ZAPATISTA ORGANIZING IN CYBERSPACE: WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS?

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INTRODUCTION

The political and psychological battle for the hearts and minds of the population is not new to guerrilla warfare. But when supporters of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation- EZLN) began posting their communiqués and commentary to the Internet, many observers suggested that these new “postmodern” forms of political persuasion were “virtual” or had no bearing on reality (Froehling 1997, Hellman 2000). Froehling recognized that cyberspace is a new venue or “space” for carrying out social struggle and that it had become “part of our reality.” At the same time, he warned that cyberspace activism may simply be part of a “virtual revolution.” Judith Adler Hellman’s criticism was less equivocal. She portrayed cyberspace supporters of the Zapatistas as “re-enchanted” idealists, overly eager to find a new post-socialist cause, ignorant of the complexities of the situation in Chiapas, and, at best, irrelevant to the actual revolutionary struggle.¹ Given the importance of political persuasion and popular support to revolutionary struggle, political organizing in cyberspace may have real life implications. This paper will show that the use of information technology by Zapatista supporters is a logical extension of the Zapatista's previous efforts to win hearts and minds. Moreover, the cyberspace campaign has actually enhanced the tactics and furthered the objectives of the Zapatistas. I will begin with a brief discussion of the role of political persuasion in guerrilla warfare. Then, I will examine Zapatista objectives and political efforts and discuss how the cyberspace organizing of other political activists has contributed to these efforts.²

¹ Hellman suggests the cyberspace Zapatistas supporters may even threaten the human rights of the Chiapanecos.
² In referring to "political activists" throughout this paper, I include the many scholars who are also activists. It is of course possible for people to be both political activists and scholars.
Strategists of guerrilla warfare and counterinsurgency have long recognized the importance of winning the hearts and minds of the population. Mao Tse-Tung believed that the political struggle to win the sympathies of the population was essential to the success of guerrilla warfare. Like the military campaign, the political struggles involved efforts to change existing institutions or invent new ones.\(^3\) Unlike a military campaign, the tactics of the political struggle had to elicit the sympathy of the population. Mao likened revolutionaries to “fish” and the population to the “sea” in which the fish live. Without a supportive population, he believed, it would be impossible for the guerrilla to survive (Tse-Tung, 3). Che Guevara also considered popular support indispensable to guerrilla warfare. He maintained, “guerrilla warfare is a war of the masses, a war of the people. The guerrilla band is an armed nucleus, the fighting vanguard of the people. It draws its great force from the mass of the people themselves” (Guevara, 50). While he recognized that the population would have to supply the guerrilla force with food, cover, and new recruits, Guevara also believed that a small guerrilla nucleus or “foco” could create the subjective conditions necessary for revolution; in other words, they could spark a revolutionary peasant movement. This prescription for revolution, which became known as “foquismo,” played a key role in the Latin American insurgencies of the 1960s. Foquismo was criticized by traditional Marxists, many of whom preferred class struggle by more peaceful means, by Trotskyites, who feared that the foco would take the place of

\(^3\) The term political is used to describe tactics used to change or reinvent institutions. It is not meant in the sense implied by Lasswell.
the vanguard party, as well as those who were prescribing “more sophisticated political-military strategies of ‘protracted popular warfare’ and guerrilla-induced popular insurrection” (Loveman and Davies in Guevara: 50). To varying degrees Latin American revolutionaries have recognized the importance of gaining popular sympathies. Without the strength for a decisive military victory, the insurgents must also emphasize political tactics, tactics such as information campaigns. The EZLN has thus adopted a sophisticated political-military strategy, much more similar to that used by the Sandinistas of Nicaragua than to the foco guerrilla movements of the 1960s. EZLN strategy places greater emphasis on the political efforts to win hearts and minds.

Since the 1960s, counterinsurgency strategists in the United States and their allies in Latin America have also recognized the political nature of guerrilla struggle. In response to the Cuban revolution and Nikita Khrushchev’s 1961 proclamation in support “wars of national liberation,” the Kennedy Administration prescribed a combination of political and military counter-guerrilla tactics (Loveman and Davies in Guevara: 19). US military forces and their Latin American cohorts not only assumed it was necessary to destroy guerrilla forces directly, they also initiated civic action programs and propaganda campaigns to undermine popular support for the guerrillas and to strengthen approval for Latin American governments (Pustay, 89; Klare, 59-60). The consequences of these brutal counterinsurgency campaigns are tragic and several cases are now well documented (McClintock, Klare and Kornbluh, Jonas, Falla). What is more relevant for the purposes of this paper is that the US effort to defeat Latin American guerrilla movements led to the promotion of political tactics such as civic action and psychological operations.
The Kennedy Administration began supplying civic action assistance to Latin American militaries through the Military Assistance Program and the Agency for International Development. The aid was intended to improve the image of the military and the government through military-sponsored rural development projects in the areas of education, sanitation, agriculture, health, transportation, communication, and public works (Barber and Ronning: 6). In late 1962, for example, civic action projects were introduced in an effort to strengthen popular support for the Guatemalan military. With considerable assistance from U.S. military advisers, the Guatemalan military provided medical and nutritional services as well as transportation and communication projects to woo residents in the country’s eastern departments, where the insurgents had become active (Shirley: 154-155).

