Combating the Spread of Terrorism by Targeting the World Wide Web

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Letter from the Chair

Esteemed delegates,

My name is Marina Latariya, and I am honored to be the President of the Security Council at the Žilina Model United Nations 2017. I have been an active member of the Model United Nations society in Slovakia for several years and can, based on my past experiences, call ZaMUN one of the best MUN Conferences I have ever attended.

This years topic of the Security Council was chosen specifically to target issues and problems the modern world faces today. Terrorism is one of the main topics of every conference, news channel and newspaper article, however during our committee session we will talk about one specific aspect of terrorism: The Recruitment of Terrorists through the World Wide Web. This phenomenon specific to the modern world is one of the most dangerous arms of terrorism, through the Internet terrorists can influence and mobilize people from all over the world with only one message sent at the right time.

I advise all delegates to thoughtfully research this topic with the help of this study guide and the recommended readings at the end. The study guide is only the first contact the delegates have with the chosen topic, that is why I encourage the delegates to prepare their positions to accurately represent the countries they have been assigned with.

I am looking forward to ZaMUN 2017 and meeting all of you. For any further questions regarding the topic, how to write a Position Paper, the country position or any other inquiries, please contact me at this email address: marina.latariya@icloud.com.

Best regards,

Marina Latariya

President of the Security Council

Introduction

Combating terrorism is one of the main goals of every country and international organization functioning now. This task is made easier and at the same time harder with the use of the World Wide Web (further mentioned as "the Internet"). On one hand, the Internet made it easier to spot terrorist activity on social networks and through browser history, on the other hand the popularity of the social networks and the dark web has served as the perfect anonymous platform for terrorist recruitment and communication across long distances.

One of the main platforms of terrorist recruitment are Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Telegrams and many others. These social networks have served as tools of terrorist, even with various security measures undertaken by the owners of the social networks. For example, Twitter deleted around 235 000 accounts from February 2016 till April 2016, however even this initiative is miniscule compared to the amount of accounts controlled by terrorist organizations. For every account the social network closes 5 more appear in its place.

Online recruitment has become of the main battle grounds against terrorism in our times. That is why the world must adapt and understand the new forms of terrorism, to efficiently combat them.

1. History of the Use of Internet as a Terrorist Weapon

The Internet has become one of the main communication platforms from the 1980s, and has only increased its reach since its founding. Nowadays, a young adult checks their Facebook or Twitter page (50% of 18-24-year-olds) the moment they wake up and continue to log in for at least 20 minutes each time. Facebook has 1.79 million active Facebook users worldwide. The popularity of these networks has increased the vulnerability of their users to terrorist propaganda, which is cleverly hidden in ordinary looking pages, links and articles.

1.1.   Al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda has had an Internet presence for nearly two decades. It is one of the first terrorist organization to discover the social networks as a platform for their propaganda as well as anonymous communication and spread of information through their affiliates. As yearly as the 16th September 2002 the American terrorist cells of Al-Qaeda were reportedly using the Internet to spread their propaganda and to communicate with each other. This theory was confirmed during the September 2011 attack on the US. During the investigation in the planning of the 9/11 attack evidence was found pointing to the use of encrypted messages sent through the internet from Afghanistan to the US terrorist cells with information on the targets and detailed planning of the attack.

The 9/11 attack was the first confirmed terrorist attack carried out with the use of the Internet as a "cyber planning" tool. This new discovery at the time showed the world that terrorists move with the times and adapt their methods to the newest technology, which was and is the Internet.

"Cyber planning" is not the only instance in which terrorists use the Internet to further their goals. It has been confirmed that Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups use the internet to finance themselves from charities and direct money transfers through the Internet. Analysts found Al-Qaeda and various charities sharing the same bank account, where Al-Qaeda received the money people were "donating" for a charity. In order to quench the money flow a number of US based Islamic charities were shut down.

1.2. Islamic State

Since its separation from Al-Qaeda on the 3rd of February 2014, the Islamic State has proliferated and spread through the Middle East in quick succession. The Islamic State is a modern-day terrorist group well equipped to dominate the Internet and the social media with its messages of radical Islam and brutal images of its attacks, assassinations and killings. The Islamic State is the first terrorist organization to control a territory furnished with all the institutions of a legitimate government. This only points to the efficiency of their global strategy and recruitment tactics radicalizing people all over the world to take up arms and further their goals.

