

Chapter 13

Prevention of Recruitment to Terrorism

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The long-term survival of terrorist organizations relies on their ability to attract new members and maintain an ongoing terrorist recruitment cycle. The numbers of terrorist organization members may decrease due to counterterrorism operations or defections, forcing the leaders of those groups to seek new members. Preventing terrorist recruitment is one of the most effective and least lethal methods of countering terrorism, and yet it is often overlooked by those combating terrorism. Western governments did not stop Al-Qaeda from recouping its losses, even after it suffered devastating losses in the months following the 9/11 attacks. The fact is that Al-Qaeda had only around 400 armed members at the time of 9/11, as opposed to thousands of affiliated members in 2019. Although the recruitment strategies of different organizations may vary, they follow a similar historical pattern. All recruiters must first identify qualified candidates, then establish secure connections, build rapport, indoctrinate them, and slowly pull them into an organization. ISIS proved that this process could be fast-forwarded through online propaganda and social media. Preventing recruitment in the first place can be the most fruitful, and maybe also least expensive, method used to counter terrorism. Successfully short-circuiting the recruitment cycle may save thousands of lives of prospective recruits and many more lives by thwarting future attacks. This chapter aims to present a holistic and comprehensive road map for interrupting and preventing terrorist recruitment by identifying relevant societal factors and triggers that recruiters use to find and control their subjects.

Keywords: Terrorist recruitment, prevention, terrorism, intervention, countering terrorism, family involvement.

Preventing terrorist recruitment is one of the least lethal and most practical, inexpensive, and humane ways of countering terrorism, both in the short- and long-term. However, historically, preventing recruitment to terrorism has often been ignored or considered a less appealing method of countering terrorism. Often, counterterrorism authorities rightly focus on being able to provide immediate security and prevent terrorist attacks by carrying out counterterrorism operations or targeting operators who have already been recruited into the ranks of terrorist organizations. While these operations may provide much-needed short-term security and prevention, they often cannot prevent the ongoing cycle of terrorist recruitment.

Prevention of recruitment to terrorism can be compared to preventive medicine, which focuses on promoting practical day-to-day approaches to support the health and well-being of individuals and communities and prevent disease, disability, and death. The fundamental approach of preventive medicine encompasses simple measures like washing hands, being careful with hygiene, immunizing the population, avoiding smoking, and getting screened for various conditions. As a result, illnesses can be prevented and people do not need expensive treatments and procedures, which saves millions of lives and dollars. Similarly, the prevention of recruitment to terrorism, by decreasing the numbers of terrorists, would not only lead directly to fewer terrorist attacks and casualties, but also to fewer resources being spent on investigating such attacks, including human and judicial resources and prison-related expenses. Furthermore, such preventive activities would lead to fewer arrests and terrorist casualties, as well as strengthening peace and harmony in societies by eliminating the escalation of conflicts.

There are increasing numbers of practices, de-radicalization programs, and programs for countering violent extremism (CVE) and preventing violent extremism (PVE). However, most of these programs focus on individuals or groups who have already been recruited or radicalized. This could be considered a late step in the prevention of terrorist recruitment, as it does not focus on individuals directly before they are radicalized and recruited.

Prevention programs targeting terrorist recruitment are also more productive than conventional police and intelligence work, simply because they reduce the risks involved when working with active terrorist organization members. More importantly, as a result of these programs, fewer individuals are being imprisoned or killed through operations, and families and communities are not being alienated or distanced from the government or law enforcement agencies. I observed consistently during my tenure in Sanliurfa, Turkey, and research activities that, even if the siblings of an arrested terrorist were not true believers in a particular terrorist ideology, the chances of their recruitment significantly increased if their loved ones had been arrested.¹

The advantages of the prevention of terrorist recruitment are also in line with an essential rule of countering terrorism argued by Wilkinson, namely that “governments should try and avoid over-reaction and repression by their security forces”² in order to achieve a balanced counterterrorism strategy. From the perspectives of families and friends, counterterrorism operations might be seen as repressive and unjustifiable if their loved ones are harmed or lost, regardless of how balanced those operations are. The literature also suggests that hard-power law enforcement counterterrorism strategies should be carefully calibrated so as not to alienate populations and individuals, and they should not be excessive, discriminatory, or political.³ Correspondingly, Crenshaw⁴ and Roth⁵ pointed out that counterterrorism activities should be carried out under the norms of a judicial process and adhere to democratic frameworks to avoid the backlash and the emotions that can stem from disproportional interventions.

Finally, to succeed and survive, terrorist organizations are always seeking new recruits. For a successful counterterrorism policy, it is imperative that the vicious cycle of terrorist recruitment be targeted and interrupted. Preventing recruitment to terrorism should be considered the first step in countering terrorist activities. This chapter presents a road map of tactics and policies for disrupting recruitment, arguing that there is no single method when it comes to this; rather, one should follow a holistic approach that encompasses a combination of

the tools prescribed throughout this chapter, based on addressing the ideologies, demographics, and geographies and the organization, its base, and the target populations involved.

The Concept of Terrorist Recruitment

Historically, terrorist organizations have used different tactics to recruit new members, often based on their ideologies, locations, and objectives. From this perspective, no single, uniform recruitment process exists.⁶ However, terrorist organizations learn from each other, and there are often many similarities in how they reach out, indoctrinate, and recruit new members.

In most cases, terrorist recruitment is a never-ending process, with several different layers existing through which terrorist organizations try to extend their reach and expand their base. In fact, the life of a terrorist organization depends on its ability to reach out to new people and persuading them to join and “guarantee the next generation.”⁷ Nesser, in explaining the reliance on recruitment, points to the “culture for recruitment” among the jihadist circles and describes it as “an inherent, expansive drive to the jihadist movements,” which forces dedicated Salafi jihadists to “use all opportunities to try to recruit for their cause.”⁸

Often, people think of the militarily trained strike forces of terrorist organizations and the ideological hardcore as those who carry out the attacks. However, there are several other structures involved. These include large state-like bureaucracies such as the state-like bureaucracy ISIS had or Hezbollah currently has, logistical and financial support units, media and propaganda units, civilian leaders assigned to control/represent different regions or structures, or simply a base, that is, people who directly or indirectly, actively or passively, support the organization ideologically, financially, or however they can, without directly being involved in armed confrontations and conflicts. In most cases, the base is where a candidate would be judged and tested before being assigned to a more serious position, as in an armed cell. Therefore, the recruitment of a terrorist organization has a broader perspective that encompasses all aspects and functions of the organization.

Terrorist recruitment is a lengthy and time-consuming process that is often well-planned and carefully conducted by the full membership of a terrorist group. For instance, Al-Qaeda produced a recruitment manual,⁹ “A Course in the Art of Recruiting,” which is a great example of how terrorist organizations emphasize the importance of recruitment by producing step-by-step field manuals to teach their members how to properly recruit by following recommended procedures.

Additionally, it should be kept in mind that a group’s inability to reach its final objective to enlist a large number of dedicated militant members should not automatically be considered an unsuccessful venture. For a variety of reasons, prospective recruits might not dedicate themselves to the group as “soldiers,” but might become part of the larger base, where they can offer support by providing resources such as finances, safe havens, and expertise.

Key Terms: Radicalization, Recruitment, and Prevention

There is a need to define these three terms in the light of diverse uses in the current literature, as these terms will be frequently referred to in this chapter.

Radicalization

Radicalization, for the purpose of this chapter, is defined as “a set of complex causal processes in which multiple factors work together to produce extremist outcomes,”¹⁰ leading to the assumption and acceptance of terrorist ideologies, along with the violent activities stemming from these. McCauley and Moskaleiko argue that radicalization can happen at different levels;

the individual, group, and mass-public levels.¹¹ The characteristics of these three levels of radicalization are used in this chapter when referring to a variety of recruitment scenarios.

It is important to acknowledge that not everybody who assumes radical ideas becomes violent or becomes a terrorist. Radicalization by itself is not exclusively the focus of this chapter but rather the socialization and mobilization towards terrorism and violence through radicalization, as the assumption of a radical ideology is the essential path to violent extremism and terrorist activity. Mark Sedgwick has been correct in arguing that the term *radicalization* is an ambiguous term that has created confusion among the researchers and government officials.¹² Vergani and his colleagues categorize two different types of radicalization that result in violent extremism. They distinguish between “studies that focus on behavioral radicalization (which focuses on an individual’s engagement in violent action) and cognitive radicalization (which focuses on an individual’s adoption and internalization of violent and extremist beliefs).”¹³

Recruitment

Recruitment in this chapter is referred to as the entire process by which a terrorist organization reaches out to potential new candidates and tries to persuade them to join their group, through a series of well planned, systematic, and supervised activities.

Researchers have long studied why some people get recruited to terrorist organizations, while many others in comparable circumstances do not. As explained by Hegghammer, much of the literature on recruitment falls into “one of four categories, depending on whether the focus is on supply or demand, and underlying or proximate determinants” (see Figure 1).¹⁴

Figure 1. Typology of Analytical Approaches to Differential Recruitment¹⁵

	<i>Supply</i>	<i>Demand</i>
Underlying determinants	Recruit attributes	Group attributes
Proximate determinants	Networks, socialization	Recruiter tactics

While numerous researchers have studied various aspects of terrorist recruitment, such as the demographics of recruits or their psychological profiles, this chapter examines the process itself.

Prevention

Prevention is the action of stopping something from happening. In this chapter, the term prevention of recruitment is used to mean planned, systematic, and holistic action taken to stop a prospective recruit from joining a terrorist organization. Prevention can be applied at any stage of the recruitment process. In the context of this chapter, the term *prevention* does not refer to hindering terrorist attacks or other terrorist actions, but rather to preventing terrorist recruitment.