Psychological operations were also used by counterinsurgents in efforts to increase popular support for Latin American governments. By the mid-80s, U.S. advisers had assisted numerous Latin American militaries in executing information campaigns to improve their image (Siegel and Hackel in Klare and Kornbluh: 122). Referred to as psy-ops by the US military, these information campaigns consisted primarily of “audio, visual, and printed materials…” (Klare and Kornbluh: 60). Counterinsurgents utilized any media at their disposal, including painting their messages in the form of graffiti on prominent buildings and walls. Some of the information promulgated was erroneous. In Inside the Company, former CIA operations officer, Philip Agee, describes how US and Latin American intelligence agencies routinely communicated various forms of misinformation in attempts to discredit Latin American guerrillas and their suspected supporters. Agee maintained that the Mexico City CIA station was “the largest in the
hemisphere” and included a “sizable support staff of communications officers, technical services, intelligence assistants, records clerks and secretaries…” (Agee 1975, 524)

Psy-ops and civic action were also promoted in US counterinsurgency manuals, several of which were translated into Spanish and used to train Latin American officers at the School of the Americas and elsewhere. 4 The numbers of Mexican officers who received US training began to increase significantly during the 1980s due to an expanded US counter-narcotics effort. The United States provided training through its International Military Education and Training Program (IMET) to more than 500 Mexican military personnel between 1984 and 1992, compared to 906 personnel during the period from 1950 through 1978 (Barry, 1992: 332-333). 5 U.S.-Mexico military and intelligence cooperation expanded further during the 1990s. This training exposed more Mexican security forces to US counterinsurgency doctrine. While the drug war was the public justification for the change, training and equipment provided under this guise have been used to assist the Mexican military’s counterinsurgency efforts. In “The Drug War and Information Warfare in Mexico” Stefan Wray found that US counter-narcotics assistance provided the Mexican military with sophisticated communications and computer technology. Like the US helicopters that were used by the Mexican military in its assaults against the Zapatistas in January 1994 and February 1995, US communications equipment and training were apt to contribute to Mexico’s counterinsurgency efforts.

Computers, mobile radios, database software, data encryption equipment, and training

4 Mockaitis alleges that a 1981 manual, FM 100-20, *Low Intensity Conflict*, was also translated for use at the School of the Americas.

5 Although the United States often supplies equipment to Latin American militaries through its Military Assistance Program (MAP) grants, most U.S. military equipment provided to the Mexican armed forces has been provided in the form of counter-narcotics assistance (Barry, 1992: 334).
related to the use of communications technology increased the capacity of the Mexican military to carry out psychological warfare.

Today struggles to win hearts and minds are carried out in cyberspace as well as through the more traditional media. Like other propaganda campaigns or psychological operations, cyberspace information campaigns have the potential to expand and strengthen support for the either the government or the guerrillas. The best-publicized cyberspace information campaign on behalf of an insurgency is that being conducted in support of the EZLN. In order to determine if this new information technology has strengthened and expanded support for the Zapatistas, I turn first to an overview of Zapatista objectives and propaganda and, then, to an analysis of pro-Zapatista cyberspace organizing.

ZAPATISTA OBJECTIVES AND PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN

On January 1, 1994, the day that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect, the Zapatistas first drew international attention by occupying San Cristóbal and the towns of Altamirano, Las Margaritas, Ocosingo, Oxchuc, and Huitán. Contrary to claims by Ronfeldt et al (1998) that the Zapatistas adopted strictly military tactics at the start, initial Zapatista tactics included a multifaceted information campaign (Ronfeldt et al). On that first day in San Cristóbal, an indigenous representative of the EZLN read to a crowd of onlookers from the opening of "The First Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle." The document, posted for all to view in San Cristóbal, Chiapas was essentially a declaration of war against the government of Ernesto
Zedillo. It referred to Article 39 of the Mexican Constitution to justify the people's "...inalienable right to alter or modify their form of government" (CCRI-EZLN: 1/1/94). Most importantly, the declaration outlined the Zapatista's eleven demands: jobs, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, liberty, democracy, justice and peace.

The Declaration was not the only political tactic employed by the Zapatistas on that first day of the insurgency. Subcomandante Marcos also held a dialogue with onlookers in the central plaza of San Cristóbal, and rebels occupying the state radio station based in Ocosingo broadcast political statements and music (Ross, 2001: 20, 23 and Russell: 22). Less than a week after the declaration of war, a group of Tzotzil men asked television correspondent Epigmenio Ibarra to deliver a second EZLN communique to a local weekly newspaper. It was printed on January 10, and six more communiques were released during the following week (Ross, 2001: 31, 40). According to Mexico-based journalist John Ross the impact of the EZLN communiques was profound:

The communiques were like a brilliant commentary on Mexican life and the defiant, playful tone struck a nerve throughout the country and the world-as, one by one, La Jornada, El Financiero (for a short while), and the opposition weekly Proceso circulate the epistles to a wider and wider

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6 All of the EZLN Communiques cited herein are available online in English as well as Spanish at: http://www.ezln.org/documentos/index.html. This website, Comunicados EZLN, is currently maintained by The Groundwork Collective, a student organization at the University of California at San Diego. The Communiques originally appeared in Spanish in La Jornada, Proceso, El Financiero, or Tiempo. English translations were usually the work of the National Commission for Democracy in Mexico - USA. The UCSD students posted the Spanish and English versions (as well as versions in other languages) to the Comunicados EZLN web site. I have reviewed both versions in generating the translations used herein.
audience. National and international diffusion was sped along by a press
corps that numbered nearly a thousand in the first 23 days of the war.
Activists in El Paso were already translating the communiqués and posting
them daily on the web (40).