The Islamic States has been active on Twitter since its offensive on Norther Iraq started. On June 9^{th,} a succession of Twitter accounts was created promoting and documenting the progress of the offensive in Northern Iraq. The Islamic State has succeeded in attracting a vast global audience by posting uncensored images of its brutal tactics. It has encouraged its supporters to share these videos and promote the Islamic State in their communities.

In 2014 the numbers of individuals leaving the UK to join IS was on average 5 per week, this number has only increased in 2015. The Islamic State is filled with educated young people radicalized through the social media with different tactics that turn them against their families and friends, in order to isolate them and minimize other influences outside of the terrorist ideology.

2. The Social Media as a Tool of Terrorist Propaganda and Recruitment

As has been stated above the social media plays an important role in the radicalization process of individuals. Contrary to popular belief radicalized individuals are rarely devout Muslims, however they usually consider themselves as not religious at all. Furthermore, it is easy to call a radicalized person gullible or naïve, however this as well is not the case. Usually the people radicalized through the Internet didn't seek it out, it found them. The nature of radicalized individuals varies as well, they can be your or old, have an educational background or not, they can be financially stable or poor, none of these factors make them more liable to radicalizations. The only common factor is that they are in one way or another sympathetic to the cause of the terrorist group.

The usual start of the radicalization process is when the sympathizers of the groups cause start to research the group, make an online donation to one of its causes, download articles or journals or enter a jihadi chat room. This process not only leads to the discovery of the terrorist group but it also opens the sympathizer to be found by the terrorist group. This opens the link between the sympathizer and the terrorist group, which can then individually contact the sympathizer, send them terrorist materials and with some individuals create a feeling of "belonging" to a specific cause/group.

There are various social media platforms the terrorist groups use to radicalize individuals, these include: online journals, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, video games, Telegrams, etc.

2.1. Online Journals

Both Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State publish online journals available worldwide to train, educate and radicalize individuals. The Al-Qaeda has been publishing their journal "*Inspire*" since 2010. The article contains detailed instructions on how to create homemade bombs, execute attacks or how to plan a terrorist attack. It has been confirmed that individuals made or attempted a terrorist attack after downloading the journal. One notable example is the brothers Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, who carried out the bombing of the 2013 Boston Marathon after downloading the journal and using its tutorials on how to make homemade bombs from ordinary pressure cookers.

Similar to Al-Qaeda the Islamic State publishes its own online journal the "*Dabiq*", the name comes from a prophetic location where Muslims battle infidels in a small Syrian town. *Dabiq* differs from *Inspire* by the nature of its content. *Dabiq* promotes the Islamic State as a rational and moral, by promoting its ideology as pure in a world of evil, presented in pictures of important political figures worldwide. There have been nine issues of the journal since March 2015 with topic spanning from the holy war, the importance of community and the Islamic ideology. Furthermore, it promotes the victories and military success of the Islamic State.

2.2. Facebook

There are various ways the terrorist groups use Facebook as was listed in a 2010 report by the Department of Homeland Security:

- "as a way to share operational and tactical information, such as bomb recipes, AK-47 maintenance and use, tactical shooting, etc.;
- as a gateway to extremist sites and other online radical content by linking on Facebook group pages and in discussion forums;
- as a media outlet for terrorist propaganda and extremist ideological messaging;
- as a wealth of information for remote reconnaissance for targeting purposes."

 (Homeland Security Institute, 2009)

With the amount of monthly active Facebook users, the terrorist groups have a vast audience for their radicalization methods.

2.3. Twitter

Similar to Facebook, Twitter has been used as a tool by a multitude of terrorist groups. Terrorist groups post tweets at an hourly basis informing their supporters of the groups activities, ideology and tweets to gain sympathy. Furthermore, there have been a number of cases when mainstream media unknowingly promoted terrorist originated news. Such an incident occurred in April 2013 when a press Twitter account was hacked and tweeted the message of two bombing at the White House, injuring Barack Obama. This tweet was viral in a matter of seconds contributing to the plummeting of stocks at Wall Street.

2.4.   YouTube

YouTube is an effective tool of promoting terrorism through videos. Per YouTube statistics, there are 300 hours of videos posted to the site every minute, this magnitude of videos makes it difficult to monitor the content of all the videos posted. The site has tried to control the spread of terrorist propaganda by featuring a "promotes terrorism" button under all video, relying on the viewers to flag inappropriate content. However, even these measures are miniscule compared to the number of videos with terrorist content posted every day. The removed videos are almost instantly replaced and viewed by thousands.