The majority of the research conducted under the notion of prevention falls under “terrorism prevention policy and programs” that aim “to reduce the risk of terrorism by applying tools and approaches other than the traditional law enforcement and criminal justice tools of arrest, prosecution, and incarceration.”¹⁶ This chapter on the prevention of terrorist recruitment covers parts of these efforts; however, its focus is solely on the prevention of terrorist recruitment, which should be considered as a subcategory of the broader “terrorism prevention policy and programs.”

The Attack-Exposure-Propaganda-Recruitment Continuum

Beyond their ideologies, terrorist organizations thrive on four important elements to survive. Essentially, these steps follow each other, each kick-starting the next part of the process through a vicious cycle, constantly contributing to the survival of terrorist organizations (see Figure 2).

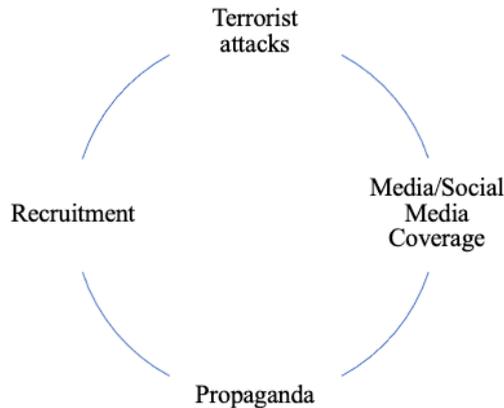
Terrorist attacks are inherently designed as communication tools used to spread fear among the populace and convey a message through violence. This is one of the main reasons for why, in Schmid and Jongman's groundbreaking analysis of the discourse of terrorism definitions, which examined the frequency of terms in 109 definitions, 'violence and force' had the highest frequency, at 83.5 percent, and 'fear and terror' emphasized the third-highest frequency, at 51 percent.¹⁷

As communication strategies, terrorist attacks first aim to present terrorist organizations as more powerful and sophisticated than they actually are. Second, attacks are carried out to hijack media coverage and help spread their messages in the aftermath of an attack. Terrorist attacks may dominate for a short while the world agenda, leading to intense publicity through excessive media coverage (and now through social media as well), which translates into mass propaganda. This free media coverage enables the terrorist organization in question to recruit more members. As early as 1975, Brian Jenkins, noted, "Terrorists want a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead."¹⁸

Free media coverage and propaganda spread through terrorist attacks, in a sense, catalyze the base of a terrorist organization. They send the message that a group is powerful; in the words of a terrorist I interviewed in the past, "boiling the blood of their base to mobilize them," and affording them opportunities to reach out to new people.

Gaining publicity through terrorist attacks has historically been one of the main objectives of terrorist organizations. In fact, the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, discussing the 1985 Trans World Airlines hijacking, urged democratic nations "to find ways to starve the terrorist and the hijacker of the oxygen of publicity on which they depend," to stop this cycle.¹⁹ In 1989, the doyen terrorism studies scholar Alex Schmid, realizing the role of media in this cycle, simply warned editors of mass media not to be "the terrorists' accomplices".²⁰

Figure 2. Terrorist Organization Attack and Recruitment Cycle



Similarly, addressing the issue of terrorist publicity and media, another leading terrorism studies scholar, Dr. Bruce Hoffman, stated;

“The modern news media, as the principal conduit of information about such acts, thus play a vital part in the terrorists’ calculus. Indeed, without the media’s coverage, the act’s impact is arguably wasted, remaining narrowly confined to the immediate victim(s) of the attack rather than reaching the wider ‘target audience’ at whom the terrorists’ violence is actually aimed. Only by spreading the terror and outrage to a much larger audience can the terrorists gain the maximum potential leverage that they need to effect fundamental political change.”²¹

The coverage of a terrorist attack by the media gives a terrorist organization free TV airtime and print media coverage. Thus, the intended reaching out automatically occurs, and the organization may be able to start to recruit more members or reach out to new people to recruit. In the mind of an extremist and radicalized believer in the ideology of a terrorist organization, seeing coverage of a terrorist attack in the media can often become a spark and starting point, prompting that person to decide, “I should do something, too.” This was explained to me by a terrorist during an interrogation I held on how he decided to join a particular terrorist organization.

Therefore, being aware of how terrorists use ongoing attacks to prove that they are alive and powerful and to ensure a flow of recruitment is one of the most essential steps in preventing recruitment. It is possible to design strategies to intervene in this vicious cycle at any point in order to weaken the recruitment process.

Organizational Structures of Terrorist Groups and Recruitment

Terrorist organizations have different structures, based on their size, ideology, geographical location(s), operations, and objectives to achieve long-term success. Structures can also be fluid, as terrorist organizations usually respond to challenges by modifying their structures or adopting new techniques to maintain efficiency and “protect against infiltration and threats.”²² For instance, Kilberg identified four basic terrorist structures, based on a study of 254 groups (“market, all-channel, hub-spoke, and bureaucracy”).²³

Understanding terrorist structures is essential, particularly when it comes to dealing with terrorist recruitment and attacks. Terrorist structures and hierarchies essentially reveal how groups operate daily, who communicates with whom, and how tasks are delegated among members. More importantly, the ways in which terrorist propaganda activities are carried out can lead to increased recruitment. Who oversees recruitment activities and where these take place are important aspects of the terrorist human resource acquisition process, and these can be understood only if organizational structures are exposed. Another piece of critical information, from the perspective of prevention, is understanding “who is (or can be) in touch with whom” in such an organization.

The objective of this chapter is not to study the structure of terrorist organizations; however, we are going to look at a few sample structures to illustrate how recruitment is conducted.

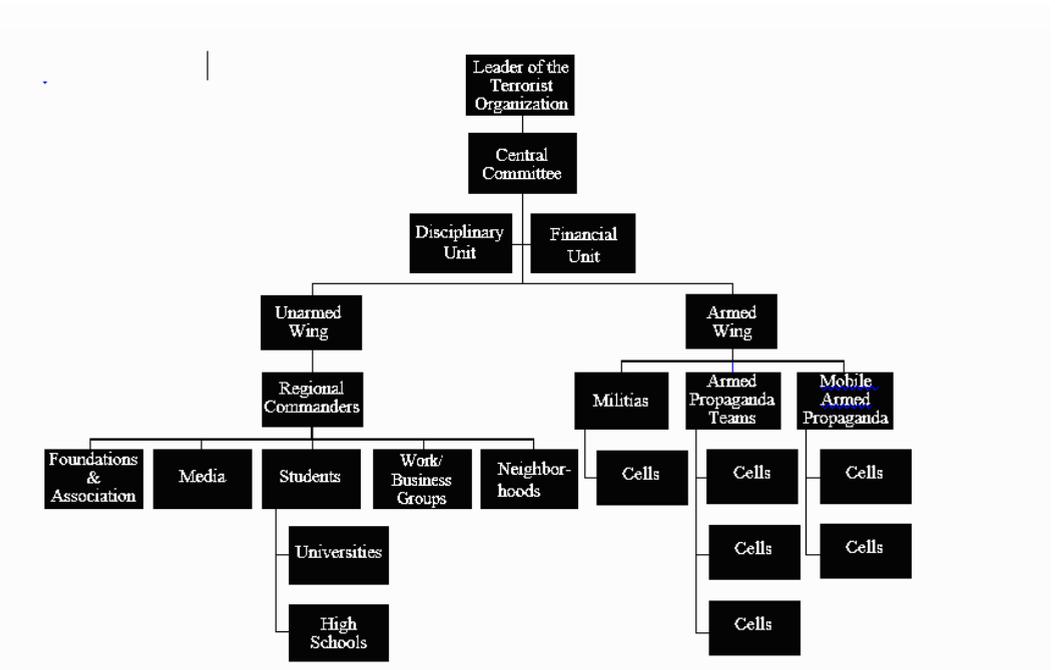
Before the ISIS caliphate was established, its senior members planned the future structure of the organization, because they knew success would depend on it, not only for ensuring its efficiency, but also for protecting the security of its members and organizations. With this in mind, Samir Abd Muhammad al-Khlifawi (a.k.a., Haji Bakr), a former Iraqi colonel in the intelligence service of Saddam Hussein, drew up a plan for the structure of ISIS,²⁴ which constituted the first version of its organizational structure.

The caliphate was established in 2014, and as ISIS started to control large areas, its structure evolved into the following hierarchy,²⁵ encompassing several activities beyond its military operations. The ISIS structure reveals that there are many layers of hierarchies involving different tasks, from media to sharia commissions to security. When ISIS functioned as a state-like organization from 2014 until 2018, most of its structures were open to the public, other than its security apparatus. Members were usually identified with their tasks. However, after its defeat, ISIS evolved into an insurgency group, and its structure was rapidly updated to face the consequent realities and necessities.

The Turkish terrorist organization Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party/Front (DHKP/C), had a structure dividing the armed and unarmed wings very carefully, not only controlling the communications between these two wings, but also keeping the armed wing underground for their own security (see Figure 3). These two wings were called “unarmed, political, or legal” vs. “armed, military, or illegal” to designate the allocation of tasks. This structure is essential to understanding the typical activities of a terrorist organization.

What is seen on the left side of the schematic in Figure 3 is the face of the terrorist organization, whose members freely operate above ground through legal means, enjoying freedoms, such as free use of the media, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and the right to establish foundations and associations, university and high school activities and clubs, workers’ and officers’ unions, and neighborhood clubs, in an effort to produce legal fronts to attract people to their activities. This can be done for a variety of objectives including recruitment, expanding the base, disseminating propaganda, and providing safe havens. The strategy of having larger bodies legally operating in a free society by using the constitutionally

Figure 3. Sample Structure of the DHKP/C, a leftist Terrorist organization based in Turkey



provided rights and freedoms with less security and secrecy is to have the means to reach out to the public and to create operational spaces for armed groups when necessary, through the coordination of the higher command with people in charge of different units.

