent James Bond.

Tsouli's activities included the setting up of web sites and web forums in support of Al-Qaeda, and distributing video material filmed by the Iraqi insurgency. His primary co-conspirators were takfiris; Waseem Mughal and Tariq Al-Daour. Their activities were funded by Al-Daour, who was found to be in possession of 37,000 credit card details, which were linked to more than €2.5 million worth of fraudulent transactions. Tsouli has been called the "**world's most wanted cyber-jihadist**", and his conviction was the first under British law for incitement to commit an act of terrorism through the internet.

Tsouli first appeared on web forums in 2003. He attracted the attention of Aaron Weisburd on a forum called "Islamic Terrorists", where he initially appeared to be a harmless agitator, "At first I started publishing bits and pieces of what he was doing online for comic relief, and really had no appreciation of where he was headed". Tsouli and Weisburd taunted each other online "I would give him a message like, 'Your days are numbered- you're going to get caught'. He, on the other hand, was participating in discussions about which part of my body they wanted when I was killed, and he said he wanted one of my fingers as a souvenir". In 2004 Weisburd geolocated Tsouli to Ealing in West London, and passed this information on to the authorities.

In early 2004, Tsouli joined two now defunct password-protected forums sympathetic to al-Qaeda in Iraq, *Muntada al-Ansar al-Islami* (Islam Supporters Forum) and *al-Ekhlās* (Sincerity). There, he gained a reputation as a resident expert on Internet technologies, especially on matters on both enhancing and defeating on-line security. He was well known as someone who could break into a web site and hide files containing al-Qaeda propaganda on these sites (examples of such propaganda include the Abu Musab al-Zarqawi produced film *All Is for Allah's Religion*, the al-Qaeda Internet magazine *Voice of*

Jihad (Sawt al Jihad), and videos of the beheading of Americans Nick Berg, Jack Hensley and Paul Marshall Johnson, Jr.). He would then post links to these covert files on the forums he belonged to. He also mentored other volunteers on the art of computer cracking, both by answering questions on-line and through an al-Ekhlās posting entitled "Seminar on Hacking Websites".

Eventually, Tsouli started posting non-computer related instructional material on-line, including tutorials on making suicide bomb vests and other explosive devices. He also started distributed cracked versions of computer software, including Arabic language translation software.

In 5 June 2005 Tsouli wrote "I am still the terrorist 007, one of the most wanted terrorists on the internet. I have the Feds and the CIA, both would love to catch me, I have MI6 on my back". Following the 7 July 2005 London bombings, Tsouli wrote: "Brother, I am very happy. From the moment that the infidels cry, I laugh".

Between April and October 2005, he was contacted by American Ehsanul Sadequee, who sent him a videotape he had made of potential targets including the United States Capitol building, the World Bank, a Masonic temple, and a fuel depot.

Arrest and Conviction

On 11 September 2005, a group calling itself "al-Qaeda in Northern Europe" posted a declaration on the al-Ansar web site. Following this, 18-year-old Swedish citizen Mirsad Bektašević, who was one of those responsible for the declaration, travelled to Bosnia where he and Abdulkadir Cesur filmed a video in which they wore ski masks, and, surrounded by weapons and explosives, said that they intended to attack sites in Europe to punish nations with forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. On 17 October 2005 Bektašević was arrested in Sarajevo, and analysis of his laptop identified Tsouli in his buddy list, and his mobile phone records showed that he had recently called Tsouli. The Metropolitan Police were informed, and on 21 October 2005, Tsouli was arrested in a raid on a house in Shepherd's Bush, London. He was charged under the UK's Terrorism Act 2000 for "conspiracy to murder, conspiracy to cause an explosion, conspiracy to obtain money by deception, fundraising and possession of articles for terrorist purposes".

Trial began in May 2007. Judge Peter Openshaw caused some controversy when he halted the trial to ask what a web site was, saying "The trouble is I don't understand the language. I don't really understand what a website is." Following this, Professor Tony Sammes was called upon to give a presentation which explained what the internet is, how people can access the internet, and what web sites are.

At the trial Tsouli's technical skills were emphasised. Evan Kohlmann testified, "007 came at this with a Western perspective. He had a flair for marketing, and he had the technical knowledge and skills to be able to place this stuff in areas on the net where it wouldn't be easily erased, where lots of people could download it, view it and save it."

