

Forum: Special Committee on SDG #16

Issue: Measures to combat online recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters

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Introduction

In this day and age, technology has become immensely pertinent to our way of life. Advancements in technology have enabled us to create computers, search engines, websites, drones, automated planes, and many more inventions that have helped to higher the standard of quality of life. More specifically, the internet has become a key piece in this ever changing world, and is used by most privileged people everyday. While, often times, we limit our minds to only think of the internet to be a search engine, video streamer, and a platform to express ourselves, we forget that the internet is much, much more. Among this includes Social Media, and Messengers, such as Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and Telegram. All these platforms enable free speech and free posting (with very few limits), and are generally used to portray multiple valid view in our politically divided world. However, over the past several years, terrorist groups such as ISIS, and supporters of terrorism have used platforms such as these to push their cause and recruit more people, specifically young people, to join their extreme cause. Moreover, this topic can be broken down into two sub categories: cyber security and regulation, and counterterrorism. Both of these sub issues have been tackled separately by organization such as the UNODC and the UN Committee on Counter Terrorism, as well as countries such as the United States and United Kingdom. However, up until now, they have not been treated in the same light together. If this topic is treated holistically, and it is agreed that there is a correlation between online propaganda and terrorism recruitment, organizations and MEDCs can begin clamping down more on cybersecurity in further coordination with aerial and ground assaults in the nation where the terrorism originates.

Definition of Key Terms

Online Recruitment

Whenever, any group, business, or organization is looking for something: donations, jobs, or other services, they will use certain tools to bring awareness to the public regarding this, and taking stock of interest. These tools may include promotional video, flyers, presentations, and even in this day and

age, social media. ISIS is no different in this respect; they use social media platforms in order to spread awareness to their cause and request the services of young radicals. These tools often include announcements, and intense, violent media propaganda.

Foreign Terrorist Fighters

Foreign terrorist fighters are defined by the United Nations Security Council as “individuals who travel to a State other than their State of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict.” This definition is troubling on its own, but is essentially correct.

Radicalization

Radicalization is the act of instilling certain extreme political views into a person. The idea of radicalization in the context of the world today is in regard to terrorism and how many people now become radicalized through certain experiences they had, or the more prevalent reason now, the internet.

Net Neutrality

Net Neutrality is the concept that internet service providers and governments cannot discriminate against certain sites because of their identities. However, this gives advantages to controversial sites that have devious intentions of promoting terrorism, The repeal of net neutrality would see these sites discriminated against and blocked out.

Background Information

The Rise and Fall of the Islamic State

The Islamic State is a primary examples of this issue, understanding its influence and rise to power is key. The roots of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria can be traced back to the Al Qaeda Iraq faction which broke off to form a more extreme, more brutal, state under the moniker, ISIS. ISIS first began its expansion in 2013 and 2014, taking over key cities in both Iraq and Syria amid political chaos. In order to sustain control, ISIS required more fighters, and turned to technology. In doing so, they were able to release information through the popular encrypted messenger Telegram, as well as garner support over all social media platforms. These actions helped enable troubled, radicalized individuals, ranging from mainly teenagers to 30 and 40 year olds, to leave their home countries, many coming from Europe and the United States, and join ISIS in their battle against the West. ISIS rapidly grew between 2014-2017, facing little to no serious, effective opposition. By 2016-17, Syria remained in a power

struggle between the Russian backed Syrian Government, the American backed Syrian rebel forces, and ISIS; while American backed Iraq rebels were making swift progress retaking their key cities. During the period between 2017-18, ISIS has since lost much of their land equity in both Syria and Iraq, and have lost many key cities to both the American and Russian forces, while leaving both countries in a state of rubble.

The Presence of Social Media and the Internet in 2018

Among the 7 billion people on this Earth, there are 4 billion internet users and 3 billion social media users. These are very eye opening statistics, as they prove the effect that technological developments have had on this world. In the last decade, smartphones have been introduced as a smaller computer alternative and have only improved from there, with most people now owning a smartphone. ISIS specifically are now increasingly fighting an online cyber war, with the use of slick videos, online messages of hate and even an app that all aim to radicalise and create a new generation of cyber jihadists. These modern day tools are helping ISIS spread their propaganda and ideology to thousands of online sympathisers across the world on prominent social media platforms including Twitter, Snapchat, Youtube Instagram, and Facebook. Within the contents of these platforms are accounts that are controlled by supporters of terrorist groups like ISIS, and while these apps have security measures to prevent controversial pictures and messages, the promotion of terrorism through video has still remained very hard to target to pinpoint and completely block out. Furthermore, more often than not, these social media accounts used by supporters of terrorism are virtually untraceable and so do not even contribute to the eradication of online recruitment of terrorism fighters. Moreover, terrorists and terrorism supporters have been allowed to stay anonymous in many countries that have net neutrality regulations in place. This has forced ISPs to be unbiased and impartial to all websites. However, with the repeal of net neutrality, this now allows for ISPs and governments to be biased and block out controversial and extremist websites. This should have an impact in countries like the US, who have repealed net neutrality.

