First session
  Agenda item
  18 March 2023

Preventing Terrorist Recruitment

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Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the UNCSW the topic synopsis entitled "Preventing Terrorist Recruitment." (GA/AHTER/SYN/IIC/00.2).

Preventing Terrorist Recruitment

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Section I—Introduction

The Ad Hoc Committee on Terrorism ("Ad Hoc Terror") was established by the General Assembly of the United Nations on the 17th of December, 1996. The committee's purpose is to combat terrorist threats— bombings, nuclear threats, training camps, and so on— and develop a proper legal framework to do so. The global growth of internet usage and the increased interconnectivity have bred a new form of terrorism— cyber terrorism.

Section II—Background Information

From the years 2011-2021, an average of 56 million deaths occurred globally, with an average of 26,000 by way of terrorist attacks. Despite accounting for less than .05% of global deaths, the impact terrorism exerts on global wellness is staggering. With society globally connected via social media and 24 hour television news cycles, terrorist acts exert a disproportionate amount of influence on the world stage, and it is through acts of terror that these organizations enact their agenda. Terrorist organizations rely on constant recruitment to refresh and revitalize the organization, and among the most vulnerable groups to recruitment by terror organizations are adolescents. These organizations flourish primarily due to these vast human resources, allowing them to initiate attacks and maintain operations. Therefore, restricting recruitment hurts the capacity of terrorist groups to operate and hinders the long-term impact of terrorism. Without the pivotal lifeblood of new recruits in their ranks, terrorist organizations would suffer a sizable blow.

To combat recruitment efforts, it is necessary to discuss the two main motivations of individuals joining the terrorist groups: compliance and internalization. Compliance refers to the coercion of people to join another group. In developing countries, many impoverished individuals encounter deplorable living conditions, including starvation. However, individuals primarily join terrorist organizations because of internalization, when the individual agrees with a group's beliefs and neglects their own.

Organizations achieve internalization by interacting with a person and compelling them through radical thinking, including ideas of religious salvation. Another motivation includes the need concept where people actively participating in terrorism want to communicate their usefulness and, as a result, receive meaning into their lives. A sense of validation often occurs with people who feel like they belong somewhere, despite the bloodshed or cruelty of the organization.

Terror organizations actively recruit new members through a variety of means, sometimes differentiated by the environment in which they operate. Utilizing Al-Qaida as a focus of study, the RAND Corporation identified four basic methods of recruitment. Net Strategy typically occurs in places without opposition to the terrorist organization. This approach thrives with widespread propaganda media used to draw interest to its program. Another practice, the Funnel method, materializes when a population doesn't have motivation a leader would wish. It involves putting potential recruits through a series of initiations, or "hazings". The individuals "funneled" out of the crowd are highly motivated and irrevocably indoctrinated into the organization's cause. In communities where promoting the organization publicly proves risky or inefficient,

groups utilize the Infection Method. A well trained and persuasive member of the organization will enter the epicenter of the targeted population, interacting one-on-one with potential recruits. In remote surroundings where media or recruiters cannot be placed, organizations utilize the Seed-Crystal Method. Organizations change the living conditions of the physical environment and convince inhabitants that joining is the only way out of this desperate situation.

Section III—UN Involvement

On June 15 2017, the UN passed a resolution forming the United Nations Counter Terrorism Office. It is the first initiative taken by the UN where it actively assists member states in dealing with terrorism. It aims to accomplish this by enforcing the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

Primarily, this strategy aims to address the conditions that lure people into terrorism, such as compliance and internalization. While fighting the terrorist activity in the world today, the UN also aims to prevent future terrorism in multiple ways, including hindering recruitment into these organizations. After accomplishing this, the UN wishes to introduce measures to increase a state's capacity to prevent and combat terrorism. A robust defense of human rights is a cornerstone of UN strategy, for a population with access to education, infrastructure and hope for the future will be less likely to fall under the sway of a terror organization. In addition, a government free of corruption will offer less incentive for terror organizations to commit atrocities, and potential recruits will, in theory, have access to resources to assist them in shrugging off terrorist recruitment.

In 2014, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2178 in regard to Foreign Terrorist Fighters. This resolution obligated countries who signed this resolution to take specific steps addressing terrorists within their region. Countries were required to enforce certain human rights to prevent polarization in political and social ideology. Countries also needed to acknowledge how the internet plays a role in recruiting terrorism. They needed to be aware of what information was being disseminated online should it lead disaffected members of society to the terrorist way of thinking. According to the resolution, countries would need to report their findings on terrorism to the UN every 180 days to ensure that they are not allowing any potential terrorist recruitment or propaganda incursions.