On 4 July 2007, after two months at trial, Tsouli and his co-defendants Waseem Mughal and Tariq Al-Daour pleaded guilty to "inciting another person to commit an act of terrorism wholly or partly outside the UK which would, if committed in England and Wales, constitute murder" (a crime introduced in the Terrorism Act 2006) and admitted to conspiring together

and with others to defraud banks, credit card companies and charge card companies. Tsouli was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment, Mughal to 7½ years, and Al-Daour to 6½ years. On 18 December 2007 at the Court of Criminal Appeal the sentences of all three men were increased - Tsouli's sentence was increased to 16 years, Mughal to 12 years and Al Daour 12 years. At the time of their conviction, Tsouli was 23 years old, Mughal was 24 years old, and al-Daour was 21 years old.

Alternative version

When police raided a flat in West London in October 2005, they arrested a young man, originally from Morocco, called Younes Tsouli. They had no idea, at the time, just how significant he was.

From his bedroom on an ordinary road in Shepherds Bush, he had become one of the most notorious cyber-jihadists in the world.

The story of Younes Tsouli, or Terrorist 007 as he styled himself, reveals how virtual terrorist networks can emerge out of sight of the authorities and not only radicalise the young online but also help them carry out terrorist attacks.

Tsouli had begun browsing the web for extremist material but quickly became much more than an observer. He took on the user name of Irhabi 007 - Irhabi meaning Terrorist in Arabic.

He began posting advice on hacking and uploaded extremist propaganda but soon began to try to help those planning attacks.

Al-Qaeda link

"He was explicitly looking for home movies from US soldiers that would show the inside of US bases in Iraq, so they could do a better job at launching attacks into those bases," explains Aaron Weisburd, a private cyber-tracker based in the US who watched Tsouli closely.

Extremists also began to recognise Tsouli's skills and his potential. As Iraq descended into violence, al-Qaeda's leaders there contacted Tsouli. They asked him to build websites and run web forums for them and soon he became the main distributor of video material from al-Qaeda in Iraq.

"Over the space of only two years, he became the undisputed king of internet terrorism," explains cyber-terrorism consultant Evan Kohlmann.

He also became first a moderator and then the administrator of one of the most important extremist websites which facilitated contacts between thousands of individuals.

"He... provided a link to core al-Qaeda, to the heart of al-Qaeda, and the wider network that he was linking into through the internet," explains Peter Clarke, the head of the Metropolitan Police counter-terrorism command.

Tsouli's websites were being shut down either when hosts realised they had been hijacked or when cyber-trackers or officials spotted one of Tsouli's own sites and shut it down.

This meant that Tsouli had to continually set up new websites to host the material. This required money. And here he was helped by two other associates, also arrested in October 2005.

They were Waseem Mughal and Tariq Al-Daour. Al-Daour was the money man. On his computer drives police would find 37,000 credit card details, including security codes.

These had been stolen in phishing attacks or purchased in on-line forums where stolen information circulates. Innocent people who thought they were simply following a link to verify their account information were unwittingly helping the group fund their terrorist activities.

Police identified more than 2.5m euros worth of fraudulent transactions carried out by him. Another remarkable aspect of this case is that there is no evidence Tsouli and Al-Daour ever met in person. They were connected through cyberspace, as so many others were in the broader network.

Growing threat

Conspirators no longer need a physical sanctuary in which to meet: they have found it on the web.



Tsouli became a notorious cyber-jihadist from his bedroom in London

“ What it did show us was the extent to which they could conduct operational planning on the internet ”

Peter Clarke, Scotland Yard

Tsouli was eventually caught because of his links to a terrorist plot. Two men travelled from Scandinavia to Bosnia in October 2005 to carry out an attack. But they were under surveillance.

When they were arrested, their phone records revealed contact with a man in West London. The Metropolitan Police were alerted and raided the address, arresting Tsouli. It was only weeks later as they examined his computer records that they realised they had captured a major player in the world of cyber-terrorism.



Part of a PowerPoint presentation on how to make a car bomb found on Tsouli's laptop

For British police, the Tsouli case was a watershed. "What it did show us was the extent to which they could conduct operational planning on the internet. It was the first virtual conspiracy to murder that we had seen," explains Peter Clarke of Scotland Yard.

The evidence against Younes Tsouli and his co-conspirators was so overwhelming they pleaded guilty to incitement to commit acts of terrorism on the internet.

He is now serving a 16-year prison sentence at Belmarsh High Security Prison in London, where he is denied access to the internet.

Tsouli may be behind bars but the number of extremist websites is growing by the day. The fear is that the story of Terrorist 007 may have been a warning of a threat that is still out there and that is still growing.