DISARMAMENT & INTERNATIONAL SECURITY COMMITTEE (DISEC)

Topic 2: Disrupting youth terrorist recruitment through social media

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1. Definition of Key Terms

Foreign fighters: fighters who enlist to take part in wars or military missions in which their native country is not directly involved.

Jihad: terrorist groups inspired by Islamic fundamentalism. In the religious language of Muslim peoples, the "holy war" against the infidels.

ICT: Information and communication technology.

Arab Spring: unrest and riots have erupted since 2010 in some Arabic-speaking countries, such as Syria, Libya, Egypt, Tunisia and many others, from the Middle East to North Africa.

2. Introduction

The international community has recognized terrorism as a global threat since 11 September 2001, following the collapse of the Twin Towers in New York, United States. The attack was organized by the international paramilitary terrorist movement of Islamic ideology Al Qaida, founded by Osama Bin Laden in Afghanistan in 1988 and expanded into Pakistan, Syria, Yemen, Somalia and the Maghreb. Since then, despite the death of Bin Laden in Pakistan in 2011 during an anti-terrorist operation by the United States Navy and that of his successor Ayman al-Zawahiri in 2022, following the birth of new organizations, Islamic terrorism continues to shake the international balance, representing a global danger.

3. Background Information

Based on the data collected by the GTI (Global Terrorism Index) between 2020 and 2022, three terrorist groups have been identified, which, albeit in collaboration with other more niche movements, are considered responsible for more than half of the deaths that occurred during the attacks of terrorists.

The first group, according to statistics, are the Taliban. They represent a fundamentalist and radical Islamic religious movement, mainly of the Pashtun ethnic group, made up of those who define themselves as

"Koranic students". They set themselves the goal of imposing a rigid and literal interpretation of the Koran, which they consider the only reliable Islamic text. The Taliban movement was born in Afghanistan in the late 80s, after the war against the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In this period Mohammed Omar joined the Islamic Revolutionary Movement and at the end of the war, having become a mullah (an expert theologian of Islam), he founded the Taliban organization together with a group of students. As already mentioned, the religious objective of this school of thought is to bring Islam back to the purity of its origins, through strict observance of the Koran. It was mainly influenced by the fundamentalist movements of Deobandi (present in India) and Wahhabism (present in the Arabic peninsula). The Taliban do not allow any religious representations, even in temples, they do not allow women to leave their homes without a male presence and the Burqa, and they do not allow men to wear trimmed Western-style beards. On 15 August 2021, following the abandonment of the country by international forces, the Taliban arrived in the Afghan capital Kabul, conquering the country which today is in a situation of extreme poverty due to a disastrous economic crisis. To date, an estimated five million people are displaced between Afghanistan and neighbouring countries, particularly in Pakistan.

The second terrorist group considered among the most dangerous in the world is Boko Haram, founded in 2002 in the state of Borno, in north-eastern Africa. At the head of the movement, which was added in 2013 to the list of terrorist organizations is Abubakar Shekau. It is an extremist Salafi-jihadist movement, supported directly by some wealthy Nigerian families. The group's main objective is in fact to re-establish an Islamic state in the northernmost region of Nigeria, where the Sokoto Caliphate once stood, which also included Niger and Cameroon. Currently, the areas around the Lake Chad basin are the most affected by terrorist attacks, in particular the states of Yobe and Adamawa. Boko Haram is considered one of the most violent terrorist organizations ever officially registered; for example, it is suspected of the slaughtering of 110 Christian farmers and the kidnapping and enslavement of 276 schoolgirls from the Chibok region in 2014; these girls were victims of sexual abuse and violence. The movement's main funding comes from the Nigerian military, a supplier of both arms and funds. The group was also funded by local political figures opposed to the central government, as well as governors of regions such as Kano and Bauchi. This rapid spread of Boko Haram is due to the discontent that still exists in Nigeria, which is experiencing delicate political and social issues. Currently, more than half of the Nigerian population lives in conditions of extreme poverty, which the organization has been able to exploit by directing the popular consensus to its side.

The third terrorist group is ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), also known as ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant). It was formed in 2003, as a group affiliated with the largest and most powerful al-Qaeda. The break between the two organizations took place in 2014, under Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, who announced the foundation of an Islamic state which included the territories between Iraq and Syria controlled by ISIS, which then became an independent group. Currently, the organization controls an area of about 35,000 square kilometres, from Aleppo (northern Syria) to the Diyala region (eastern Iraq), an area where more than 6 million people live. It is estimated that between 7,000 and 10,000 people operate the terrorist movement, including locals and men who left Western countries to serve the Islamic State. ISIS represents an economically autonomous organization unlike other terrorist organizations; for example, it supplies electricity to Syria, owns oil fields and has established the collection of taxes in the occupied countries.

4. The Online Radicalisation Method

Technology has been an instrument of influence and diffusion of extremist ideologies towards individuals around the world and at all ages since the first 2000s, especially with the advent of the internet and social networks. "Cyber terrorism" is the strategy used by some terrorist organizations to propagate their ideologies, to actively display their power through the internet and to directly attack public and private companies or even national and governmental computer systems.

