Committee: Youth Assembly

Issue: Online recruitment of young people by terrorist groups

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INTRODUCTION

Terrorist groups use the Internet and online tools in order to promote political, religious or/and ideological issues. Their goals include the effective communication with the members of the organization, attraction of new members, organization of their activities and planning of their attacks in the real world.

Social media pages, like Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, facilitate the actions of such terrorist organizations and contribute to the recruitment especially of children and young people that wish to join their actions.

The key subject of this CGSMUN Agenda is digitalization and e-democracy. In a progressively digitalized world, e-democracy could be defined as the process towards improving democratic procedures via online tools. Online terrorism, as defined below, is an indispensable topic of this agenda, since its elimination constitutes a major step towards e-democracy.

During the past years, the international community has been asked to confront the disturbing phenomenon of the recruitment and exploitation of children and young people by terrorist groups. Furthermore, Internet has become a huge part of our lives through the past decades. Youth and children are the main users of Internet as they are born in a generation mostly based on technology, the Internet and social media. Every day they are influenced by the hundreds of photos and videos they see online and in their Social media accounts like Instagram, Twitter or Facebook. Internet and social media have become the main tool for terrorist groups to recruit young people. They use these means daily in order to pass their messages to the youth and to children of all ages; it is very important and crucial that we solve this problem in order to eliminate the number of youths that are being recruited daily by terrorist groups.

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The extent of the phenomenon, has led the international community to consider it as a very important form of violence against children at multiple levels and it has become a priority on the international agenda.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Terrorism

The illegal use of violence against civilians, in the pursuit of political and/or religious or other aims.

Online recruitment

The process of attracting young people to participate in the activities of terrorist groups using Internet and online tools, such as social media.

Terrorist Groups

A group of individuals that use terrorism in order to pursue their political, religious or other aims.

Propaganda

Information which is spread by specific groups, in this case terrorist groups, in order to influence the public opinion.

Youth/ Young People

According to the United Nations, a youth is the person between the ages of 15 and 24 years and between the ages of leaving education and finding his/her first job. Member States have different definitions of youth.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

It is not a new phenomenon that children and young people are being used by terrorist organizations in order to carry out their terroristic actions. Approximately 20 years ago a report of the expert of the Secretary-General on the impact of armed conflict on children (Machel Report, 8), reported the consequences of child recruitment and use of youth by armed groups. It is true that terrorist groups have hard power, but they also have an impressive amount of soft power that they don't

hesitate to use. In rough and unstable times, they attract youth by using their vulnerabilities and giving them a purpose to exist and the chance to build their own identity by belonging in a group.

Although the many attempts of international institutions to carry out successful and efficient researches, the number of youths that have left their homes in order to join the fighting in Syria or they are thinking of doing so, after they communicated with recruiters through online platforms.

Terrorist Influence on Children in Cyberspace

Children and young people are attracted and recruited by terrorist groups in many different ways, from direct contact or from propaganda on social media. Their goals are to produce around 40 videos every day in as many languages as possible in order to promote their actions and influence youth and children. They also have around 40.000 Twitter accounts that have guides on how to join the Islamic State.

Firstly, they use social media in order to attract the younger people of the society. By sharing content through social media they can promote their beliefs and influence public opinion and other people's points of view.

Some terrorist groups have made their own online platforms which are specially designed in order to attract teens and young adults. By creating content that is appealing to them, like blogs, songs, films or documentaries, they succeed in luring them into their actions and pursuing them to join them.

They also use virtual messages, texts, presentations, video and audio materials as propaganda. Online space is a very useful and safe ground for various activities of terrorist groups which include file sharing, encrypted messages, fundraising and of course recruitment of young people. They also promote their future actions and plans as well as spreading fear.