One of the most important tasks of the unarmed wing has always been the recruitment of new members. Because this wing operates freely in public within assigned units, it has always been tasked with recruitment, in addition to other assigned duties. For example, the media wing produces journals or newspapers for the organization, while trying to reach out to potential new recruits through its day-to-day activities. Because the members of the unarmed group are tasked with recruitment, organization members always meet and interact with newcomers in their unit until they are fully vetted and evaluated, at which point a new recruit is assigned to another unit, based on their education, skill sets, character traits, and dedication. Therefore, the unarmed wing is essentially the base of the terrorist organization, where most recruitment activities are conducted, along with other tasks.

The most important aspect of this unit from the perspective of recruitment is the fact that no new member would be directly assigned to the military or armed wing of the terrorist organization before spending considerable time in the unarmed wing. This is done not only to prove their dedication and trustworthiness, but also to establish a foundation for continuous ideological indoctrination. In reality, the flow of new members from the unarmed wing to the armed wing is a very slow process. Assignments happen based on the needs of the armed wing and the qualities of the new recruits, who are kept in the unarmed wing for as long as possible.

The flow of new recruits to the armed wing depends upon several factors. Among these are the newcomer's qualifications, ideological indoctrination and commitment, health and physical strength, skill sets, as well as secrecy issues – and unforeseen events like being “burned” (uncovered by law enforcement and intelligence) or being subject to situations such as becoming vulnerable to arrest or undergoing a prison sentence after a trial.

Finally, once a member of the unarmed group is assigned or passed to an armed unit, the new member usually goes through military training and is assigned to a new location, typically a new city or country where he or she is not known to members of the public.

This scheme and the slow flow of new recruits from the unarmed to the armed wing of a terrorist organization provides (from the perspective of the prevention of terrorist recruitment) ample opportunities to intervene in the recruitment process while it is happening out in the open before someone is passed on to the armed wing. In an armed wing, the rules of secrecy are substantially stricter, and members, in most cases, live in carefully structured cells, which makes it more challenging and difficult for the law enforcement and intelligence communities to penetrate the organization.

While Figure 3 does not represent the structures of all terrorist organizations, most terrorist groups apply similar rules or tactics, and often they do not immediately assign new members to more professional and secretive armed units. An exception to this rule would be cases of armed group members with previous and trusted connections -which happened in the past with the DHKP/C, Al-Qaeda, and ISIS - based on mutual trust and the needs of the groups or stemming from the exodus of members to the ISIS caliphate, which represented a state-like organization handling tens of thousands of newcomers.

Terrorist Recruitment and Radicalization Process

When I first started to work in counterterrorism in 1995 in Ankara, Turkey, I immediately realized that terrorist organizations were recruiting most of the siblings and close friends of the suspects we were arresting. In fact, I realized that the driving factor for terrorist recruitment was often not the ideology or the justifications of the terrorist organization, but rather, the prior connections and emotional attachments with the family and friends who had been arrested. Considering what I was experiencing and observing, I tried to understand why individuals were

becoming terrorists and engaging in extremist behaviors. Like many other researchers,²⁶ I believed that knowledge of the terrorist recruitment methods would be key to successfully countering terrorism and preventing recruitment.

During my twenty-year long career in counterterrorism, I collected data for the terrorist recruitment prevention program called “Preventing Terrorist Recruitment through Early Intervention by Involving Families,”²⁷ which I established in Sanliurfa, Turkey, between 2010 and 2014. As the chief of counterterrorism, I developed the descriptive scheme described below for the “the terrorist recruitment and radicalization process.” It is imperative to note that the following model represents face-to-face and direct recruitment methods. Radicalization and recruitment through social media and the internet will be discussed separately.

I studied terrorist recruitment methods, particularly with youth, and investigated how people were being approached by different terrorist organizations and what tactics were being used, beginning with initial connections and proceeding over the years towards membership. Both my master’s thesis and PhD dissertation focused on terrorist recruitment and how to deal with it in the long run.

During my interviews with terrorists who were members of ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), the DHKP/C, the Liberation Army of the Workers and Peasants of Turkey (TIKKO), and many other organizations, and the case I recorded, I realized that there were often similar patterns in terrorist recruitment and the radicalization process, regardless of the organization or ideology.

It is essential to understand that each step of the “terrorist recruitment and radicalization process” is an opportunity to intervene and to reverse the course of the process. It is only possible to successfully prevent the recruitment of new members to a terrorist organization if the authorities understand how the recruitment process works.

Terrorist organizations tend to monitor and supervise recruitment activities closely. As a general rule and principle, almost all terrorist organizations require their recruiters to report each of the recruiting steps to their superiors before taking any action. These reports may include how the recruiter knows the prospective subject, their background and biography, qualifications, education, work, ideology, doctrinal commitment, and special skills. Often, during terrorist cell operations, authorities recover hundreds of pages of handwritten or digital reports detailing the above elements for different subjects, written by the recruiters and detailing the progress they were making. The DHKP/C and Hezbollah were particularly very keen on producing such reports, and the recruiters’ superiors would pass the reports to their leaders. For example, the Turkish National Police confiscated the archive of Hezbollah in July 1999,²⁸ which consisted of 41 hard drives, two laptops, and over 300 CD-ROMs, with over 133,000 pages of documents, which included internal communications, financial reports, the biographies of thousands of prospective recruits, and reports about the recruiters’ progress.

The Terrorist Recruitment and Radicalization Process

I defined the following stages of the terrorist recruitment and radicalization processes based on my experience as an active law enforcement counterterrorism officer over twenty years and on the basis of my counterterrorism research activities, detailing how and through which phases a person is recruited into a terrorist group. These stages constitute essential milestones in becoming a member of a terrorist group and identify the activities by which authorities can intervene to interrupt the process, provided they are aware of how each step works. Therefore, I will detail and explain each stage carefully, presenting its main theme, objectives, and possible activities.

1. Identifying the candidate.
2. Initiating contact (if contact didn’t exist already).

3. Building rapport and friendship.
4. Advancing friendship and trust, introducing ideological indoctrination, and playing to emotions.
5. Isolating the recruit and advancing indoctrination to networking with other terrorists and associations.
6. Reinforcing the assumption of a new identity.
7. Introducing the recruit to simple terrorist activities such as demonstrations and social media posts.
8. Assigning candidates to different parts of the terrorist organization.

Identifying the Candidate

The identification of the candidate is the first step in the recruitment process. There are two types of recruitment based on the policies and needs of a terrorist organization. The first type is “opportunistic recruitment,” where recruiters try to recruit people whom they already know, with whom they already have connections, or with whom they can connect through a variety of means.

The key factors enabling the identification of a candidate at this stage include prior connections, education and intellectual capacity, demographic characteristics, the type of neighborhood, and whether the prospect has someone associated with a terrorist organization in his or her family or circle of friends.

In “opportunistic recruitment,” terrorist organizations seek to increase their membership and base and will welcome anyone who can be securely recruited and is trusted. For instance, Al-Qaeda, in its recruitment manual²⁹ “A Course in the Art of Recruiting,” provides a pathway to “opportunistic recruitment.” This is the general practice for most terrorist organizations. However, this type of recruitment should never be understood as welcoming everyone into a terrorist organization, because terrorist organizations have different sets of rules to vet newcomers in an effort to ensure their secrecy and weed out possible informants or unwanted characters. For example, Al-Qaeda strongly advised against recruiting the following types of people: cowards, excessively talkative people, people who entertained hostile ideas toward the Mujahideen, stingy people, and loners.³⁰

The second type of terrorist recruitment is targeted recruitment through “talent spotting.”³¹ In targeted recruitment, terrorist organizations tend to seek out people with special talents and qualities who can be assigned to work in certain units or areas that call for qualified members to carry out the assigned tasks, such as producing sophisticated explosives or try their hand at developing chemical and biological weapons. To give an example: in the 1970s, the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), according to Mia Bloom, “trail blazed this innovation of talent spotting during the Troubles (1970s) in which the organization visited college campuses and sought out potential recruits with advanced educational degrees (especially in the fields of math, chemistry, and engineering - all disciplines that aided in the development and improvement of IRA explosives).”³²

Similarly, ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, after the caliphate was established in 2014, issued a call to his followers via an audio message that was later published in the first issue of the ISIS journal *Dabiq*. Al-Baghdadi appealed to skilled and qualified Muslims to support ISIS by inviting them to his caliphate. He appealed to “Muslim doctors, engineers, scholars, and specialists” in his speech, stating,

“We make a special call to the scholars, *fuqaha*’ [experts in Islamic jurisprudence], and callers, especially the judges, as well as people with military, administrative, and service expertise, and medical doctors and engineers of all different specializations and fields. We call them and remind

them to fear Allah, for their emigration is *wajib 'ayni* [an individual obligation], so that they can answer the dire need of the Muslims for them. People are ignorant of their religion and they thirst for those who can teach them and help them understand it. So, fear Allah, O slaves of Allah.”³³

I also personally observed several cases where different terrorist organizations made special efforts to recruit people based on their qualifications, particularly at universities and at high school levels. In most cases, the recruitment of certain high-profile students led to an increase in the number of new recruits and gave the organization a stronger foothold in the institutions the young recruits were attending.