The complete blockade of YouTube for terrorist propaganda (identified by the authorities) would deny the terrorists a powerful channel, however it would have a sizable impact on the intelligence gathered from such videos by the authorities. On the other hand, terrorists know exactly what they post on the social media, so the validity of such intelligence is under question.

2.5.   Video Games

Terrorist groups have been vocal about attracting a modern young generation to their cause through video games specifically created to promote their ideology and spread the hatred of "corrupted Western authorities". One such game was the "Quest for Bush" released in 2006 by the Global Islamic Media Front, which consisted of players advancing through six mission fighting American soldiers with the Presidents likeness, coming to the last seventh mission where they directly engage the President in a desert region. Throughout the whole game, jihadist songs play in the background.

Another video game, this time released by the Islamic State, was a remodeled popular video game of Grand Theft Auto, in which players role-play as IS soldiers killing law enforcement officials and attacking military vehicles carrying explosives.

Furthermore, Hezbollah, a terrorist group based in Lebanon, developed a series of games: Special Force and Special Force 2, which simulate military mission against Israeli forces in first-person perspective. The second installation of the game also offers personal and mental training for the players.

All of these games are available online translated into different languages in order to reach a global audience.

2.6. Telegrams

Telegrams is a social media app created in 2013, as a messaging service with a strong focus on privacy. It has been exploited by the Islamic State in September 2015, when they created their own channel called "*Nashir*" (translating to English as "distributor"). The Islamic State uses Telegrams, because of its privacy setting that make it harder for the authorities to monitor content. Furthermore, messages sent through this app are equipped with a "burn time" that automatically deletes the messages after a specific time, which simplifies terrorist communication. The Islamic State posts various content through Telegrams, such as training manuals, guides on how to obtain and import weapons, how to make bombs or how to plan and perform single-wolf jihadi attacks. It also uses the app as a form of communication between its terrorist cells worldwide to launch or start planning a terrorist attack.

3. The Process of Radicalization

The process of radicalization has been perfected over time by different terrorist groups. Each group has a different set of tools used for radicalization as well as a different requirement of a potential terrorist. The recruitment process of the Islamic State was broken down into stages by J.M. Berger who proposed this five-part template, adaptable to different situations:

- Discovery – ISIS discovers a potential recruit, or a potential recruit discovers ISIS
- Create Micro-Community – ISIS supporters flock around potential recruits to surround them with social input
- Isolation – Potential recruits are encouraged to cut ties with mainstream influences, such as their families, friends and local religious communities
- Shift to Private Communications – ISIS supporters encourage targets to take their conversations about ISIS into private or encrypted messaging platforms
- Identify and Encourage Action – ISIS supporters probe to figure out what the target is most likely to do (usually travel to join ISIS, or carry out terrorist attacks at home), then encourage the target to take action

(J.M.Berger, 2015)

The Islamic State recruiters are fueled to radicalize other not only by their devotion to their belief but also by a financial incentive. Each recruiter gets an average of 10,000$ for each recruit they radicalize, the price varies per the nature of the recruit, for example doctors, computer specialists, etc. are more valuable.

Manipulation is another successful tool of radicalization, no potential recruit believes they are radicalized by a murderous and radical terror group, they are supplied with ideas of fantastical nature. For example, two American women were lured into Syria under the pretense of providing humanitarian aid. After they entered Syria they were taken to the IS compound and served as sex slaves.

Other manipulation technique is the idea implanted in the recruits' head that he or she belongs and participates in "something bigger than themselves", which gives them purpose in life and welcomes them into a society of like-minded people that serve as a support system in times of need or confusion.

Self-radicalization has become a popular form of joining a terrorist organization. Young

individuals radicalize themselves by reading terrorist journal, downloading content from the internet, reaching out to terrorist cells in their country and many others. With the spread and modernization of the Internet this process only became easier. One such example is Aabid Hussein Khan, who at 22 years old with the help of two other like-minded young individuals formed a terrorist cell in the United Kingdom. He utilized the Internet as a tool to connect people all over Europe, the US and Canada, these young men and women created a society of computer savvy radicalized individuals with the same interests. The cell was only found and disbanded in June 2006.