The Recruitment of terrorists by groups other than ISIS

Other examples of foreign fighter recruitment other than ISIS is fewer and farther between. ISIS is easily the most technologically savvy terrorist group, while its other terrorism counterparts operate in parts of the world where internet is also few and far between. groups like Boko Haram and Hezbollah have used other mediums to convey themselves, but they have not taken to the internet like ISIS have. In the past, groups like Al-Qaeda have broadcast video messages, but have not conveyed them over the internet. On a further note, neo Nazi groups in the US and Europe are prime examples of recruitment via the internet. Currently there are many conservative websites and social media accounts still out there,

that convey messages for their causes. This is a good, non ISIS example, as it shows how the power of the internet and social media have brought people together at events like the Charlottesville rally.

Social Media Networks

The features of Social Media Networks are being taken advantage of for extreme political purposes. While social media was initially created as a way to be social, digitally, it has evolved into this multifaceted concept that includes the sharing of news, political views, other medias, and personal information. However, in particular, the flawed filters do not always work on blocking out extreme, controversial videos that promote extreme causes such as terrorism, and this is the way that social medias are affected most. Further, it has been discussed that some social media platforms have made people wary due to their failure to block such content from their networks, and this could really be the theoretical “stick” media platforms need to create change in this field.

The motivations of foreign terrorists

The motivations of foreign born terrorists are varied; some have been radicalized as a result of certain experiences, while most go because they feel excluded and isolated in their society and are desperate for money. It has been reported that ISIS has attracted foreign talent with wages of anything from \$50-\$500 a month. Furthermore, the individuals partaking in activities concerning terrorism, must be very desperate for political change. Some of these reasons include discrimination, isolation, economic challenge, social injustice, or unhappiness regarding the current government regime.

Teens and Young Adults (20s)

Teens and young adults are considered the future for their MEDCs, but why do they fall victim to some of these horrible recruitment tactics? There are 3 reasons to be considered here, the importance of politics in their lives, the impact of the education system, and the media playing an important role in their lives. Firstly, for youths, the discussion of politics in schools has been severely damped due to a growing political divide in many democratic nations. As well, there is a lack of infrastructure for mental, psychological education and assistance in schools, currently, as well as a lack of education regarding current political events. Moreover, media is playing a larger, and larger role in the lives of youths, especially social media, and compare to the previous generation, the weight of the importance of the media has increased full fold.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

ISIS is by far the most technologically advanced terrorist group. They consistently use encrypted messengers like Telegram to spread information, along with other social media platforms to spread sick propaganda videos. Around 17,000 ISIS fighters were foreign throughout their reign, and while not all recruitments are credited to online, it can be assumed that due to ISIS's large cyber presence, many fighters were inspired to join after seeing ISIS recruitment videos on their social media platforms.

United States of America

The US has played an interesting role in this entire conflict. On one hand, they helped expedite the ISIS decline by backing the Syrian Rebel Forces; while on the other, the policies set by President Trump and the US Senate have alienated Muslims and other enemies of the West, indirectly prompting more foreign terrorist recruitment. Moreover, with regard to the internet, the United States recently repealed the Net Neutrality act, which should have significant improvement in the state of internet security in the US and will be detrimental to the cybersecurity of terrorists. With the repeal of net neutrality, companies can discriminate against certain websites and block them, which would be the case for sites containing controversial, and dangerous material.

European Union Member Nations

The countries of the European Union have been the greatest contributors to the foreign fighter population. Furthermore, like the US, many EU nations have become very conservative and nationalistic, and have alienated Muslims and other enemies of Western beliefs. However, the nations of the EU have continued to help the fight against ISIS in Syria. As well, now with regard to the internet the EU continues to believe in net neutrality, which has enabled less and less control over the content posted on the internet, giving way to terrorism promoters to post what they want and stay anonymous doing so.

Russia

Russia is the other piece of the puzzle in Syria. While the Syrian Rebels and the Syrian Government have continued to fight each other, they have collectively driven ISIS out of several key cities including Aleppo and Raqqa. Furthermore, of all of the ISIS foreign fighters, the majority are Russian, with around 3,000 Russians joining ISIS.

Syrian Rebels and the Syrian Government

Both of these groups, while working against each other, have been able to recover lost land in Syria. This has largely been due to American and Russian support, and it looks as if they may be able to come to an agreement for a more stabilized Syria.

United Nations Office on Counter Terrorism

This body along with the United Nations Security Council are the UN's driving force behind countering terrorist recruitment. Specifically this body deals with all topics related to terrorism, upholding the UN's counter terrorism plan, and working with countries to devise strategies against terrorism. Currently, they have seen many cases of foreign terrorist recruitment, as it is very prevalent, and they have released statements advocating for countries to regulate their laws more closely, both on the internet and the criminal offence that fighters will be charged with if found to be guilty of such crimes.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

The UNODC is still quite an active member in this issue despite the lack of drugs or direct crime. In this particular issue, they are concerned with the level of crime that this recruitment is enticing. They have collaborated closely on the UN Counter Terrorism Strategy. Moreover, they are the main sub body of the UN spearheading the greater issue of terrorist recruitment, and as of yet, they have been successful in attempting to prevent further recruitment since 2017. The lack of recruitment really has shown for global terrorist groups like ISIS, as they have since declined. However, the UNODC has not been managing domestic terrorism, and the recruitment tactics that is used. This includes Neo Nazi groups in the US, and other fairly nationalistic groups.