The Internet can really help terrorist organizations grow as through the Internet terrorist organizations can teach their members how to build bombs, join their organization, fund terrorism and share important information. By using the

Internet many youths often choose to actually engage in terrorist acts and not simple be passive supporters and sympathizers of terrorism.
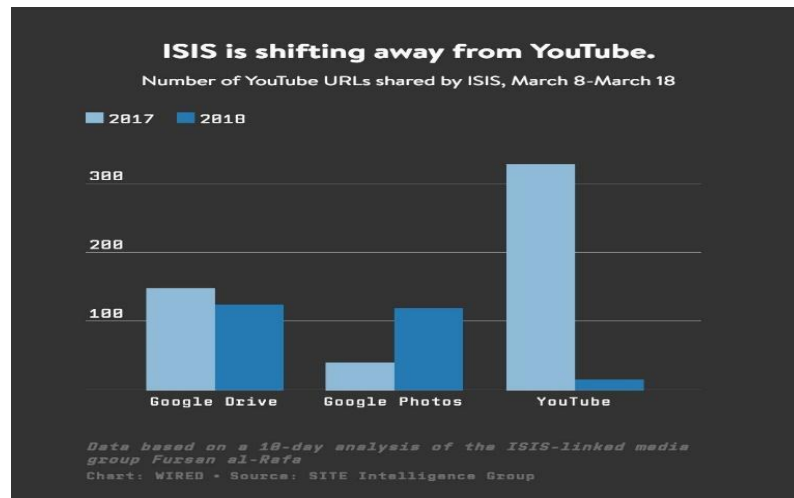
Figure 1: ISIS is shifting away from YouTube

Why young people want to join terrorist groups

There are many reasons why young people want to join terrorist groups, some of them are listed below.

One of the most common reasons why young people join terrorist groups is because they are looking for an identity. According to a study from the United States Institute of Peace (2010),among "2,032 'foreign fighters'" who joined al-Qaeda, being a so-called "identity seeker" was the largest reason to join a terrorist organization. A second reason is the traumatic experiences many young people may have faced as a youth which led them to becoming terrorists as it is a characteristic which is highly recognized by terrorist recruiters.

Terrorist groups also choose to recruit youths who feel alone and they have a need for belonging. Their targets are the most vulnerable people of the society, mostly children and youth, who are still figuring out who they are, what they need and who they want to be. For most teenagers being a part of a terrorist organization may be one of the first true meanings that they have in their lives. By belonging in terrorist organizations they believe that they become more important and they matter.

Many teens that had been recruited by ISIS say that they saw these online terrorist groups like a brotherhood and a place where they could be recognized and acknowledged.

Moreover, according to the United States Institute for Peace, so-called "thrill seekers" accounted for 5% of the "2,032 'foreign fighters'" they interviewed in 2011. It is mentioned in the study that these individuals are attracted to violent video games that glory jihad and war and they often come from a middle or upper class family.

Finally, youth and children want to join terrorist organizations because they wish to make right what they think is injustice. A main factor that contributes in the participation of children and youth in terrorist activities is righting what a terrorist believes is wrong. Terrorist groups often offer youth a way to express themselves for what they believe is right and what it is called civil rights, by rejecting the same time the "status quo".

The significance of youth for terrorist groups

The involvement of youth in terrorist activities plays a significant role for the terrorist groups for some specific reasons.

Firstly, youths reduce the possibility of arrest of the terrorist leaders and they allow to terrorists more freedom, as they don't have any criminal or police records.
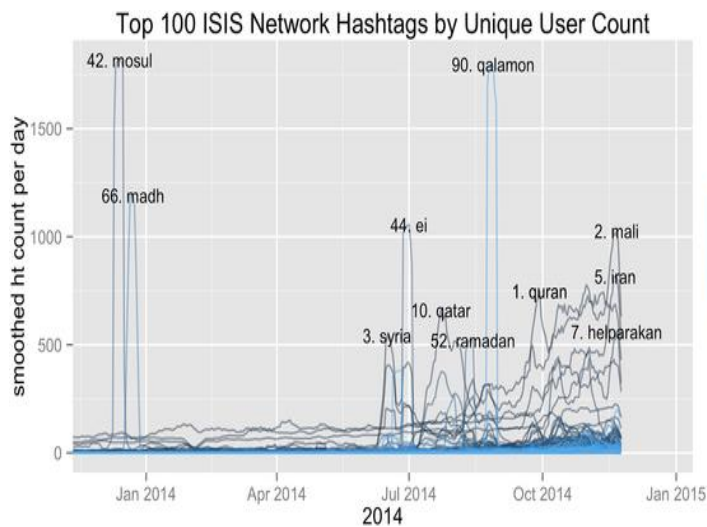
Also, youth do not draw much attention or suspicion on the part of security and authorities because of their young age. Even if they get caught, they would receive lighter sentences in prison.