Initiating Contact

At this stage, the recruiter initiates contact with his or her subject if it did not already pre-exist, or the recruiter might seek an intentional and focused connection with the subject. Obviously, there is no need to establish initial contact with a target subject if the recruiter already has a prior connection through family ties or friendships. However, in many cases, terrorist recruiters use a variety of tactics to establish sites to which they can attract new subjects for recruitment purposes, such as cultural centers, bookstores, cafes, youth centers, music concerts, after-class study sessions, and free courses.

Al-Qaeda considers the first two steps in this model to be the first stage of its recruitment process, which is labeled “Getting Acquainted and Choosing”; it instructs its members to “look around yourself carefully, maybe you will find a Mujahid you hadn’t recognized before. Ponder on all of the people and look for a Mujahid amongst them.”³⁴

Building Rapport and Friendship

Usually, recruiters seek ways to spend time with their subjects. At this stage, we often observe increased social activities between the subject and recruiter, including attending after-school activities, participating in weekend and evening gatherings, going to movies, spending time at malls, and taking long walks. Typically, the involvement of other players or terrorist-related entities is not observed at this stage. Recruiters usually focus on ascertaining whether or not they can trust their subjects and if it is worth continuing to work on them.

Generally, recruiters, as with most terrorist organizations, are required at this point to report their progress in their recruitment efforts. In most cases, they must make a detailed report in order to get feedback and directions from their peers and unit leaders. For example, the Al-Qaeda recruitment manual names this stage as “Getting Close (or Approaching)” and builds it on two axes or hubs: “[T]he first one is getting close through daily work (routines) and the second one is getting close through weekly work.”³⁵ Al-Qaeda urges its recruiters to invite their subjects to meals and give them gifts to become closer to them. Furthermore, the manual provides a questionnaire for assessing whether a candidate is suitable for the next level of the recruitment process, which includes questions such as:

1. “Is he eager to see you?”
2. Does he talk with you about his private affairs and his hobbies?
3. Does he ask you to help fulfill his needs concerning Allah (SWT)?
4. Does he follow your orders?
5. Has he told you that he loves you (for Allah)?
6. Has your fondness for him increased?
7. Does he love to spend a lot of time with you?
8. Does he accept your advice and respect your opinion?”³⁶

Advancing Friendship and Trust, Introducing Ideological Indoctrination, and Playing to Emotions

Recruiters, after ensuring that they can trust their subject and after receiving approval from the organization, start to deepen their friendship with the prospect, playing to the person's emotions by fostering the idea that they are close friends, even sharing a brotherly or sisterly type of affection. The objective is to make subjects believe that the recruiter is their best friend and that there is complete trust between them, which is destined to lead to an emotional bond.

At this stage, the primary objective is to enhance rapport and trust between the recruiter and the subject, while slowly introducing the organization's ideology without mentioning the organization. Thus, the final goal at this stage is to build the utmost trust and affection between the parties, for two essential reasons. The first is that the trust and confidence between the parties help subjects to believe what they are being told by the recruiter. The second is that the connection between the parties will eventually ensure that the targeted subject will not be able to say "no" or "deny the requests" of the recruiter, due to the affection that has grown between them. This is done by recruiting the subject in such a way as not to lose the friendship, which constitutes the essential foundation of terrorist recruitment. When the time is right at the end of the recruitment process, the new recruit will be locked into that friendship. Even if the new recruit has some doubts, the emotional ties and the affection established will help the recruiter to proceed to the next stages.

One can often observe the start of ideological indoctrination at this stage. While the recruiters and subjects have sometimes talked about the ideologies of terrorist organizations and the justifications for their existence, at this stage, the indoctrination of the subjects becomes systematic, and the recruiters try to make them true believers in their ideology - or at least the non-violent version of it. Nevertheless, in most cases, terrorist organizations and their violent activities are not introduced nor mentioned during this stage; rather, the general concepts of terrorist ideologies are introduced.

For leftist terrorist organizations, indoctrination involves Marxist ideology and thought; for the Salafi jihadist terrorist organizations, the discussion revolves around Salafism and Wahhabism without reference to the terrorist organizations. For example, Al-Qaeda asked its recruiters at this stage not imply to their subjects that "Jihad is al-Qaida."³⁷

In general, I did not observe the introduction of justifications of terrorist violence at this point during my past interactions with terrorists nor did I find it in my research. However, depending on the ideological commitment and readiness of a subject, a recruiter could start to talk about the actions of the terrorist group and their justifications to accelerate the recruitment process. Basically, each subject is evaluated individually on a case-by-case basis, and the actions of the recruiters are adjusted accordingly.

Al-Qaeda calls this stage "The Awakening of Iman" and advises its recruiters not to

"show the candidate any jihadi videos, audios, etc. except when his Iman (faith) is at a high level, and when he is in a state of tranquility in order to have the best effect on him and on his heart. And don't let him listen to anything (i.e. videos or audios) when he is bothered or sad because it will be of no benefit for him."³⁸

Isolating the Recruited Person and Advancing Indoctrination to Networking with other Terrorists and Associations

Isolating the recruit and advancing the indoctrination process to networking with other terrorists and associations constitutes the most important and intense phase of the terrorist recruitment process. During this stage, recruiters do their best to make sure that their subjects

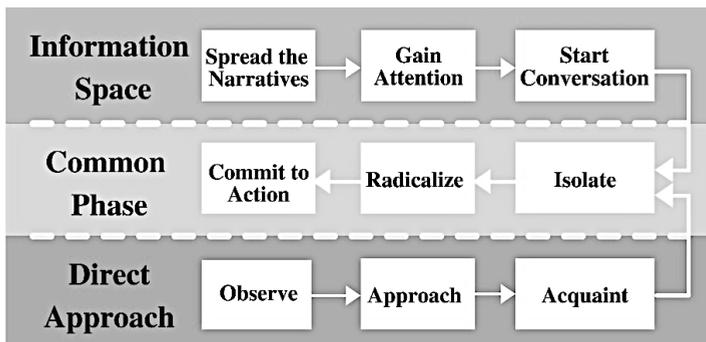
become true believers in the organization’s ideology. During this process, there is often increased activity of reading together, discussing ideological materials, summarizing the material being read, watching videos, and exchanging books related to the ideology of the particular terrorist organization.

Another important aspect of this stage is the initiation of the “isolation phase.” This is when the recruiter ensures that the prospective recruit will distance himself or herself from previous social settings and start to associate with the recruiter’s network. In addition, isolation often takes place through a lifestyle change based on the newly acquired ideology. The recruit is introduced to other members of the terrorist network, and often those members put extra efforts into having the new person feel at ease and comfortable among them by being extremely nice and compassionate. This approach seems to work very well with young people, because they want to spend more time with their new inner circle of friends. Al-Qaeda emphasizes to its recruiters the importance of networking, with the following advice, “You should know, my dear brother, that the best way to inculcate the concepts is to do it in a group, and this is the opinion of the people who master this art (recruiting).”³⁹

Isolating a new recruit is essential to ensure his or her assumption of a new identity and is the pathway to radicalization.⁴⁰ At this stage, the subjects are expected to read and associate themselves exclusively with the literature of the terrorist organizations they are joining. These materials include the organization’s books, journals, videos, audio recordings, and social media accounts. The recruits also cut their ties with their former social circles and friends, avoiding places they used to frequent, and adopt a lifestyle that distances them from other ideological and social groups.

Alexandra Stein, in her book *Terror, Love and Brainwashing*, describes this situation as setting up “the conditions for a later rearrangement of the recruit’s close relationships” by getting the prospective recruits into the organization’s sphere of influence. Stein further elaborates on the next step, in which the organization can begin the isolation project and start to position itself as the primary emotional and cognitive resource for the recruit – becoming the new, and eventually the only, safe haven. There is a three-fold process in setting the stage for the creation of an attachment bond to the group: gaining access to the recruit through initial contact, positioning the group as a newly perceived safe haven and beginning to detach the recruit from prior attachments. Propaganda is the ideological tool wielded to accomplish this.⁴¹ During this stage, the candidates are expected not to get involved with the teachings and literature of other ideological traditions and to not communicate or discuss these ideologies

Figure 4. Recruitment Approaches used, Depending on the Environment ⁴²



with others, including family members; this is particularly true for the new members. The motive here is to limit access to the counterpropaganda and ideological approaches of other groups by isolating new recruits from the outside world, a tactic also used by cults. Indoctrination is used to reduce the risk of defection to competing rebel groups.

This mindset and the tradition of controlling new and prospective recruits create a high barrier to the prevention of terrorist recruitment. Al-Qaeda calls this stage “The Stage of Planting Concepts” and advises recruiters to have their subjects do the following to reinforce their identities:⁴³

- “A book called “Questions and Doubts regarding the Mujahideen.” The candidate must read this book because it is very beneficial and will help him to protect himself.
- The candidate should see all the meetings with our ummah’s wise sheikh Al-Zawahiri because these meetings revolve around the Jihadi ideas.
- Let him watch all the productions of Al Sahab, Al Furqan, Al-Maghrib Al Islami, and Chechnya. However, make sure you show him these in stages, and select the best ones of their videos.”