3.1.   Differences between the Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State on Recruitment

Even though the Islamic State emerged as an arm of Al-Qaeda, after their spilt in 2014 the Islamic State adopted more liberal forms and restrictions on recruitment.

Al-Qaeda is known for its strict vetting process of applicants willing to join their organization. This vetting process is called the "*tazkiyah*", which means that a new applicant must be vouched for by someone already in the organization. For example, an applicant Ifthekar Jaman, whose story was published by the New York Times, was born in England to parents that emigrated from Bangladesh. He travelled to Syrian to join the Nusra Front of Al-Qaeda affiliate. He met a man on a bus in Turkey who helped him travel to a Nusra recruitment office, however they turned him down. He lacked the proper letters of recommendation mandatory for all recruits. The Al-Qaeda has four requirements for membership: swearing alliance to the emir and being obedient, obtaining a personal referral from a member of Al-Qaeda's inner circle, and displaying "good manners". (J.M.Berger, 2015)

On the other hand, the Islamic State stated that: "If you're a Muslim, you're already part of the Caliphate", which means everybody can join their organization. This all-inclusive method of recruitment has helped the Islamic State radicalize thousands of people all over the world. The Internet has eased this process by connecting the recruits and the terrorist groups without the need to travel long distances to join the terrorist front. The Islamic State supports lone-wolf attacks in the home countries of the recruits.

4. Counter Radicalization

Counter radicalization is crucial in the fight to combat terrorism. There are a couple of mechanisms used to counter radicalization: debunking of the terrorist message, spread of counterterrorist messages, modern technology and preventing youth radicalization.

Debunking terrorist teaching has proven to be an effective measure of counter radicalization. If the teaching of the terror group is promoting can be revealed as false and a radical misinterpretation of Islam, the legitimacy of the said terror group would be placed under question, diminishing its community of support and the target group of recruits. Logical and true explanations of Islam have helped rehabilitate recruits into the mainstream society. For example, an initiative in Saudi Arabia of de-radicalizing inmates in prisons has brought sizable results. The program was launched in 2004 with 2000 prisoners enrolled, by 2007 about 700 of the prisoners were released after completing the program. The program consists of: teaching the prisoners about the true beliefs of Quran, rehabilitating former jihadists, and helping to integrate them back into the society. The success of this program is strengthened by the support the prisoners receive after they are released from prison, such as assistance with employment and accommodation.

Furthermore, the spread of counterterrorist messages prevents individuals from being radicalized in the first place. The main platform of this mechanism should be the social media where the main percentage of the radicalization process happens. By providing materials about the true teachings of Quran, counseling and different support systems, individuals prone to radicalization would be protected from the temptation to join or research a terror group. An example of a successful counterterrorist message with impact on the online community was promoted by the hacker group Anonymous, in 2015 in response to the attack on the Parisian newspaper Charlie Hebdo, the group hacked into various Twitter and Facebook accounts of terrorist groups shutting them down and posting this message: "You will be treated like a virus, and we are the cure". Mentioning the Islamic State as the virus spreading through our society and the online community as the cure.

On the same note, in 2015 days after the Charlie Hebdo shooting, the newspaper released an app available online for download to user identifying with their cause of free speech and upholding the motto of the newspaper: "Because a pencil will always be better than barbarity, because freedom is a universal right". The actions of the newspaper show

the spread of counterterrorist message by utilizing the modern technology reaching millions of viewers.

Lastly, preventing the young generation from listening to terrorist messages and teaching them the true values of our society is crucial to protect the future of our society, promoting liberal and democratic values. The private sector has made great steps in the help to protect the younger generation form radicalization by reaching out to the youth where they are online by directly talking to them on social media and giving them the platform to ask questions and form their own uninfluenced opinions.

Conclusion

I would like to encourage the delegates to use this study guide as the first step to a basic understanding of the topic, and to expand their knowledge by going through the further reading recommendations and to research this topic from the perspective of their individual country. I hope the study guide helps the delegates evaluate the main points of our committee sessions and serves as the guideline of future readings.

Further Reading Recommendations

http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reprints/2006/RAND_RP1214.pdf

http://7.iwar.org.uk/cyberterror/resources/cyberplanning/thomas.pdf

https://www.unodc.org/documents/frontpage/Use_of_Internet_for_Terrorist_Purposes.pdf

http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27912569

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