

Cyber terrorism a global menace criminology essay



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A female American cartoonist, Jeff Smith stated, " The threat is there, it's very real, If we have a Unabomber who desires to launch an attack with an PC instead of a bomb, there could be a great deal of damage" . Computers and the internet are an essential part in modern society undoubtedly. They make our life more convenient as well as enhance our living quality. As the role of computers is tremendous, it stimulated criminals and terrorists to make it their preferred tool for attacking their targets. This kind of modern crime is called cyber terrorism. This transformation in the methods of terrorism from traditional methods to electronic methods is becoming one of the hottest issues in the modern society. Cyber terrorism is a form of terrorism which the criminals use computers and the internet as a medium to commit crimes. Issues surrounding this type of crime have become high-profile, generally those including hacking, computer virus, computer worms and e-mail related crimes. We can easily observe the cases of cyber-related crimes are rising on news, even in local or other countries. In my point of view, Cyber Terrorism is an inevitable phenomenon in an advanced society.

The intentions of cyber terrorists using cyberspace as a channel to commit crimes can be defined in different ways. Many people assume that the objective of cyber terrorists are only focus on computer hacking, they only commit crimes through internet. They generally regard that their intention to commit cyber crimes is only for steal data and violate people's privacy.

However, there are another reasons for the criminal to commit cyber crimes. Dorothy Denning stated that " Cyber terrorism could also become more attractive as the real and virtual worlds become more closely coupled, with automobiles, appliances, and other devices attached to the Internet." As the

cyberspace has the ability to affect an abundant amount of people at one time, it's the effective way for criminals to commit crimes through internet with different intentions and purposes. On behalf of explaining the purpose of cyber terrorism, the criminals can be politically intended hacking operations, their purpose is to cause tremendous harm to the society such as loss of life or economic damages. Second, the behaviors of the criminals can be unlawful attacks and threats of attack against computers, networks, and the information stored therein when done to intimidate. Third, the criminals coerce a government or its people for the political or social objectives. Forth, cyber terrorism can be a physical attack that ruins computerized systems for critical infrastructures. (Such as the internet, water supply and telecommunications). Except for the above objectives of Cyber Terrorism, some authoritative organizations also have their own definition on the term of it. The U. S. National Infrastructure protection Center defined cyber terrorism as “ A criminal act perpetrated by the use of computers and telecommunications capabilities, resulting in violence, destruction and/or disruption of services to create fear by causing confusion and uncertainty within a given population, with the goal of influencing a government or population to conform to particular political, social or ideological agenda”. Now we can have a thoroughly understanding of why the terrorists choose cyberspace as a medium to commit crimes.

The forms of cyber terrorism are multi-faceted, cyber terrorists use various tools and methods to achieve their purposes. The first mean is hacking. Hacking refers to all forms of unauthorized and illegal methods to access a computer system or a network. Some people are underestimate the harmful

effect . Here is a terror example showing the seriousness of hacking. Jimmy Sproles and Will Byras once stated that A British hacker wanted to know “ what kind of chaos could be caused by penetrating the hospital computer”, he hacked into a Liverpool hospital in 1994 and changed the medical prescriptions for the patients. Unluckily, A patient was killed by an overdose of penicillin after the hacker broke into the hospital computers and altered his prescription. The other form of cyber terrorism is Computer Viruses. It is generally a computer program that can infect other computer programs by modifying them in such way as to include a copy of it. They are spreading faster than they’re being halted. Some people are underestimating the harmful effect of computer virus, they think that the virus can only affect the performance on the personal computer, it won’t pose threat on other aspects. In fact, the virus are very dangerous and its harmful effect are massive. For example, the hospital life-support computer system being stopped by virus could be lethal. In addition, Computer worms are also a typical tool for Cyber terrorism. It is a self-contained program that is able to spread functional copies of itself or its segments to their computer systems. A worm named WANK(1989) infected many computers on a network. If this worm found that it had system privileges, it would change the system announcement message to “ Worms against Nuclear Killers!”. Additionally, Cyber Terrorism are also included some E-mail related crimes. The convenient, ease and speed of email has made it a preferable tool for criminals. The email related crimes are mainly email spoofing, email bombing, threatening emails, defamatory emails. Also , it’s a powerful tool for criminals to spread virus and worms. Criminals are increasingly designed to steal information silently without any noticed by the victims. It is expected

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that mobile devices are prevalence in our daily life, there may be increasingly targeted victims for attack by the criminals in future.