Leftist terrorist organizations used to make great efforts to ensure that their subjects would be fully indoctrinated during this stage. Back in 1998, a DHKP/C member told me how he was forced to read 300 pages a day, summarize what he understood and discuss it with his peers for ninety days during his summer break. Similarly, ISIS set up ideological training camps - often linked to military training - and produced a collection of textbook-like manuals consisting of over 10,000 pages and made sure its members studied them during their training.⁴⁴

As already mentioned, this stage marks the beginning of lifestyle changes based on the terrorist group and its ideology. The prospective recruits start to distance themselves from their former networks; they may change their attire based on the newly assumed ideology, such as growing a beard without a mustache and, for Salafi jihadist terrorist groups, wearing “short pants (above the ankles) and knee-long shirts.”⁴⁵ Christianne Boudreau from Calgary, Canada, the mother of Damian Clairmont, who joined Jabhat al-Nusra in 2013, described this stage, mentioning she “noticed a change in her son. If he was visiting and his new friends called, he would only answer the phone outside. He wouldn’t eat with the family if there was wine on the table. He told his mother that women should be taken care of by men and that it was acceptable to have more than one wife.”⁴⁶

At this stage, also, the subjects interact, socialize, and associate with known terrorist front entities. These are essentially places, operating under regional or ideological names that do not reveal their ideological affiliation - places which serve as common ground and meeting spots for the terrorists and young people, designed to attract new people run by the terrorist organization. They are such sites as foundations, associations, bookstores, charities, Internet cafes, study groups, tea houses, music and dance courses, sports academies, language centers, and other places where known terrorist members are present while prospective recruits spend time there.

Kruglanski describes this networking and socialization stage as involving “the presence of an ideological component that identifies involvement in terrorism as an appropriate means to gain (or regain) a lost sense of significance, followed by a process of socialization and implementation.”⁴⁷

Similarly, Jensen⁴⁸ portrays this process by referring to social identity theories of radicalization, which suggest that “increased group cohesion can produce dangerous group biases, such as group polarization;⁴⁹ groupthink;⁵⁰ in-group/out-group bias;⁵¹ diffusion of responsibility;⁵² and rule compliance⁵³ that lead members to adopt increasingly extreme beliefs or engage in extremist behaviors.”

Nesser describes this stage by noting that,

“analysis suggests the existence of a ‘culture for recruitment,’ which implies that recruits are socialized by friends and acquaintances in militant milieus, mainly through religious and political discussions, and ‘team-building’ activities initiated by the terrorist cell leaders. Team building often involves physical training, weapons training/paintball, watching propaganda movies, and attending the sermons of radical clerics.”⁵⁴

The role played by socialization in the process of recruitment is seen in the following example: ISIS set up a coffee/teahouse called “the Islam Teahouse” in Adiyaman, Turkey, in the center of the city⁵⁵ to serve as a hub where prospective Turkish ISIS members could spend time with other ISIS members. Many other people simply felt that the teahouse was attractive because of its name and went there. It was reported that around fifty people visited and spent time in this teahouse daily, and by 2015 it had facilitated the recruitment of around 300 Turkish ISIS members, including the terrorists behind the 2015 Suruc and Ankara suicide attacks,⁵⁶ which killed 143 people and wounded over 600.⁵⁷

Similarly, Al-Qaeda organized picnics where prospective recruits, new members, and experienced members were tasked with meeting newcomers by gathering in the countryside to spend time together. Sometimes this was done with the participation of the members’ families to establish closer bonds and to welcome the new members. The leader of Al-Qaeda in Turkey, Habib Aktas, reportedly arranged several picnics in 2004 to motivate Turkish Al-Qaeda members.⁵⁸

Reinforcing the Assumption of a New Identity

Terrorist candidates, at this stage, realize that they have fully associated themselves with the group and assumed the identity and accepted terrorist teachings imposed by the recruiter and by their new network of associates. It should be understood that the isolation of the new recruit continues during this stage, as the newcomer is carefully observed by the recruiter and the network.

This is the stage where the recruit is offered the chance to become an official member of the terrorist organization. Based on my personal observations and research, if subjects make it through this step, it becomes very difficult for them to disassociate themselves from the group. This is often because of the close friendships and bonds developed and due to the ideological indoctrination. If a subject has passed the prior steps, it usually means that he or she will formally become a new member of the organization.

This stage is Al-Qaeda’s last stage of the recruitment process, which it calls “The Establishment of the Brigade”: “During this stage, the brother [candidate] will be: Convinced by the most important concepts of the jihadi methodology with a real desire to perform jihad.”⁵⁹

Introducing the Recruit to Simple Terrorist Activities Such as Demonstrations and Social Media Posts

The new recruits are welcomed into the group and assigned, in most cases, to a local sector of the terrorist organization. This depends on the needs of the group and the qualifications of the new members, but they are often sent to the unarmed wing of the group for further testing and observation, to give them a chance to acquire more experience. At this stage, the candidate feels like part of the group and understands that he or she is now inside the terrorist organization. The organization constitutes an inner circle where the new member feels welcome and enjoys being with his or her new friends. There is also a sense of an outer group,

a presumed enemy, which may consist of rival groups, governments, and adherents to other ideologies.⁶⁰

During this stage, the affiliations with the group are usually not visible to the outside world. If the group would like to reinforce the new member's identity and affiliation with the group, he or she will be asked to carry out seemingly innocent and harmless activities, such as being part of a demonstration, distributing pamphlets and booklets, writing graffiti, transporting books or funds, or engaging in other activities which would not be openly deemed illegal. This stage serves as a pathway to becoming a trusted member and affords opportunities for new recruits to prove themselves. I have often observed that young recruits would be charged up emotionally at this stage, eager to carry out the activities they were assigned to do.

There is an additional reason why new members are asked or encouraged to carry out these simple terrorist tasks. Through these activities, two messages are instilled in the mind of a new terrorist. The first is that there is excitement and pride involved in proving oneself, strengthening one's ties to the group, and carrying out an attack with fellow members for an ideological cause. Salafi jihadist groups also introduce these activities as good deeds for the cause of their religion, which is deemed to help the participants to earn a place in paradise. Leftist organizations have a similar mindset, encouraging their new members to join in simple attacks and praising their courage and bravery despite them being newcomers. The approval of the inner group and close friends gained through simple terrorist activities influences the mindset of the new member and strengthens the idea that he or she is part of the group and is welcomed and accepted.

The second reason for asking new members to carry out simple attacks is to incriminate them in the eyes of the judiciary or law enforcement, simply saying or implying that "now that you committed a crime, you have to stick with us, and we will protect you as a member and make sure that you are not caught or imprisoned." At this stage, the new member often already assumes the government forces are an enemy, believes that the police are after him or her, and feels the need to stick with the group to be safe.

Assigning Candidates to Different Parts of the Terrorist Organization

At this final stage of the recruitment process, the candidates have proven themselves and are ready to be assigned to different parts of the organization. The assignments are usually done on a case-by-case basis, and different factors are taken into consideration before a newly recruited terrorist is relocated, which includes issues such as whether candidates are about to graduate from college or high school, whether they can cut their ties with their family, whether they have enough courage to live abroad under stressful conditions, and whether they possess the desire or physical strength to go through rigorous military-style training.

It is common to observe certain behaviors if a newly recruited terrorist is going to be assigned abroad or relocate. These include going on a shopping spree to get ready for the new assignment, buying gifts for friends or family members, interacting with close family members (which, from the terrorist's perspective, is meant as a farewell), emptying bank accounts, spending money to the maximum limits of credit cards, or, for more critical assignments, suddenly going missing.

In general, a newly recruited member is not sent abroad directly. Rather, under normal circumstances, a newcomer is assigned to a local area to work in an unarmed unit, so that more senior members can observe, get to know, and test the recruit over time, and produce reports about his or her qualities and characteristics. Unless the terrorist organization is in a rush to assign more manpower to its armed division, it usually takes over a year for a new member to be relocated.

Terrorists are often relocated or assigned abroad if a member is deemed to be in jeopardy of being arrested because of an ongoing police investigation or counterterrorism-operation, or if a member's connection to the terrorist organization and their activities are somewhat revealed. Furthermore, terrorist organizations usually relocate their critical cadres and local leaderships constantly, in order to try to hide their identities and keep their faces from becoming familiar to local authorities.

Prevention of Recruitment

Preventing terrorism and terrorist recruitment is a delicate practice that requires a professional approach and the involvement of a combination of well-informed and educated officers, specialists, experts, volunteers, and others. Preventing recruitment before a prospective recruit is completely assimilated should be considered a matter of communication and outreach, rather than one for law enforcement or for an intelligence operation. The objective of preventing terrorist recruitment is not to prosecute those who are being approached by terrorist recruiters, but rather to save them from being pulled into a terrorist group to begin with.

Therefore, for a successful intervention and prevention program, the people who are intervening must understand the delicacy and sensitivity of what they are doing, should have a deep understanding of the terrorist organization they are dealing with, must be able to evaluate the psychology of their subjects, and should know how to approach vulnerable populations in order to be able to open communication channels. While not everyone involved in prevention activities needs to have the same depth of knowledge, the managers and individuals who meet and interact with the vulnerable populations should be equipped to handle a variety of scenarios, along with a well-established understanding of how to communicate with the individuals they are approaching. There are no pre-set techniques when it comes to the prevention of terrorist recruitment; rather, a holistic approach encompassing a variety of techniques based on the subjects and conditions should be adopted.

Key Concepts and Qualifications

Understanding the Terrorist Organization in Question

One of the most important qualifications of the individuals who are part of an intervention and prevention team is an understanding of the terrorist organization they are dealing with, not only locally, in terms of its jurisdictions and neighborhoods, but also globally, since many contemporary terrorist organizations act in harmony and are quickly affected by the actions of their peers abroad. Understanding a terrorist organization should cover the following elements, because each plays a key role in the daily lives of an organization and its members:

- The ideology of the terrorist organization, including its historical evolution and belief systems, and sensitive matters which may have significant meaning for the followers of that ideology.
- The history of the terrorist organization and its existing state of affairs, including its past activities in a region.
- The structure of the terrorist organization, particularly regarding recruitment activities, the movement of recruiters, the involvement of the base, and the leadership of the organization in a given region and the departments they head.
- The tactics of the group in question, from recruitment to propaganda, including how it carries out terrorist attacks and its weapons and explosives of choice.
- Social media outreach, and other communication mediums which the group uses to communicate and disseminate propaganda.