These messages clearly and simply communicated the demands of the EZLN General
Command. More importantly, they resonated with the Mexican public because they
tapped into disillusionment about the Revolutionary Institutional Party's (PRI) economic
policies and more than 60-year dominance of Mexican politics. In addition, the
communiqués criticized foreign imperialism and appealed to an unusual form of Mexican
nationalism.

In a January 6 communiqué, the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous
Committee (CCRI)-General Command of the EZLN attempted to explain the objectives
of the armed struggle. The first stated objective was to inform the people of Mexico and
of the world about "about the miserable conditions under which millions of Mexicans,
especially the indigenous people, live and die" (CCRI- EZLN: 1/6/94). The statement
went on to describe how the Zapatistas considered liberty and democracy "the
indispensable prerequisites for the improvement of the economic and social conditions of
the dispossessed of our country" (CCRI- EZLN: 1/6/94). On behalf of the indigenous
peoples, the Zapatistas were voicing their objections to the neoliberal economic program
of the PRI. 8 These government policies pre-dated NAFTA and included changes such as

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7 Marcos did not send out the communiqués himself via e-mail from his laptop computer, despite claims to
this effect (Swett). He was, however, responsible for at least the composition if not the substance of these
messages.
8 These economic policies were “pro-market, pro-business, anti-worker, and anti-capitalist (Cleaver, 1996).
the 1992 elimination of the government's land distribution program (Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution), the reduction of government-sponsored farm credits, and the reduction of government tariffs on foreign goods. In addition to blaming the ruling party for Mexico's economic problems, the January 6 communiqué took aim at Mexico’s one party rule and demanded the resignation of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari. The document also announced that most of the EZLN leadership were indigenous (Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Chol, Tojolabal, etc) in a defense against government criticisms that the guerrillas were led by foreigners or upper-class mestizos (CCRI- EZLN: 1/6/94). In defending against government accusations and explaining the EZLN objectives, the insurgents used the communiqué as part of its information campaign against the government.

Similarly, a communiqué issued January 13 criticized US imperialist tendencies in an appeal to North Americans and the Mexican population. Although the letter was addressed to Bill Clinton, the US Congress, and the American people, the Zapatistas submitted it to the Mexican press, in an appeal to anti-imperialist sentiments among Mexicans. The letter accused the Mexican government of using US military aid to "massacre the indigenous people of Chiapas" (CCRI- EZLN: 1/13/94). US officials would later acknowledge that helicopters intended for the Drug War were in fact used by the Mexican military in its 1994 assault against the EZLN. The US Government Accounting Office also reported that the Department of State did not have the staff

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9 NAFTA simply represented an extension of this economic liberalization, and it was not even the actual reason why the EZLN initiated its armed campaign on the eve of NAFTA's inauguration. The military operation was originally planned for an earlier date, but logistical concerns led to its delay. Later, the rebels chose January 1 in hopes of catching the Mexican military forces when they were recovering from the holiday celebration. NAFTA has subsequently been the subject of much EZLN criticism because it extended tariffs reductions, making it harder for Mexican producers to compete with cheap North American goods.
necessary to monitor whether US helicopters and other counter-narcotics equipment were being used for unauthorized purposes (Ross, 1994: 104 and Wray, Ch. 3).

The Zapatista propaganda campaign appropriated national symbols and icons, not just in an attempt to appeal to Mexican nationalism but to change it into what has been characterized as "Votán-Zapata" or Mexican nationalism transformed by Mayan myth (Cleaver, 2001). Votán, a figure who in the mythology of the Mayan Tzeltales represented the heart of the Mayan people, was sent by God to distribute land. EZLN namesake Emiliano Zapata was also a champion of campesinos as well as a hero of the Mexican revolution of 1910-17. Another national symbol appropriated by the EZLN was the Mexican Constitution of 1917. Article 39 of the Constitution was used to justify the EZLN right to revolt, and the Zapatistas have demanded the reinstatement of Article 27, an article that until its revision in 1992 provided for land reform and communal property ownership.

EZLN Subcomandante Marcos played a key role in the Zapatista information campaign. His political propaganda, story telling, and poetry fascinated and charmed Mexico; his communications also kept media attention focused on Chiapas. Marcos drafted communiqués, gave interviews, and crafted stories, fables, and poetry. He also sent letters of solidarity to groups and individuals engaged in similar struggles within Mexico and abroad. Some of his creative writings drew from indigenous beliefs and many were told from the perspective of Don Durito, a Lacandón beetle, or "Old Antonio," Marcos' indigenous mentor (Ponce de León). La Botz attributes Marcos' diverse appeal to his "wit, irony, humor, and sophistication" (9). Marcos, or El Sub as he is often referred to, became a kind of celebrity icon. Dolls in his image, attired in the
signature ski mask, pancho, and bandolier, appeared for sale in streets and markets, first
in San Cristóbal, and later, throughout the country (Russell: 55-56, Ross 53). The media
dubbed the phenomenon, "Marcosmania." Press coverage of El Sub and Chiapas
eclipsed that of the Mexican presidential campaign. Russell's survey of media coverage
in the Mexican newsmagazine Proceso found that during the period from January 10
through March 7, 371 pages of coverage were dedicated to Chiapas compared to 34 pages
dedicated to the presidential race (55). The information campaign was in full swing.