Another important aspect is the vulnerability of young people to recruitment. Attracting a child is obviously easier than attracting an adult. Young people many times are easily influenced by the acts terrorist groups do, in order to recruit because of their psychological instability, uncertainty and need of belonging.

Therefore, for all the above reasons we can understand why young people are the key to carry operations and are more than needed for terrorist groups.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

ISIS

The name ISIS stands for Islamic State of Iraq and Syria which is a Sunni jihadist group with a violent ideology. It claims religious authority over Muslims and it was inspired by al Qaida.

ISIS has recruited thousands of people throughout the past 5 years, since its creation in 2014. The rapid expansion of this terrorist organization and its huge "success" is a result of its human resources, the new recruiters. Social Media, like Twitter, Youtube and Facebook etc. are the key of this "success" as ISIS can promote their beliefs and the propaganda in order to recruit children and young adults.

ISIS uses YouTube videos in order to promote their inhumane actions and inform people about their organization and its purpose. ISIS also uses Twitter and Facebook accounts to propagandize their actions, promote their beliefs, influence public opinion and make more young people join their organization.

Firstly, Social Media provide an online space where ISIS can perform its recruitment activities and present an image of the organization as the fulfillment of a kind of ultimate jihad fantasy. Secondly, in Social Media cruel and inhumane actions are "normalized", which makes the recruitment attempts of ISIS more successful.

Al Qaeda

Al-Qaeda is a network of Islamic Extremists. The organization has been acknowledged as a terrorist group by the United Nations Security Council, NATO, the EU, the US, the UK and various other countries.

Al Qaeda also uses Internet and social media like YouTube, Facebook etc. to promote their actions, recruit their members and propagandize their beliefs.

Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT)

The GIFCT is an organization which was formed in June 2017 and its goal is to alter terrorists' ability to promote their terroristic action or spread their extremist propaganda. In order to achieve this goal they collaborate with NGOs, academic experts, and governments.

They also share important information and knowledge with the UN Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate (UN CTED) and the Tech Against Terrorism initiative. While achieving their goals they respect and they try to preserve the fundamental Human Rights.

Sudan

Sudan has made a remarkable effort to combat this phenomenon, by developing effective plans and strategies. Sudan also cooperates within regional and international level through its partnerships. It tries to adopt measures that respect human rights while combating terrorism.

First of all, Sudan tries to hold dialogue with prisoners, rehabilitate them and make them once again responsible citizens of the society. The program that they follow in order to achieve their goals is based on a number of pillars. The first one is direct dialogue, the second one is rehabilitation and integration in the society and the final one is ensuring that society is safe and protected from extreme ideologies.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a country that has experienced many terrorist attacks throughout the years and faces violent insurgencies by ISIS. For this reason it strives to eliminate terrorism in all its forms in order to become a more peaceful country. The Afghan Minister of Education believes that terrorism could be eliminated if illiteracy was eradicated. That's why he and his partners try to establish a more efficient education program and ensure access to education for as many boys and girls is possible.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
8th September 2006	The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.
October 2006	AQI publicly renamed itself the Islamic State in Iraq
June 2014	Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared ISIS as an Islamic caliphate
Since 2015	ISIS has recruited local children and children of foreign terrorist fighters and has used them as executioners and suicide attackers.
August 19, 2014	ISIS posts a video showing the beheading of US journalist James Foley, missing in Syria since 2012.
September 2, 2014	ISIS releases a video showing the beheading of US journalist Steven Sotloff. The apparent executioner speaks in the same British accent as the man who purportedly killed Foley.
September 13, 2014	ISIS posts a video showing the apparent execution of British aid worker David Haines.
October 3, 2014	ISIS releases a video showing the apparent beheading of British hostage, Alan Henning.
June 2017	The Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) is formed.
September 2017	France, Italy, and the United Kingdom co-hosted a United Nations meeting on Preventing terrorist use of the Internet.
April 2019	For the first time in five years, ISIS releases what it says is a new video message from its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

By the end of 2019	Lawmakers in Europe are trying to establish a new legislation to combat the problem of online recruitment by terrorist groups and online terrorist content.