Section IV—Possible Solutions

The policy of countries, along with the UN, should show confirmation that terrorist organizations have reduced recruitment numbers and should continue these patterns so that future generations do not get involved with terrorist organizations. Preventing the distribution of terrorist propaganda and information proves to be incredibly critical. Limitations on access to media enforced by the government is a possibility, however it must be taken in stride with appropriate protections for the rights of the country's population. Another way to address the issue is to find and shut down terrorist recruitment "funnels." Targeting areas near the organization's core can have the largest effect in slowing down the organization and, most importantly, making it harder for terrorists to manipulate others into being followers. Appropriate systems of justice need to be implemented such that terrorists are eliminated as threats, however it may be necessary to consider what ramifications may result from an overzealous application of justice. Martyrdom of a beloved or respected leader within a terrorist organization may bolster the ranks of a terrorist organization rather than reducing

them. Actions must be prioritized in impoverished and developing nations as well as those with high levels of terrorist activity.

Realistic funding for solutions is imperative to the degree of success they achieve. Poorly funded initiatives may come across as insincere and merely symbolic to the people affected and may ultimately be ineffective. One solution could be the donation of a fixed percentage of a governments' GDP (1%, for example) to the United Nations effort to end terrorism. Especially in developing and destabilized countries, creating solutions that are explored thoroughly and well-funded are essential to gaining the trust of the people and stopping them from entering terrorist organizations.

Section V—Bloc Positions

African: The high poverty rate makes Africa a perfect breeding ground for compliance recruitment in Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa. In recent years, a peak in terrorist activity occurred in Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2017, the United States reported that ISIS' stranglehold has expanded into the North African countries of Tunisia and Libya as well as a large portion of the Greater Sahara. Nations committed to combating terrorism, most notably South Africa, have joined with UNODC in May 2022 to target terrorism or violent extremism within the area.

Asia-Pacific: This bloc is plagued with terrorist attacks and organizations. Most notably, the recent Taliban takeover of Afghanistan violently shook the nation and surrounding area. In past years, Iraq and Syria have been considered one epicenter of global terrorism. ISIS has been actively recruiting throughout the region in an attempt to enact its will on the region. These nations seek assistance and militaristic support from Western countries.

Eastern European: Compared to other parts of the world, less terrorism is reported in Eastern Europe. Eastern Europe, through the European Union, announced a strategy in preventing terrorism. The three main objectives of the plan were to strengthen citizen safety, prevent extremist ideology, and collaborate with other countries internationally. The European Union asserted their efforts recently through controlling the industry of firearms and criminalizing travel if it is suspected to be connected with terrorist activity.

Latin American and Caribbean: The main driving force for terrorism is political unrest. Political corruption, as well as historical social and economic inequity have led to a number of powerful terror groups. The Colombian National Liberation Army (E.L.N.) and The Shining Path operating out of Peru have been particularly active in the region.

Western European and Others: This bloc is not immune to the either the threat of terrorist attacks or the flourishing of terrorist organizations within its borders, despite having significant socio-economic advantages. Well developed infrastructure makes for quite complex recruitment strategies, and as a whole these regions serve as enticing targets both for terrorist attacks as well as recruitment.

Section VI—Questions That Should Be Taken Into Consideration

How can one establish programs to counter the recruitment of people by terrorist organizations?

Which of the four types of recruitment would the proposed solution have the greatest effect on?

Does this solution have long term viability, or is just short term relief for the countries really struggling with this issue?

How do we reconcile legitimate concerns raised by illegitimate organizations (e.g.: terrorist organizations)?

Section VI—Helpful Sites and Resources

UNODC: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime—Document—Handbook on Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: The Role of the Justice System
bit.ly/IIMUN2023-ADHOCTERROR01 (Shortened URL from unodc.org)

Frontiers in Psychology—Article—Why People Enter and Embrace Violent Groups
bit.ly/IIMUN2023-ADHOCTERROR02 (Shortened URL from frontiersin.org)

RAND National Security Research—Article—Al-Qaeda terrorist selection and recruitment
bit.ly/IIMUN2023-ADHOCTERROR03 (Shortened URL from rand.org)

Financial Action Task Force—Report—Financing of Recruitment for Terrorist Purposes
bit.ly/IIMUN2023-ADHOCTERROR04 (Shortened URL from fatf-gafi.org)

University of Maryland—Database—Global Terrorism Database
bit.ly/IIMUN2023-ADHOCTERROR05 (Shortened URL from umd.edu)

UN—Fact Sheet—UN Security Council Resolution 2178 on Foreign Terrorist Fighters
bit.ly/IIMUN2023-ADHOCTERROR06 (Shortened URL from un.org)

U.S Department of State—Report—Country Reports on Terrorism 2019
bit.ly/IIMUN2023-ADHOCTERROR07

Potential Search Terms: Prevention of Terrorism, Strategies for Terrorist Recruitment, Al-Qaeda's tactics for terrorist recruitment, Counter-Terrorism Strategy, Compliance Recruitment