In addition to written forms of communication, the EZLN incorporated visuals as
part of their tactics for informing and winning sympathies among the population. In early
February Commandante Ramona and other masked members of the CCRI General
Command appeared in a videotaped interview with Epigmenio Ibarra and La Jornada
reporter Blanche Petrich. Photographer Antonio Turok also captured the interview in still
shots (Ross: 44). The rebels staged another visual media event with their February 16
release of former Governor, General Castellanos Domínguez. Castellanos had been
kidnapped during the first week of the war, and the rebels used the release ceremony to
reiterate their demands, publicly shame Castellanos, and castigate the Institutional
Revolutionary Party (PRI). Nearly 300 reporters were in attendance and the event was
broadcast to the nation via television (Russell: 56).

While the Zapatistas expanded their information campaign, the EZLN military
campaign lasted only a few days. The most intense fighting took place in Ocosingo and
Rancho Nuevo. Reports as to the number of dead remain in dispute. The Zapatistas
reported more than 500 rebel casualties while a Mexican human rights group estimated
the total number of civilians and combatants dead at 159 (La Jornada 11 June 1994).
Most fighting had stopped by the second week of January and the rebels, estimated to number between 3,000 and 8,000, retreated to the jungle rather than face a government force in the region numbering as many as 17,000 (Russell). In a radio interview, Marcos would later acknowledge, "We know our limits... We don't see the armed struggle in the classic sense of all the previous guerrillas, that is, as the one and only way forward...What we're saying is 'Let's make a deal to create a democratic space" (Quoted in Ponce de León: 433).

Human rights organizations criticized the Mexican military for using excessive force and committing summary executions, and the media carried editorial critiques by a number of prominent Mexicans. On January 12, over 100,000 civilians attended a demonstration in Mexico City's central plaza. While the participants were not themselves insurgents, observers remarked that the Zapatistas had arrived in the capital. The demonstration and public criticism of the government's military assault forced the Salinas government to abort its military tactics (Cleaver, 1996; Ronfeldt et al 1998). President Salinas declared a unilateral cease-fire after the rebels had already retreated.

When negotiations resumed shortly after the cease-fire, Marcos announced that he was there merely as a translator and that he took his orders from the indigenous commandantes. Manuel Camacho Solís represented President Salinas at the talks, while the 19 indigenous members of the CCRI General Command represented the EZLN. San Cristóbal Bishop, Samuel Ruiz mediated the negotiations when they began on February 22. Within just ten days, a tentative accord was reached outlining 32 rebel demands and corresponding government responses. These demands were consistent with the

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10 The EZLN was also accused of violating the rights of civilians, albeit on a much smaller scale that that of the Mexican military. See Russell.
objectives laid out earlier by the Zapatistas, with the possible exception of an increased emphasis on Indigenous rights. Four of the demands focused specifically on indigenous rights and culture, ensuring that the Zapatista objectives would expand their support among the majority population in Chiapas. Some of the other objectives were: free elections, revision of NAFTA, the annulment of the Salinas reform of Article 27 of the federal constitution, an end to militarization in the region, the right to employment and fair wages, protection of the region's natural resources, the right to fair prices for produce, official recognition of the EZLN, and funding for healthcare, education, housing, and infrastructure (Womack: 270-274).

The Zapatistas won more political capital with the next step in the peace process. The indigenous leaders of the CCRI General Command took the accord back to the indigenous communities for approval. Although that approval was never secured, the EZLN was expanding its base of support among the indigenous communities. The indigenous communities rejected Salinas's tentative commitments when the government increased its militarization following the March 23 assassination of Donaldo Colosio, Salinas' handpicked successor to the presidency. Salinas helped to fuel suspicion that the Zapatistas were suspects in the murder, and he soon amassed troops again in Chiapas.

On June 10 the CCRI General Command issued its Second Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle. The declaration not only condemned the militarization, it called for a National Democratic Convention (CND) and demanded the establishment of a transition government (CCRI-EZLN: 6/10/94). With national elections scheduled for August 21, the Zapatistas invited more than 6,000 delegates, observers, and press to attend the convention. Although it was cut short due to rain, the convention was a major success in
terms of the EZLN information campaign. The convention opened in San Cristóbal on August 6. Its five working sessions were scheduled to focus on: the transition to democracy, peaceful electoral change and civilian resistance, the 11 EZLN demands, the transition government, a constituent assembly and a new constitution (La Botz 187). On August 7, the convention began its journey deep into the Lacandón jungle in preparation for working sessions scheduled for August 9. Near the small Lacandón village of Guadalupe Tepeyac, the Zapatistas had constructed a convention center, complete with amphitheater and library. The Zapatistas drew on historic symbolism again when they named the site Aguascalientes, in remembrance of the 1917 Aguascalientes convention where Francisco “Pancho” Villa and Zapata agreed to join forces in attempt to defeat Venustiano Carranza. Although severe thunderstorms forced the 1994 convention to be cut short, the event demonstrated that it was possible for a group of armed rebels to initiate a peaceful, civil movement for political change.