- Recruitment and training schemes, outreach arrangements, and the front operations the organization uses to pull people into its circle.
- The base of the terrorist group in question, including who supports the group in a given jurisdiction, whether there are hot spots for the group and its ideology in the region, how it interacts with nearby groups, whether its base provides safe havens and financial support, and so forth.
- Local trends and customs observed by members of the group.
- Analysis of any of the vulnerable local populations who could be directly or indirectly subject to terrorist propaganda and recruitment activities.

Understanding the Demographics

An analysis of the regional demographics that terrorist organizations target is essential for the prevention of terrorist recruitment. The prevention team should have a good sense of education levels, financial and employment-related facts, family structures, family size and age distribution, the locations and roles of schools and universities, health facilities, libraries, and related important facts covering the region in question. These sociological factors often deeply affect the psychology of individuals vulnerable to terrorist recruitment.

Another important factor is knowing and understanding the religion, culture, and values of the people of the region, respecting people's values when interacting with them, and never discounting or disrespecting their belief systems or religions. People tend to become alienated when their values are disregarded, and such a move could easily shut down the communication channels between those who are trying to prevent terrorist recruitment and their subjects.

An Awareness of Terrorist Organizations' Justifications

Terrorist organizations employ a number of arguments and justifications to explain and rationalize their activities, particularly their use of violence. Often, terrorists are taught about these arguments in advance and supplied with a variety of scenarios for how and when to apply them, some of which are also used during the recruitment cycle. These may be publicly recognized rationales which people other than terrorists may support, such as appeals relating to economic inequalities, corruption, harsh punishment, torture, injustice, or any other social or economic problems that plague the society and have a particular resonance with a terrorist ideology.

For example, leftist terrorist organizations might blame capitalism for economic problems and the injustices and inequalities in societies, and Salafi-Jihadist terrorist organizations, particularly Al-Qaeda, argue that the House of Islam is being subjected to invasion by the US military because they have military bases in Saudi Arabia, which gives the organization the authority and right to fight back against the Americans. It is essential that the intervention and prevention team members be aware of the justifications and arguments terrorist organizations adopt, so they can be ready to talk about them. However, teams should not unnecessarily raise these topics in conversations, so as to avoid conflict and alienation when they are trying to build rapport and connections with vulnerable populations.

The Base

A terrorist base basically consists of a segment of a regional population who, at the very least, adhere to an ideology in sympathy with that of a terrorist organization, such as Salafism versus Salafi-jihadism, and who may condone some of the activities of the terrorist organization.

Some may only approve in theory but not take direct action, while others may support the activities of a terrorist organization by various means, direct or indirect, active or passive,⁶¹ including providing financial or logistical support, safe havens, medical aid, and means of communication (such as acting as couriers), or providing other types of support that do not directly involve open illegal activity. The presence of a terrorist base is essential for a terrorist group because operating in a region with a strong base is a lot easier and safer for the terrorist group.

In addition, bases are often breeding grounds for terrorist organizations, offering them sites and networks that enable them to reach out to individuals, particularly youth, for recruitment purposes. My dissertation research, covering various terrorist groups in Turkey, indicated that previous interactions with terrorist organizations significantly increased the chance of being recruited, especially if the family of a targeted subject was within the base of a terrorist organization. This, in turn, significantly increased the rate of recruitment into terrorist organizations. My findings also revealed that teenagers were more vulnerable to terrorist recruitment if they or their family members shared an ideology with a terrorist organization or had previous interactions with it.⁶²

Hot Spots

Terrorist organizations use a variety of locations that are fully or partially open to the public, which serve as fronts for different purposes. While the primary role of these fronts may vary based on the region, the needs of an organization, and its ideology, these fronts often serve as places where members of a terrorist organization can interact with other people to make initial connections and identify potential candidates for recruitment. Such places are not directly identified with their affiliations with a terrorist organization but are often legal establishments where people can carry out legitimate activities freely and openly, such as:

- associations and foundations
- bookstores
- cafes, coffee or tea houses
- internet cafes
- media centers
- mosques, *masjids* (prayer houses)
- sports complexes, gyms, or workout centers
- music clubs or musical instrument courses
- culture or youth centers
- immigration centers
- social clubs or neighborhood centers
- businesses
- private dormitories or student houses
- outside activities and gatherings, such as concerts, social gatherings, or picnics.

Knowledge of the existence and locations of hotspots is essential for the prevention of recruitment because frequently recruitment connections are made through the various activities that are conducted in these places, and where social networks are created. Hotspots are used to facilitate the first three steps of the recruitment cycle because they do not overtly represent terrorist organizations, and they operate legally.

Significant Dates and Events

Terrorist organizations observe special days, occasions, or times for celebrations or grieving. These times of remembrance are exploited to mobilize their supporters and base, to spread propaganda, and to attract people to their events. While not all special dates are directly associated with terrorist organizations, they nevertheless try to dominate these occasions to further their objectives.

For example, May 1st, International Workers' Day, has always been an important calendar event for leftist and Marxist terrorist organizations. It is a day when they do their best to increase the numbers of members and supporters to carry out demonstrations during events and celebrations on this day. Similarly, Hezbollah supporters come together in masses to celebrate Ashura Day. These events usually serve to provide a show of strength and an opportunity to invite non-affiliated people to the celebrations and share food and establish connections.

It is essential for individuals and teams to be aware of these dates and find out what types of activities different terrorist organization members and supporters engage in, so that they are not caught off guard when these occasions occur. In addition, these events and gatherings are significant opportunities for the prevention teams because they can easily spot newcomers and interact with them afterward.

Who is Targeted for Recruitment?

It is true that most terrorist organizations constantly try to recruit new members to their ranks. However, there is always a dilemma when it comes to recruitment: "security." Terrorist organizations by their very nature have to operate secretly. The unarmed wings of terrorist organizations function under lighter rules of secrecy, as opposed to the armed cells. Therefore, when it comes to face-to-face recruitment, terrorists cannot carry out their activities openly, recklessly, and without consulting their peers and leaders. This is so in order to protect both the group and its members from law enforcement, intelligence operations, and infiltration. Terrorist recruitment is not like open hiring. Recruiters cannot reveal and declare their intentions, and they certainly cannot advertise, unless it is done through anonymous social media calls, such as those posted by ISIS. This is why there is a calculated recruitment process and cycle – it serves to ensure the secrecy and safety of the recruiters.

Prevention teams must have a good understanding of which terrorist organizations target which segment of the population, whether an organization engages in opportunistic recruitment or goes after specific individuals by talent spotting, and what the general schemes and tactics of recruitment teams and individuals consist of. The following section analyses the most commonly targeted groups when it comes to terrorist recruitment.

Family Members and Close Friends

Terrorists tend to recruit people whom they already know and trust, including family members and close friends. This is done so that the nature of their activities remains veiled and protected and reduces the risk of a complaint being filed to the authorities. The recruitment of family members and close friends is usually the first choice of recruiters, for three reasons.

The first reason is that terrorist recruiters have already known their family members and close friends for years. With their characteristics and qualifications, particularly those of their siblings or nieces, nephews, or other relatives close to themselves in terms of age and of close friends from their neighborhoods or schools, they are given a head start in the recruitment process, since they do not need to spend time on the initial contact phase after getting the approval for "identification of the candidate." For example, "The IRA recruited, most commonly, trusted families whose affiliation went back generations: most operatives' parents

and even grandparents had been involved with the movement.”⁶³ Furthermore, in most cases, relationships and connections with family members and close friends generally would not raise suspicion if intelligence and law enforcement agencies are conducting investigations, since communications between friends and family members can easily be deemed non-suspicious. From this perspective, the Brussels and Paris attacks of 2016, for which close family members and friends were quickly enlisted, were, unsurprisingly, able to stay under the radar of local intelligence and law enforcement agencies in at least two countries, France and Belgium.

Second, most family members and close friends would be familiar and perhaps recognizable believers in the ideology of a particular terrorist organization and already socially related to people who believe in similar ideologies and causes. At the least, they might be believers in an ideology without embracing its violent part, like assuming a Salafi/Wahhabi lifestyle, or they might already be acquainted with the justifications used by a terrorist organization, such as the Israel-Palestinian conflict that Al-Qaeda often raises. Nesser describes this as “the existence of a ‘culture for recruitment’; implying horizontal patterns of recruitment, in which hard-core, mainly politically driven, jihadist activists with ties to known groups, quite aggressively reach out to potential recruits through their social networks.”⁶⁴

The third reason is the confidentiality and secrecy developed through the past connections and the advantages of being able to trust close friends and family members not to expose recruiters by tipping off law enforcement agencies and being able to easily weed out potential informants. Kenney, from this perspective, points out that “recruitment might require selecting ‘people of confidence’— individuals who might be related to existing members to weed out potential informers or police plants.”⁶⁵ One of the essential steps of opening up to a prospective recruit is talking about the terrorist organization. While this stage does not take place until the middle of the recruiting process, there is always a risk that it will backfire, revealing the objective and identity of a recruiter, and at worst, leading to a complaint being filed with the authorities. Due to emotional attachments and blood connections, family members and friends can generally be depended on not to turn to the authorities if they do not want to be part of the process, and they will simply look the other way; this places them among the best candidates for recruitment.

