



**(TS//SI) Sunni Extremists and Short Message Service (SMS)**

FROM: [REDACTED]  
Arab Sunni Extremism  
Run Date: 07/07/2003

(TS//SI) Islamic extremists, including al-Qa'ida, have found the short message service (SMS) capability of their GSM telephones to be a valuable form of communication and have dramatically increased its use during the past 18 months. Extremists employ SMS to send and receive short messages and simple pictures because they believe that SMS is more secure than both voice calls and E-mail, and it certainly is much cheaper than long distance telephone conversations. Another advantage to SMS is that it is convenient and the message gets through: if the recipient's telephone is off when the message is sent, he will get it when he turns his telephone on. In addition, some extremists have used SMS as a COMSEC tool by spreading their messages over three communication modes - voice, SMS and E-mail.

(TS//SI) What kinds of messages do they send? Counterterrorism (CT) analysis and reporting of extremist SMS communications have covered a variety of topics. In particular, SMS has been used to arrange instant messaging or chat sessions on the Internet to pass more complex information. Extremists have also used SMS to warn of security problems, especially after raids and terrorist events such as the recent bombings in Riyadh. Moreover, SMS has been used to alert fellow extremists that some event has taken place, such as a bombing, and that they should turn on their televisions or radios for more information. CT has noted that SMS is widely used to coordinate financial transfers, even to include financial transfer reference numbers and specific banks. Another common use of SMS is to pass new E-mail addresses, telephone numbers, and passwords for both computer files and E-mail accounts.

(TS//SI) The success of CT SIGINT development efforts to target and collect SMS traffic has created challenges as well as opportunities for analysis and reporting. CT will soon implement SIGINT-on-Demand for SMS reporting to speed up timely dissemination of intelligence and cope with the ever-growing volume of traffic.

**“(U//FOUO) SIDtoday articles may not be republished or reposted outside NSANet without the consent of S0121 ([DL sid comms](#)).”**