The most significant accomplishment of the CND was that it expanded the Zapatista base of support. The 6,000 accredited delegates were chosen by the Zapatistas from 15,000 applicants (Womack, 280). The delegates included indigenous representatives, campesinos, the urban poor, intellectuals, artists, professors, teachers, students, small manufacturers, and representative from various non-governmental organizations (La Botz: 180-183). The observers and press included foreigners as well as Mexicans, and some of these foreigners would return home with a new interest in the Zapatista struggle.

Following mass protests against widespread fraud in the Chiapas gubernatorial election and the PRI's renewed militarization under President Zedillo, the Zapatistas
surprised the nation with a peaceful occupation of 39 municipalities in Chiapas. The
government seemed stunned that this was possible in the face of such a heavy military
presence, but somehow the insurgents were able to declare these communities
"autonomous." With the collapse of the peso the following day, Zedillo blamed the
Zapatistas. The EZLN seemed to have lost its advantage in the information campaign
and the country's media attention shifted its focus to the economy.

Then in August 1995, the Zapatistas orchestrated another media event when they
called on the Alianza Cívica (Civil Alliance) to coordinate a national referendum. 10,000
polling places were set up within Mexico and an additional international consulta was
conducted, with most votes coming from Europe via the Internet. Approximately 1.2
million votes were cast from within Mexico and another 100,000 voted internationally
(Ronfeldt et al: chronology). On questions one, two, and three, over 90% of voters
registered their support for the EZLN's 11 demands, democratic forces working together
to achieve the demands, and profound reform of the Mexican state. A similar percentage
supported equality for women in the "developing democratic culture," while only a slight
majority favored transforming the EZLN into a political force and opposed uniting the
EZLN with other democratic forces (Ross: 126-138).

Together, the written communications, visual media events, symbolic appeals, the
CND, and the Consulta constituted a formidable information campaign. While any
information campaign on behalf of an insurgency could by definition be classified as
propaganda, the EZLN not only did a masterful job disseminating its views and
promoting its objectives, the insurgency promoted important substantive goals. As Neil
Harvey maintains, the Zapatistas worked to end authoritarian politics, promote respect for
indigenous cultures, and promote "consensual decisionmaking of hundreds of communities" (227-227). The EZLN is also to be credited with raising “important questions about the impact of neoliberal economics, the future of indigenous cultures, the transformation of gender relations, and the scope of political reform in Mexico” (Harvey: 240). These objectives and the inclusionary tactics of the Zapatistas, together with the form of the information campaign, explain why the Zapatistas have been so successful at winning hearts and minds.

By the time of the Consulta, a cyberspace campaign was also well underway on the Internet on behalf of the Zapatistas. The volume of Internet communications in support of the Zapatistas increased significantly when compared with that in January of 1994, and international activists were also employing a variety of cyberspace tactics in support of the EZLN. We turn now to an analysis of cyberspace assistance and its impact on the Zapatista insurgency.

CYBERSPACE ORGANIZING AND INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

The Actors and Their Methods

Within days of the Mexican military's 1994 military campaign, political activists began circulating information on the Internet. The Zapatistas themselves lacked the technology necessary for carrying out their own Internet information campaign. What they did do, however, was to type their communications and pass them on to friends or supportive organizations with access to the traditional media (Cleaver: 2000). Many of

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11 Froehling defines the Internet as "a connection among computers (servers) that communicate with each other through standardized protocols. No central facility organizes communication; rather, each server is connected to a number of other servers, so connections between two servers are often routed through a
the political activists who used the Internet to support the Zapatistas were working for traditional non-governmental organizations (NGOs), some of which were based in Mexico. Because of the lack of electrical infrastructure, current computer technology, and reliable phone lines, Internet organizing was difficult for all groups working in Chiapas. While Internet access was available in San Cristóbal, it was neither reliable nor economically feasible for most Mexican NGOs to use it, and most of the region lacked the telephone access needed for connecting to an Internet server. Mexican NGOs working in Chiapas on behalf of indigenous rights, other human rights, and humanitarian assistance played important roles not only in disseminating information but also in organizing traditional forms of support for the Zapatistas. The Mexican NGOs organized marches, demonstrations, press conferences, and letter writing campaigns. They did so by communicating in person, posting flyers, using radio announcements, and notifying the print media. Those in towns could also make phone calls and send faxes (Ronfeldt et al).

On February 1, 1994 in anticipation of the peace talks in San Cristóbal, a message signed by Sub-Commander Marcos was faxed to all NGOs in Mexico asking them to "form a "safety belt" or "belt of peace" around the area in which the dialogue [was] to take place." The message, which was also published in La Jornada and circulated on the Internet via Usenet, suggested that the NGOs could use this human cordon to ensure that neither side used intimidation or aggression against the other (CCRI- EZLN).  

number of different intermediate computers. Users of the Internet can connect their computer to these servers, usually via telephone service and modem, if they lack direct access to them.”

12 The Usenet message credited Gene Bowie of the New York Transfer News Service with the English translation.
Although initially Mexican NGOs in Chiapas were not disseminating much information on the Internet, Mexican university students were exceptions. Students at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico played a key role when they created a special e-mail discussion list or "List Serve" for discussing and forwarding information about the situation in Chiapas.

At the time of the Zapatista uprising, numerous foreign NGOs had also established traditional networks and methods for political organizing around indigenous rights, other human rights issues, international solidarity, and economic problems in Latin America. Many of the organizations used the Internet as well as faxes, telephones, conferences, mail, and other forms of communicating across borders. These communication networks were essential to the rapid dissemination of information related to Chiapas and to the quick mobilization of international human rights observers while the Salinas government was carrying out its military assault in January 1994 (Ronfeldt et al: 54).