According to data I gathered in 2001 from various terrorist organization members, introduction to a terrorist organization took place with the help of friends 35 percent of the time and through family members 26.5 percent of the time.⁶⁶ A similar pattern held for ISIS when it came to reaching out to associates or establishing new contacts in the West. According to research on ISIS cases in the US by the George Washington University Program on Extremism (GW Extremism Tracker, 2018),⁶⁷ while digital media are one means of connection, terrorist recruiters prefer, wherever possible, face-to-face interactions.

The importance of the family bond was, for instance, revealed when the ISIS Paris and Brussels attacks cell was examined: two pairs of brothers from two different families were involved in the attacks - brothers Salah Abdeslam and Brahim Abdeslam and brothers Ibrahim el-Bakraoui and Khalid el-Bakraoui - with some of other cell members being close friends.⁶⁸

One also could find a similar pattern in July 2017, when ISIS planned to blow up a commercial passenger plane flying out of Sydney. The Khayat brothers, Khaled Khayat and Mahmoud Khayat, in Australia, were contacted by their elder brother, an ISIS commander in Syria, to carry out the plot. Even though the Khayat brothers had no prior connections with ISIS and were living seemingly ordinary family lives and running businesses, their older brother was able to convince them to carry out the planned attack, an attack which they attempted but failed to conclude.⁶⁹

Another example comes from Indonesia, where a girl was able to convince her entire family to carry out the *hijra* (emigration) to move to Syria to join ISIS:

“When Indonesian schoolgirl Nur Dhanial arrived in Syria in 2015, she knew

almost immediately that convincing her family to join her in the ‘caliphate’ was a catastrophic error. Just 15 years old at the time, Nur Dhania said life under Islamic State rule was nothing like the paradise portrayed in the group’s propaganda. Nevertheless, 25 of her relatives - including her grandmother, sisters, parents, uncles, aunts and cousins - followed her.”⁷⁰

Finally, recruitment prevention teams and members must understand the importance of how terrorists usually attempt to recruit first from their own close circles for the reasons discussed above, before trying to reach out to others with whom they do not have prior and natural connections. While this puts recruiters’ families and friends into a vulnerable position, it also provides insight into opportunities for early intervention in terrorist recruitment.

University and High School Students

Historically, universities and high schools have been fertile grounds for political and ideological movements and have been infiltrated by terrorist organizations, based on their locations and the opportunities they afford. This enables terrorist organizations to operate clandestinely in schools.

Many young people are vulnerable and more at-risk for joining terrorist groups for a variety of reasons. Students sometimes establish close friendships with terrorist recruiters during and after class hours. The strong emotions and enthusiasm of some young people can drive them to make unwise choices; in addition, group thinking often preempts critical reasoning, so that some students may find themselves doing things with their group they would not consider doing alone.

Many locally operating terrorist groups establish committees or appoint a member to organize the recruitment activities in high schools and universities. Recruiters try to find ways to spend time with students through a variety of activities, such as games, sports, and joint studying, so that they can eventually create a strong enough bond to be able to start recruiting.

In 2012, a 15-year-old female high school student in Sanliurfa, Turkey, was able to recruit over 50 students from her school in the course of one year, simply by befriending them and persuading them to join the terrorist organization she was representing. During my tenure as police chief, I constantly observed different terrorist organizations using schools and universities as hubs for their recruitment activities. For example, the university recruiters liked to reach out to incoming students who were not native to an area and assist them by providing lodging, meals, or other forms of support, to win their hearts and establish connections before the newcomers realized with whom they were interacting. An ISIS fighter, a student from the University of Westminster in the UK, captured and held in prison in Syria, told the BBC that “he was one of at least seven students and ex-students from the University of Westminster to join ISIS.”⁷¹

The Al-Qaeda training manual also focuses on the importance of high schools and universities for recruitment purposes. The manual refers to the university as “a place of isolation for a period of four, five, or six years ... [which] is full of youths (full of zeal, vigor, and anti-government sentiments).”⁷² According to al-Qaeda, high school students are also among those who should be recruited. The manual refers to students above 15 years old as follows;

“I mean you have to cultivate the idea of jihad inside of them. If you ask me, “What can this young student do?” I will reply to you, “They can do the same thing as Muadh and Mu’awadh did.” This is because today they are young, but tomorrow they will be adults, so if you don’t give them *da’wa* “making an

invitation,” someone else will (but it will be for materialistic goals). However, don’t be in a hurry, because haste in this matter might destroy the *da’wa*.

The merits of this sector:

1. Often they have pure minds.
2. It is very safe to deal with them because they are not likely to be spies, especially after they pass the stage of individual *da’wa*.⁷³

Co-Workers

Co-workers are also ideal candidates for terrorist recruitment because people spend a lot of time with each other at work, and over time, friendships and bonds between colleagues may form or even increase, resulting in suitable conditions for terrorist recruitment. Some terrorist organizations put members in charge of different working populations, such as civil servants, office workers, doctors, teachers, nurses, and laborers, or appoint more specific subunit representatives for purposes of propaganda, recruitment, and logistical support. We have also seen examples of workplace recruitment stemming from the establishment of close kinship among workers, as happened with the 2016 Brussels attack carried out by ISIS.

Prisons

Prisons play a triple role in terrorist recruitment. The first is that of a place where terrorist inmates can carry out indoctrination, propaganda, and recruitment activities. In fact, prisons act as “academies” for terrorist organizations. Historically, some terrorist groups, like the DHKP/C and other leftist groups, wanted their members to be imprisoned, so that they could be better trained on the inside and become further radicalized while serving time. If terrorists are housed together in groups, they can assign leaders and regulate the daily lives of fellow inmates. Furthermore, because they act together, they are usually able to overpower other groups or individuals, forcing them to align themselves with their group, which yields more recruitment opportunities. Therefore, there is almost always indoctrination and recruitment going on inside prisons as terrorists try to win the hearts of other inmates, particularly those who are about to be released, not only by befriending them and persuading them to join their organization, but also by providing them and their family members with perks, such as jobs, housing, education grants, and salaries, as pathways to recruitment.

For example;

“Omar Khyam, convicted of planning terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom, described how Rachid Ramda, who was later convicted of organizing the 1995 Paris metro bombings, proactively approached and befriended other inmates said: the first thing that struck me most about Rachid was the way he greeted me.... He made me feel as if I had known him for years, such a warm personality and character, making everyone feel wanted and important as if you are his best friend.”⁷⁴

Similarly, Benjamin Herman, a 36-year-old drug dealer and a thief in Belgium, was radicalized and recruited in prison, killing two policewomen and one bystander while he was let out on a temporary two-day pass in 2018.⁷⁵ These types of risks have now increased with the imprisonment of returning ISIS fighters, who have access to other inmates inside prisons.⁷⁶ In fact, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Al-Qaeda’s leader in Iraq, which evolved into ISIS, was arrested

for sexual assault and drug-related charges in Jordan and was sent to prison, where he was initially radicalized and received his first jihadist ideological training.⁷⁷

A second role played by prisons in recruitment is the status elevation of former terrorist inmates due to their prison time and to the fact that they have had ample time to read and study ideological and tactical materials, increasing their commitment and dedication. I personally observed how newly released inmates would quickly be assigned to leadership positions because they had become tougher and more radicalized. Terrorist organizations also closely monitor the devotion and mental states of their imprisoned members. An ISIS prisoner named Abu Abdulhaqq al-Iraqi told Heller in an interview how he was promoted to emir as soon as he was released: "I was an inmate in the Iraqi prisons. When I got out, I assumed a position... As soon as I got out of prison, I was an emir."⁷⁸

A third role played by prisons in recruitment stems from the fact that terrorist organizations can identify sources among the inmates, use them for information, and encourage them to reach out to their trusted family members and friends and introduce these to terrorist recruiters on the outside. I have seen hundreds of relatives and friends of imprisoned terrorists being very quickly recruited into terrorist organizations because of their former ties and emotional bonds with their incarcerated loved ones. Terrorist inmates would arrange prison visits and encourage their visitors to meet with recruiters, most of whom were put in place before the visits. In this way, terrorist organizations can accelerate the recruitment process and overcome some security and confidentiality problems as well.

Propaganda, Outreach, and Social Media

The emergence of the internet, social media, and encrypted peer-to-peer mobile phone and computer applications became a dream come true for terrorist organizations; it enabled them to reach out to people whom, under normal circumstances, they would never have been able to reach and radicalize, sharing with them their propaganda and literature. ISIS, in particular, was a pioneer in employing social media and other digital applications to facilitate its outreach activities, by assigning some of its members to dedicate themselves solely to attracting thousands of people from around the world and eventually succeeding in recruiting some of them.⁷⁹

It is crucial to acknowledge the opportunities the internet and other technological advancements provide to terrorists, and it is imperative to understand that often these social media influencers are the initial facilitators for connections with prospects and that through such media, the vetting and recruitment process can start.

As much success as ISIS has achieved in its outreach, particularly with its Western contacts, newcomers are not automatically accepted for fear of intelligence operations and infiltration, and arriving recruits in Syria were interrogated about their connections in their countries of origin or with members within the caliphate.⁸⁰

Another consequence of internet-based mass outreach has been the increase of "lone actors," - individuals who become self-radicalized through terrorist propaganda. In the case of true lone actors, groups might not even be aware of their existence; these self-appointed "lone wolves" simply carry out their activities without direct supervision of, or control by, the terrorist organization. This presents a further challenge for the prevention of terrorist recruitment.

Methods of Preventing Recruitment to Terrorism

There is no single or unified method for preventing recruitment to terrorism. Rather, a holistic approach involving a combination of the methods described below should be utilized in

comprehensive counterterrorism and prevention campaigns, based on the prospective recruits and the location, and on the terrorist organization's ideology, activities, social base, and capacities.