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

The United Nations have made many efforts in order to combat the problem of online recruitment of youth by terrorist groups and have adopted many resolution, some of them are listed below.

General Assembly resolution 60/288.

The General Assembly adopted the United Nations Global Counter- Terrorism Strategy in 2006. All Member States agreed to eliminate terrorism in all its forms and take action and implement measures in order to combat this problem.

A/60/825.

Many UN reports and resolutions have acknowledged the need for combating terrorist use of the Internet. The General Assembly entitled "Uniting against terrorism: recommendations for a global counter-terrorism strategy", in his report in 2006.

Resolution 1963 (2010)

In this resolution the Security Council expressed its concern for the increased use of the Internet by terrorist groups in order to recruit their members, planning and promoting their activities.

Universal human rights instruments in collaboration with the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Lastly, the United Nations has adopted a Global Counter – Terrorism Strategy on the 4th of September in 2006 as it is shown in the image below.
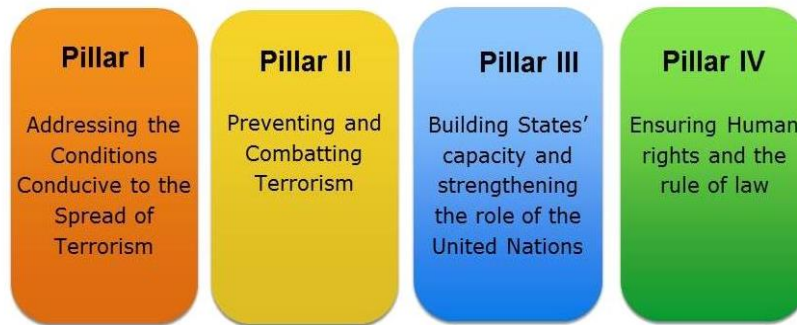
Figure 3: UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Many organizations, technology companies as well as the EU as a whole have made many important and crucial efforts in order to combat the issue of online recruitment of youth by terrorist groups.

In June 2017, representatives of big Social Media companies like Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube came together and formed the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT). The GIFCT is a coalition to share information on how to combat more efficiently and successfully the spread of online terrorism.

In September 2017 at the United Nations General Assembly, Kent Walker (Senior Vice President and General Counsel of Google), joined the leaders of the United Kingdom (Prime Minister Theresa May of the UK), France (President Emmanuel Macron) and Italy(Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni) in order to discuss what the tech industry could do to eliminate terrorist content in the online space. They all committed to develop and share technology and useful information to address online terrorist content.

Lawmakers in Europe hope to establish new legislation that will hold big technology companies (Facebook, Google), more accountable for the terrorist content they host. This specific legislation was proposed for the first time by the EU last September.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The role of the justice system is very crucial on solving the issue even if it is not the only system that is responsible for protecting children and youth. Its role is to promote effective measures to tackle violence against children and ensure accountability mechanisms. For example, prohibition of child recruitment in the international legal framework is something that will strengthen the justice system and its fight against child recruitment by terrorist groups.

Governments, NGOs and companies interested in tackling the problem, could provide support to families and inclusive communities that need help, in order to create a stable environment where children would not feel the need to seek a new family in terrorist groups.

Some other prevention measures could include constant identification of individuals and children, who are crossing national borders in order to join terrorist groups.

Furthermore, the government can effectively limit pro-terrorism content by ensuring the safety and security of children and youth in cyberspace. Legislation could restrict technology companies from providing youth and children with content related to terrorist actions and require the removal of specific content. It can also control data sharing between private and public sectors.

In eliminating online recruitment tech companies play one of the most crucial roles. Private companies can limit, delete, remove and prohibit the content that it is appeared in their platforms. It is in their best interest to prevent their platforms from becoming means of promoting and encouraging violence, terrorism, war.

Another solution is to improve the speed at which technology companies remove the inappropriate content from their web pages. It would be very efficient if a way could be funded in order to remove this content as quickly as possible.

Finally, it is very important that Technologic Companies, the Government etc. share their knowledge and their best practices in order to eliminate the issue. With this method they can receive reports, take action and improve the ways they tackle the issue and make them more efficient.

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