Some organizations, such as the network of indigenous rights organizations, sent international representatives to San Cristóbal within ten days of the uprising. Ronfeldt et al. report that more than nine indigenous rights organizations sent representatives to the region to participate in the creation of the Indigenous and Campesino State Council of Chiapas (CEOIC) (54). US based Global Exchange, and Action Canada, responded by quickly placing permanent staff in Chiapas. Another US NGO, Pastors for Peace Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization, had experience using the Internet to organize caravans to transport material aid through Mexico to people in Central America. Pastors for Peace began organizing caravans of material aid for the people of
Chiapas. Solidarity organizations such as the Committee In Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), the Network In Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA), and the Nicaragua Network also used the Internet to help circulate information to their members. These groups had two decades of experience working against human rights abuses and in support of political change in Central America, and the Internet was already a key tool of their organizing effort. For example, during the early 90s NISGUA sent out "Action Alerts" to its members via the Internet letting them know about human rights abuses in Guatemala and asking the members to write letters to US and Guatemalan officials. Many of these solidarity organizations and other progressive NGOs utilized the Association For Progressive Communications (APC) to assist their dissemination of information via the Internet. APC is a global network of computer networks that provides low cost access to the Internet. Its Mexican affiliate is La Neta. The US affiliate, the Institute for Global Communications (ICG), runs networks such as Peacenet. Both La Neta and ICG allow affiliated NGOs to utilize computer-conferencing and e-mail. For example, Peacenet's primary conference for discussion of the Zapatista struggle is Reg.mexico (Cleaver, 1997 and Ronfeldt et al: 55).

North American human rights and solidarity organizations as well as similar organizations in Europe were not only among the first to circulate information about Chiapas via the Internet and to send observers to the region, they also inspired the rapid growth of new NGOs. Ronfeldt et al report that there were already 191 NGOs in Mexico in November 1993 and that number would grow to 376 by May of 1996 (in footnote: 37). Like their predecessors, the new human rights groups and those working "in solidarity with Mexico" generated web pages and utilized e-mail. Many provided news reports and
translations from Chiapas as well as suggesting ways to provide support to people in
Chiapas. Others used "alerts" or "urgent action" messages to encourage members to
write letters and voice criticism of human rights abuses. A 1999 index of foreign
solidarity groups working in Chiapas listed 15 US, 2 Canadian, 2 Dutch, and 2 Italian
organizations as well as one in each of the following other countries: Ireland, Spain,
Switzerland, Turkey, Australia, and Japan. Three other organizations on the list were
characterized as "international," as opposed to involving only one country other than
Mexico. Today the number of new organizations continues to growth, though a few
groups have also dissolved (Irish Mexico Group: "Zapatista Index"). This index is not
exhaustive or completely up to date. The Mexico Solidarity Network is not included on
the list but the group's web page claims that it is a coalition of 80 US groups. As of this
time, the Australian and one of the Dutch organizations have dissolved.

Many other US and Canadian NGOs used the Internet and established cross-
border links in their unsuccessful efforts to defeat NAFTA. Cleaver credits these anti-
NAFTA organizations with playing an instrumental role in the early development of pro-
Zapatista cyberspace organizing. Anti-NAFTA organizations provided "a means for the
rapid dissemination of information and organization through preexisting circuits..."
(Cleaver, 1998: 627). The National Commission for Democracy in Mexico (NCDM), a
US-solidarity organization, and in particular its leader, an El Paso union activist named
Cecilia Rodriguez, were among the first to use the Internet in support of the Zapatistas.
Rodriguez engaged in cyberspace communications on behalf of the Zapatistas, translated
communiqués into English and according to Ross, was chosen to represent the EZLN in
the United States.
Other cyberspace activists were foreign academics, information technology specialists, and students. Like Rodriguez, Justin Paulson, played a key role in supplying information about the rebellion in Chiapas. Paulson set up and maintained the first unofficial web page for the civilian front, the Zapatista Front for National Liberation (FZLN) while he was a college student at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania. The web page included access to *La Jornada*, a Mexican newspaper providing extensive coverage of Chiapas. Paulson also compiled a detailed Chiapas timeline for the FZLN's web page. The timeline is now part of the web page of Global Exchange, a US based solidarity and educational organization. In 1996 Paulson was an invited participant of an international meeting sponsored by the EZLN, the Intercontinental Encuentro for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism, Intergaláctica in Chiapas.

Although most of the foreign cyberspace activists were from the United States and Canada, activists from many other countries have translated information and communicated it in other languages. Activists have supported the Zapatistas by translating some of their oommuniques into Italian, Dutch, German, French, and Portuguese. The FZLN web page contains an archive of these documents (http://www.fzln.org.mx).