Cyber terrorism can bring negative effect to the individuals, society and even the entire nation tremendously. The actions of criminal hackers are non-stopped all around the globe. They try hard to exploit vulnerabilities in software, violate people's privacy, steal information, and even shut down computer network malevolently. Lost of properties, being violated of privacy and personal data are the results of hacking by the criminals. Their personal computers will also be infected by virus and worms, it may harm a computer system's data or performance. For the society, criminals could pose serious threaten to the operation of business and governments . The threat is factual, increasing and already has proven costly. Cyber attack ranging from " I LOVE YOU" virus to the " Trinco" and the worms " RamenLion" and " Crade Red" have cost an estimated \$5 billion US dollars. According to Coleman, K. (2003) the internet being down for just one day could disrupt nearly \$6. 5 billion worth of transactions. Lewis, J (2002) also states that the " Love Bug" virus is estimated to have cost computer users around the world between \$3 million and \$ 15 million. In 2000, A hacker was able to control the computer system that control the flow natural gas through the pipelines in Russia. In 2002, hackers broke into the U. S. Justice Department's website and replaced the department's seal with a swastika, dubbed the agency the " United States Department of Injustice" and filled the page with obscene pictures. Also, the terrorists might crack into an air traffic control system and take over the complete direction of multiple airplanes. The air collusion between airplanes or crashing an airplane into a building are just two

possible results of this action. Cracking into a city's traffic system could have disastrous results. The other possibility of traffic jams and traffic accident would be occurred and it's consequences are very serious. The above cases and examples show that the cyber terrorism could seriously affect the social stability and public security of one's country. Some people may underestimate the influences of cyber terrorism, they regard the criminals are only targeted on some individuals and business, it won't post a menace to the entire nation. By the way, cyber terrorism can not only affect a specific community of people but the entire nation. Richard Clark once marked "They (computers) run our electric power grid, our telecommunications network, they run our railroads, our banking system, and all of them are vulnerable, at some level, to some degree to information warfare, or cyber-terrorism," By the use of the internet the criminals can affect much wider damage than one could kill people. For example, they can destroy the economy of the country by attacking the critical infrastructures in the big towns such as electric power or water supply. Verton, D (2003) points out that the members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) were planning to blow up and destroy six key electric substations in London (2003). Had the IRA succeeded in their goal, they would have disrupted power to major portions of London for months at 2003. This example would have been a terror attack and would have threatened the citizens of London. Also, the criminals can post a menace to the security of the nation by targeting the sensitive and secret information by stealing, disclosing or destroy the system of national defense.

The menace of cyber terrorism is measureless, its influences is profound, its target can be anyone, it is invisible but exist somewhere around us. It may occur anytime and anywhere all round the world. The criminals could seriously threaten the operation of business and government even the entire nation. As we all know, the capacity of human mind is inscrutable, the methods and tools using by criminals of cyber crimes are changed with each passing day . It is impossible to eliminate the cyber crime from the cyber space. The existence of cyber terrorism can not be denied in the advanced society. Cyber Terrorism is without doubt an inevitable phenomenon in the advanced society. Just like what Daniel, H. mentioned that “ One of the hot areas right now is tracking down cyber crime and cyber terrorism.” The modern world is declared to be a global village, collective efforts should be done across the nations by the governments, business and individuals in order to rectify this worsening situation.

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