Timeline of Events

Events

Date	Description of event
2015-2012	There are 5 attempts to streamline net neutrality regulations in the United States
April, 2013	Baghdadi relocates to Syria, and re-names the group Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.
January, 2014	ISIS takes control of Raqqa, Syria, which becomes its de-facto capital.
June 29th, 2014	ISIS declares caliphate; Baghdadi named caliph.
January, 2015	Net Neutrality goes into full effect with new regulations in the US
2015	Net Neutrality is passed in Europe

June 29th, 2017	Iraq reclaims mosque in Mosul, and the Iraqi Prime Minister claims that the caliphate has fallen.
July 9th, 2017	Iraqi PM declares that Mosul is fully liberated.
April, 2018	Facebook Cambridge Analytica scandal forces all social media platforms to reevaluate their filters for controversial information
June, 2018	Net Neutrality is repealed in the US

*Throughout this whole time, the rise and the fall of ISIS, they recruited foreign soldiers, and, as they declined, more and more of their fighters, both local and foreign were killed.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- UN Resolution on Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts – foreign terrorist fighters, 2017 (**S/RES/2396**)
- UN Resolution on The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Review, 19 July 2016 (**A/RES/70/291**)
- UN Resolution on Activities of the United Nations system in implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, 12 April 2016 (**A/70/826**)
- UN Resolution on Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, 24 December 2015 (**A/70/674**)
- UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy, 20 September 2006 (**A/RES/60/288**)
- UN Resolution on Measures to eliminate international terrorism, 9 December 1994 (**A/RES/49/60**)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Currently the most drastic set of solutions that have come from nations, are those regarding the penalties and restrictions in place with respect to foreign fighters. These attempts include establishing serious criminal offenses in regard to the travel, recruitment, and financing of foreign terrorist fighters. This is more focused towards those fighters who return from their respective fights. Nonetheless, making the criminal charges more serious for all of these offences can improve the situation, as in some cases it can instill fear into citizens not to join the fight.

Social Media Platforms/Internet Filtering/Cyber Security

On the topic of online recruitment, nations are working with tech companies to be able to make the internet safer, and limit its content. One of the most famous examples of public criticism of the internet was when President Donald Trump denounced the internet suggesting “shutting it down” after a London Underground Attack. While this may not hold the answer to this complicated issue, the awareness that it brought should have sent a clear message to social media companies to make their filters more secure.

Net Neutrality

Furthermore, the United States recently repealed the Net Neutrality act, which should have significant improvement in the state of internet security in the US and will be detrimental to the cybersecurity of terrorists. With the repeal of net neutrality, companies can discriminate against certain websites and block them, which would be the case for sites containing controversial, and dangerous material. However, net neutrality still exists in the EU, which gives free license to terrorists to launch websites and social media accounts with all kinds of propaganda they want without being immediately punished. Moreover, much of the developing still does not have net neutrality, which may be a good thing -- for now, as this will lessen the promotion of terrorism in the world.

Possible Solutions

All of these issues stem from the technological developments of the 21st Century. Before the 21st Century, internet was not very prevalent -- or pertinent to our society, and at most, it was used for research and mainly its browser. However, since then, the internet has enabled us to use social media, play games, and view media. All of which may seem harmless, but especially the first, and the third can be used in deceptive ways.

Social Media Platforms

Currently, all social media platforms recognize that their filters to block out extremist media and other controversial material generally work on pictures and messages, but have reportedly had a difficult experience automatically blocking out video. This is a large problem for these platforms in regard to this issue, as a primary resource that terrorist groups use are forms of media, with videos being popular. A proposed solution to fix this issue would be to encourage these platforms to collaborate on the formation of a new privacy filter, which is more effective. Furthermore, this also enhances security across all platforms and helps platforms retain customers (this may be an incentive for collaboration). Furthermore, the early radicalization of youth is a major problem leading to the recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters.

This issue generally stems from the values of the child, which are instilled into them depending on the kind of childhood they had. Nonetheless, these troubled youth need to be one of the key focus points when combating these issues.

Mental Health Infrastructure

Currently, the development and improvement of mental health is a movement in the US, and some parts of Europe. Therefore, all governments should be encouraged to implore their local governments to set up seminars, and counseling sessions with children to discuss tough subjects and give them a safe outlet for their feelings rather than an extreme life threatening outlet like the world of terrorism. Ultimately, this issue is extremely hard to combat in the heavily digitized world, however, regardless of this, it can be combated in the aforementioned ways.

Net Neutrality Repeal

As well, continuing to fight for the reevaluation of the internet in certain regions, in the context of net neutrality repeal would be beneficial to block out terrorism promoting sites. This has already gone into effect in the United States, and as much of the world already does not have net neutrality, no net neutrality may become the world standard in order to protect people from self radicalization via the internet.

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