By far the largest volume of Chiapas-related information disseminated via cyberspace has been that of the list serves, such as Chiapas-L, Chiapas95, EZLN-it, FZLN-info, ZAP, and Zapatismo. Membership in the lists is open; those who are interested in receiving the information contact the web master who manages the list by sending him/her an e-mail message requesting to subscribe. Most of the lists are either targeted at a specific audience, such as EZLN-it, which is directed at Italians, or the list
tends to specialize in particular types of information. Chiapas-L is primarily designed for
discussion about Chiapas, while Chiapas95 is predominantly a source for news, most of
which has been published in print media in Mexico, the United States or on news wire
services such as Reuters, Associated Press, etc. Reports emanating from NGOs are also
often circulated on Chiapas95. The volume of messages posted can be overwhelming.
For example, I received 971 messages from Chiapas95 during the period from July 27

Harry Cleaver, an academic who founded Chiapas95 and has written extensively
on the Zapatista supporters and cyberspace, estimates that as of 2000, the Internet
contained "literally tens of thousands of archived e-mail messages...[C]ounting both
listserv articles and web pages there [were] hundreds of thousands, probably millions of
words of material, not to mention, images, video and audio clips" (2000).

IMPACTS OF CYBERSPACE ACTIVISM ON THE ZAPATISTA STRUGGLE

By providing translations, publicizing events, creating web pages, disseminating
action alerts, and planning conferences via the Internet, cyberspace activists have not
only assisted NGOs, they have helped the Zapatistas disseminate their messages and
thereby provided important aid to the Zapatista information campaign. Yet the impact of
pro-Zapatista Internet activism remains the subject of contentious debate. Hellman
argues "rather than linking people in ways that strengthen their capacity to influence

13 For more information about the Internet Lists as well as a Guide to Analysis and Information on the
Zapatistas in Cyberspace see Cleaver' s "Zapatistas in Cyberspace: A Guide to Analysis and Information" at
http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/Cleaver/zaps.html

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events, internet activism sometimes creates an illusion of connectedness and political effectiveness where little exists" (14). She seems to believe that cyberspace activists are participating in the virtual realm rather than joining forces with the traditional activists of the real world. Critics of cyberspace activism often correctly point out that that some scholars and the popular media have exaggerated the use of the Internet by EZLN combatants. For example, some writers have mistakenly assumed that Marcos and the Commandantes are actually posting articles to the Web and managing "list-serves" (Swett and Rich).

The Zapatistas have written hundreds of letters, documents, stories, and other forms of communication, but it is unarmed civilians who have been responsible for circulating this information in cyberspace. The efforts of these activists, while perhaps not revolutionary, have strengthened the Zapatista's "conventional" information campaign. Given the relevance of political persuasion and popular support to successful insurgency, political organizing in cyberspace does appear to have real life implications. Cleaver (1996) Froehling, and others have used the analogy of the rhizome to describe the Internet. According to Froehling, the Internet is like "a subterranean stem lacking a definite beginning or end that continues to grow in all directions, constantly building new connections while old ones die." It is also a new space where social relations are carried out and whose "very existence changes human relations inside and outside the Internet through the flow of information..."

There is considerable evidence that cyberspace activism, in combination with traditional political organizing, has had real world consequences. Cyberspace activism
has helped save lives, expand Zapatista support, and (unfortunately) perhaps even inspire a cyberspace counterinsurgency war.

**Saving Lives**

I have described above how NGOs used computer technology to disseminate information about the unfolding crisis in Chiapas in January of 1994 and how the NGOs quickly mobilized international observers to the region. There is widespread agreement among scholars that this activism on the Internet, in combination with that in traditional spaces, played a key role in Salinas' decision to stop the January 1994 military assault. Cleaver maintains that this information campaign and quick mobilization of foreign observers "...brought the Mexican government military counterattack to a halt and helped force negotiations." Even Helman seems to acknowledge that lives were saved as a result of the activism. "The revolution in communication and the exceptionally effective communication skills of Marcos have fostered an international solidarity that has, in turn, promoted both the survival of the movement and the personal survival of its members" (4).

The pro-Zapatista activism also played a key role in bringing the Mexican military's second military campaign to a halt in February 1996. When Zedillo initiated this assault, the EZLN autonomous communities were targeted along with the guerrillas. The Zapatistas responded to the military attack by withdrawing into the jungle and intensifying their information campaign. In an interview with journalist Epigmenio Ibarra in Aguascalientes at that time, Marcos explained the decision to retreat:
The Zapatistas withdrew into the jungle, avoiding battle and occupying the moral high ground. …But I want to remind you that in the long run we have the recourse of returning. When we failed in the cities we returned to the mountains. If we fail at the politics we return to the arms (Chiapas-L 12/9/94)\textsuperscript{14}

Once again, public outrage forced the government to call a halt to their military assault. The EZLN and the government reopened negotiations, and on Feb 16, 1996 they signed the San Andrés Accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture.\textsuperscript{15}

The importance of outside observers and methods of rapid communication seems especially clear when we consider the tremendous atrocities committed by Guatemala's counterinsurgents during the early 1980s. Without access to Internet technology, the NGOs operating in the areas of conflict did not have quick ways of alerting the outside world to the human rights abuses, nor did they have the ability to mobilize such a large contingent of international observers and activists. Even in Guatemala it became difficult for the military to continue its campaign of terror when new technology became available to human rights and solidarity activists in the early 90s.

Thus far cyberspace communications have provided an unparalleled opportunity for the Mexican insurgents. The EZLN has continued its revolutionary struggle without using much military force. According to Bruhn, the EZLN "renounced the traditional revolutionary objective of seizing state power...and continued to fight what Mexico's

\textsuperscript{14} The interview was originally published in \textit{La Jornada}.