The communicative use of technology started mainly with the arrival and success of platforms and forums, where any kind of topic could be discussed without being listened to or controlled by third parties. Then came the possibility of sharing multimedia content, so terrorists started stimulating their audience by sharing videos and photos of other attacks. This still represents one of the most significant elements of influence,

especially among the youngest, who are particularly fascinated by these videos, which spur constant excitement. The first step to which the subjects chosen for the purpose of radicalization are subjected is, in fact, the timely sending of multimedia content. They can portray terrorist missions by the movement that tries to lure them, to make these acts of violence more and more normal and familiar in the eyes of the spectators, but also torture and ugliness of all kinds committed by the alleged "enemies" of the terrorist movement, to elicit an emotional reaction of indignation and resentment. These methods have a particular effect on the most fragile subjects. These are typically young people, specifically those who are victims of strong social disparities, sometimes due to their ethnic origins and their religious beliefs, which may coincide with those of extremist movements with which they come into contact. Members of terrorist organizations specialising in cyber activities are called jihobbyists. The purpose of this cyber propaganda allows organizations to reach a large number of individuals in every part of the planet, and, as already mentioned, social networks, platforms and forums represent in many cases the first form of contact with the so-called "foreign fighters".

A concrete case of massive online radicalisation happened in Bangladesh, where the YouTube channel Ummah Network, which started posting videos with Islamic radical content in 2016, reached 655k followers, and more than 1 million visuals. Bangladesh is actually one of the countries with the highest amount of radicalisation.

5. Major Countries Involved

- **France**: France is, according to the data of recent years, the European country where there has been a greater Islamic radicalization by young people. Overall, it is globally one of the nations most affected by international terrorist attacks of all time. The reasons are linked to the state of colonial power that the nation had until the sixties when the collapse of the empire took place. Following this, millions of citizens from the former colonies were absorbed but never fully integrated. To date, more than 12% of minors living in Paris are originally from the Maghreb, while 9% are from Sub-Saharan Africa. The high number of incidents of racism, combined with the economic gap and disparity, have led to a strong wave of jihadist radicalization in France over the last 20 years, especially among the very young. In 2018, more than 1,200 French people travelled to Syria to support the Holy War, now they are almost 1,900.
- **Iraq:** Iraq is certainly the birthplace of the majority of foreign fighters fighting on the Syrian front. The number of Iraqi soldiers present in the Jihad army is such that without them the Holy War could not have been sustained. The leader of the ISIL jihadist terrorist movement, one of the most powerful extremist religious organizations of all time, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, is himself Iraqi. Since Syria and Iraq are neighbouring territories and partly controlled by ISIL, exchanges of weapons and soldiers take place.
- **Pakistan:** The first group of Taliban from Pakistan to Syria was sent in 2013, making it currently the first country with an Islamic religious majority in terms of the number of soldiers employed in the Holy War, without counting the countries where the wars take place. Pakistani militias are self-managed, with a training and coordination camp having been created for Pakistani use only.
- **Tunisia:** There are approximately 6000 jihadists with Tunisian citizenship currently. In fact, as a consequence of the Arab Spring, a strong link has been established between Syria and Tunisia, which still could not prevent several volunteers from leaving. Furthermore, several Tunisian girls have been sent to the ranks of the jihadist army to practice Jihad al-nikah or the sexual concession of themselves to soldiers following temporary marriages.
- **United Kingdom**: According to statistics, foreign fighters with English citizenship are currently more than 1,600 and are mainly employed by the organizations of ISIS and the al-Nusra Front, a minor armed jihadist group engaged in the Syrian civil war. Fighters from the United Kingdom are currently the most active in spreading propaganda online, especially that conveyed by social media.

6. UN Involvement

The Cybersecurity and New Technologies programme was created by the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism to control and prevent actions by terrorist organizations on the internet and in particular to discourage their propaganda use of social networks.
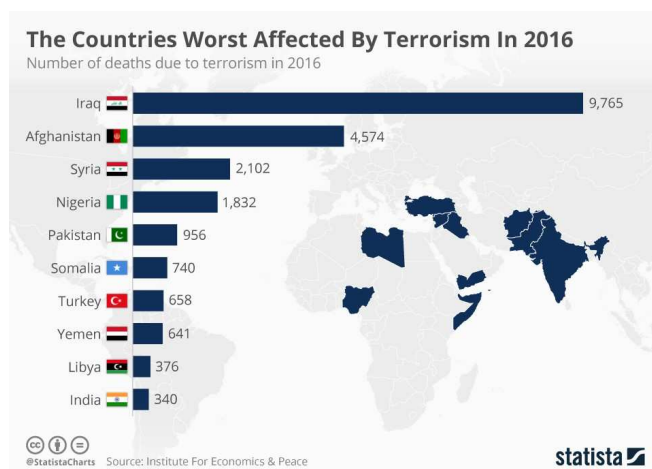
In Resolution 2341 (2017), the Security Council invites all Member States to collaborate in the fight against terrorism through an exchange of information and experiences to avoid and possibly recover from terrorist attacks, including those that occur through communication networks.

In the Security Council text S/2015/939 (Madrid guiding principles), guiding principle 25, calls on Member States to review their legislation so that all incriminating evidence – including that gathered through ICT, social media and electronic surveillance – can be used against terrorist movements, respecting human rights and freedom of speech.

Guiding principle number 26 invites nations to develop the skills of their agents to identify and anticipate suspicious movements on the internet attributable to terrorism.

In Security Council resolution 2370 (2017), Member States are invited to cooperate internationally and with private partners in an attempt to prevent the supply of weapons by terrorist organizations through technology

In addition, the United Nations has signed up for a program, the Youth Engagement and Empowerment Programme, dedicated to the role played by young people in the fight against terrorism and the radicalization of their peers. The program contains texts signed by some of the principal bodies of the United Nations.

The Countries Worst Affected By Terrorism In 2016
Number of deaths due to terrorism in 2016

Country	Deaths
Iraq	9,765
Afghanistan	4,574
Syria	2,102
Nigeria	1,832
Pakistan	956
Somalia	740
Turkey	658
Yemen	641
Libya	376
India	340

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