\textsuperscript{15} Zedillo later rejected the accords negotiated on his government’s behalf, and the EZLN suspended peace talks.
foreign secretary and others called 'a war of ink and Internet'” (Caballero 1995 in Bruhn). The use of cyberspace has enabled the rebels to limit the loss of life and minimize risks to civilians. At the same time this has allowed the Zapatistas to largely avoid alienating the civilian population, a fundamental problem for all insurgents and counterinsurgents engaged in military campaigns. Both sides find it difficult to win hearts and minds while they are killing combatants, let alone when they are killing innocent civilians or “noncombatants,” as military strategists more euphemistically prefer to refer to them. In taking the battle to cyberspace, Zapatista supporters have thus far avoided this dilemma of guerrilla warfare.

**Expanding the Movement**

The Zapatista supporters have also used the Internet to expand the movement both domestically and internationally. When the peace talks were halted in 1996, the Zapatistas concentrated their efforts on expanding the civil movement. Communiqués appearing in the print media and on the Internet announced that 1,100 members of civil society were marching to Mexico City to establish a civilian movement on behalf of the Zapatistas. In September, they founded the *Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (the Zapatista Front for National Liberation-FZLN). The FZLN now operates a web site that provides access to EZLN documents, connections to regional chapters of the FZLN, manages a list serve, and organizes pro-Zapatista actions and events.¹⁶

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¹⁶ Recently the FZLN was instrumental in organizing the 12-state, 15-day Zapatour of twenty-four Zapatista leaders and Subcommander Marcos in April, 2001. The tour was organized to support indigenous rights and culture as provided under the San Andres Accords.
When the Zapatistas made their most concerted effort to internationalize their movement by calling for continental and intercontinental encuentros against neoliberalism, the call for convention delegates went out on the Internet. Continental meetings were held in Berlin, Chiapas, and Melbourne prior to the Intercontinental Encuentro for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism, Intergaláctica in July and August of 1996 in Chiapas (Cleaver, 1998: 630). The purpose of the meetings was to discuss the impacts of pro-market economic policies and develop a strategy for creating connections among groups opposed to neoliberalism. Cleaver reports that approximately 3,000 people from more than 40 countries attended the Encuentro in Chiapas, and he attributes this turnout largely to Internet organizing. Over 4,000 attended the Second Intercontinental Encuentro in Spain in 1997. The fact that a group of masked rebels in rural Mexico could successfully organize the international encounter in Chiapas and inspire others on in Europe and Australia is impressive. It is highly improbable that this would have happened were it not for the Internet (Cleaver, 1998: 630).

In the process of expanding the base of Zapatista support both domestically and internationally, the sea in which the guerrilla “fish” swim seems to have expanded. The Zapatistas have gained new support within Mexico and abroad. In addition, the EZLN has helped to inspire a new international movement against neoliberalism.
Cyberspace counterinsurgency

Military strategists and politicians in Mexico and the United State have also acknowledged the significance of the Zapatista cyberspace information campaign. Rand scholars Ronfeldt et al have argued that these "militant social activists" are engaging in a "netwar" on behalf of the Zapatistas and the activists have succeeded at transforming guerrilla warfare. The authors discount the information campaigns and propaganda efforts of past insurgencies and suggest that the use of today's information technology fundamentally alters the nature of the conflict (7). The authors argue that information technology is linking NGOs, thereby creating social networks and undermining traditional hierarchies of power. These scholars fear that "netwar" has the potential to threaten state actors such as the Mexican government. In order to counter the Zapatista information campaign and similar threats that they perceive as imminent, the Rand scholars suggest that the United States and its Mexican allies should develop their own netwar capabilities.

Up to this point cyber space activism has helped to saved lives and expand support for the Zapatista movement, however, the prospect of US and Mexican security forces collaborating on cyberspace counterinsurgency does not bode well. It is important to keep in mind, as Froehling points out, that cyberspace methods of disseminating information are "neither inherently good or bad." Internet organizing has limitations not only in terms of who has access to technology but also in terms of existing power structures. Given the superior resources of the US and Mexican governments and the
recent flood of literature on Information warfare, it is likely that security forces in both countries are working to develop counterinsurgency networks and deploy them for the purpose of defeating the Zapatistas.

Conclusions

The use of various methods of communicating objectives and expanding popular support is not only typical of guerrilla warfare but also essential to the political and psychological battle for the hearts and minds of the population. The Zapatistas have effectively communicated their goals in the form of written communiqüés, personal interviews, and letters, all of which have appeared in Mexican print media. The EZLN has also organized press meetings, marches, demonstrations, plebiscites, and conferences. While the Zapatistas have not themselves employed new information technology as part of this communication campaign, they have provided the material and the inspiration that has motivated political activists to do so. These activists have not only helped to disseminate Zapatista communications on the Internet but have organized observer delegations, aid caravans, and participated in international conferences. Their role is not, as some have claimed, simply virtual. Local, national, and international NGOs have worked together in efforts to end the human rights abuses, promote indigenous rights, establish democracy, and end neoliberal economic policies. Although the Internet adds a new dimension to the Zapatista information campaign and has inspired new cooperative efforts among NGOs, it does not fundamentally alter the nature of the conflict in Chiapas. The insurgents have not adopted a new form of guerrilla war or fundamentally changed
their tactics. These are the same objectives that the Zapatistas have been promoting since
the First Declaration of Lacandón, when they announced their goals and began their
campaign to win hearts and minds.

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