Ideally, the prevention of recruitment activities should be initiated as soon as a candidate is identified by terrorists in the early stages of the recruitment cycle. This should preferably occur before a bond between the parties has been established and before the subject has started to become ideologically indoctrinated. While prevention can take place at any stage of the recruitment cycle, the more deeply a subject is pulled into the cycle of recruitment and isolated by recruiters, the more difficult it becomes to interrupt the process.

All of the tactics and methods listed in this chapter are included under the assumption that they would be legitimate and would be applied in keeping with the legal codes of the country concerned, as well as with international legal and ethical standards, particularly in respect to protecting the identities of targeted subjects and their families.

The strategies and policies listed in this section should be carried out by civil society organizations and government authorities in a collaborative way. There is no single one-size-fits-all approach, and policies regarding tactics and stakeholders should be decided upon and fine-tuned locally. In most cases, prospective recruits or their families might consider the intervention to be less than persuasive if no government representative is involved who assure them that the intervention process is backed and supported by the authorities. Also, government actors can answer questions and discuss concerns involving judicial processes and the future of their loved ones. However, in some cases, the presence of a government representative can backfire, and subjects might perceive the intervention and prevention activities as part of a counterterrorism or intelligence operation.

Therefore, prevention teams should identify the stakeholders based on the considerations listed above, along with the demographics, characteristics, and ideologies of the groups and individuals involved.

Finally, among all the tactics listed here, I would argue that the preferred one is helping families to intervene in the recruitment process to foil the terrorist recruiters and see that their loved ones are not recruited and turned into criminals.

Prevention of Terrorist Attacks

The appropriate authorities must carry out intelligence and preventive counterterrorism operations, implement measures to halt the formation of terrorist cells determined to carry out attacks or other terrorist activities, and closely monitor the actions of terrorist organizations. Preventing attacks is vital to undermining terrorist propaganda and keeping the organizations out of the news cycle, and thereby limiting their outreach and publicity.

Terrorist organizations always closely monitor government forces and look for new tactics, so they can continue to be successful in their attacks. To prevent attacks, a combination of the following elements is needed:

- Fresh and continual intelligence on terrorist organizations' activities, not only local, but also regional and global, shared in a timely manner with appropriate parties.
- A conversance with terrorist literature, including books, journals, pamphlets, video and audio productions, and social media posts, because through these, terrorist organizations may reveal clues about their intentions or plans.
- Detailed knowledge from local authorities on the social base and its relationship with the terrorist organization. This is indispensable, because often locals can be utilized by terrorists for logistical support, such as to provide safe havens, transportation, or financial support.

- Comprehensive coverage of the local jurisdiction. It is vital that authorities know the characteristics of the areas in which terrorist organizations operate, including physical boundaries, roads, local language dialects, and hot spots utilized as fronts.
- Knowledge of past activities of the terrorist organization in the area in question, along with any other data available to law enforcement and intelligence agencies is vital.
- Experience in countering terrorism and preventing terrorist attacks, as it takes years to gain a thorough knowledge of different terrorist organizations, learning how they operate, what types of tactics they apply, and what their structures are – which are all crucial to countering terrorism activities.

Control of the Terrorist Use of the Internet

Since the use of the internet by terrorists is a subject of study in its own right (see chapter 12 of this Handbook), I will here only briefly address the importance of denying terrorists the use of these technologies to further their goals. Terrorist organizations use the internet, social media, and peer-to-peer platforms extensively for a variety of purposes, including to:

- reach out to potential recruits and new members
- distribute propaganda and other materials, including videos, journals, memes, or pdf books,
- represent the organization and to feed their followers with news of recent developments, presented from their perspective,
- communicate,
- run front operations over the Internet,
- engage in financial and logistical support activities, and
- gather intelligence.

The purpose of this chapter is not to discuss how to counter the use of the internet by terrorists. However, it is essential to carry out local, regional, and globally coordinated activities so that terrorists cannot utilize digital media for their activities, which include identifying potential recruits. ISIS' activities are a good example of how social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and others, along with communication applications such as Telegram and dozens of other platforms, can offer terrorist organizations a multitude of opportunities to extend their outreach through the skillful use of new media. Therefore, limiting the use of social media platforms and peer-to-peer communication applications by terrorists can help authorities fight back against terrorist recruitment, both in the long and short run.

Intervention in the Recruitment Cycle and Involving the Families of Subjects

Terrorist prevention programs, including CVE and PVE initiatives, usually focus on countering the ideologies held by groups and individuals and by engaging communities and building bridges among stakeholders. The United Nations defines such actions as activities that deter disaffected individuals from crossing the line and becoming terrorists.⁸¹ However, these terms and concepts are highly debatable, and some scholars argue that CVE and PVE programs have evolved into “a catch-all category that lacks precision and focus.”⁸² Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) programs vary dramatically throughout the world, and the terms *preventing* and *countering* are often used interchangeably, “making it difficult to discern any conceptual distinction in their application.”⁸³ Furthermore, many P/CVE programs fail to

define the specifics of their goals and what they are essentially preventing without specifying the parameters for establishing short and long term successes.⁸⁴

The intervention concept prescribed in this chapter to prevent recruitment can be considered a part of overall P/CVE efforts. However, I do not believe in the effectiveness of these programs if they are not designed to reach out to individuals personally to raise awareness and persuade them to cut their ties with the terrorist organization recruiters who are in touch with them. Therefore, I suggest considering “intervention and prevention of terrorist recruitment” as an integral concept and program, because it is designed to deal with vulnerable individuals personally and directly as soon as they are identified as potential recruitment targets by terrorist organizations, rather than functioning as a general mass outreach effort.

Understanding the terrorist culture of indoctrination and recruitment is essential for the interruption of recruitment efforts. Terrorist organizations make sure that their members learn and understand two essential rules from the beginning of their recruitment. The first rule is to “hear and obey” regardless of any circumstances, referring to the necessity of adhering to the rules of the organizations and leaders. This rule ensures that for terrorist organizations and their leaders, regardless of their position in the hierarchy, orders will be carried out without any discussion, unconditionally, both as an ideological requirement or religious duty and as an organizational rule.

For example, both Al-Qaeda and ISIS, during their ideological indoctrination and military training courses, teach their cadres “hear and obey” as a rule of the organization and as part of their religious duty to obey the emirs. Followers who underestimate this rule and fail to obey are harshly disciplined. ISIS and Al-Qaeda are known for brutally punishing, or even murdering, those who fail to obey given orders.⁸⁵ Similarly, the DHKP/C had a disciplinary committee to investigate and punish those who refused to follow orders, often ending up assassinating their own members as punishment. Therefore, this rule is designed to ensure that even new recruits will follow the rules.

This entrenched logic and the fear of reprisals makes it almost impossible to intervene if a person is fully radicalized and recruited. Terrorist organizations usually apply a variety of precautions to secure the retention of their members and to prevent defections and ideological confusion.

The second rule terrorists utilize is to not involve themselves with the teachings, literature, or social media of other ideological traditions and groups, and to not communicate or discuss competing ideologies with others, not even with family members.⁸⁶ This rule is particularly true for new members. This ensures that terrorists, particularly new recruits, are isolated from the outside world. This is seen in cults as well, as a means of reducing the risk of defection through ideological confusion, or often, through doubts about the violent tactics of an organization. The Al-Qaeda recruitment manual prescribes a similar process of mental and physical isolation in an effort to protect its new recruits.

Finally, these rules and the mindset that follows from them, pose a high barrier to the authorities or intervention teams seeking to counter terrorist recruitment. Due to the conditions detailed above, obedience to the rules and mental and physical isolation, it is extremely difficult to reach out to individuals who are radicalized or who have been recently recruited to a terrorist organization without personally connecting with them, because their communication channels to the outside world are shut down. Often, these individuals see such efforts as the counteractivities of their enemies; therefore, they are on the defensive, programmed not to listen to what the enemy is trying to feed them. This makes the work of P/CVE programs very difficult. Additionally, P/CVE programs might be counterproductive because they may target the ideologies of terrorist organizations. When a conversation evolves into the questioning of one’s belief system without an established bond and trust, there is an increased possibility that the person subject to the P/CVE efforts will automatically shut down communication and cut off mental interactions due to distrust.

Intervention in Terrorist Recruitment

I propose an intervention and prevention program aimed at intervening at the very early stages of the recruitment process, when terrorists are attempting to identify a prospect and establish contact. These would be the first two stages of the terrorist recruitment and radicalization process, which have been explained above. However, even if a subject is not successfully identified as at-risk and vulnerable during these two stages, it is never too late to intervene until the subject is fully recruited through the remaining steps.

Intervention and prevention programs must be carefully designed, and stakeholders must work with the appropriate authorities and communities, so they can locate individuals, particularly vulnerable youth, who are being targeted for recruitment. The intervention should be carried out based on the subjects, their psychology, and the conditions surrounding them, particularly in relation to their families. It is advised that direct interactions with the subjects be carefully prepared, and whenever possible, family members should be involved from the beginning of the process, for the reasons presented above.

Families and Close Friends

The next step after the identification of at-risk individuals is the initiation of the intervention and prevention process. An important consideration is that approaching an individual in touch with a terrorist organization, knowingly or unknowingly, could easily become a setback, further radicalizing that person by pushing him or her into the arms of the recruiters. Therefore, it is substantially more productive if people, including family members and close friends who are close to the individual at-risk, can be mobilized to get involved with the authorities and intervention teams. From this perspective, Koehler and Ehrh argue that “in this sense families, friends and colleagues are our ‘first line of defense’ against violent radicalization, without implying the use of these emotional relationships for intelligence gathering or policing.”⁸⁷ Additionally, individuals subject to terrorist recruitment activities can be very emotionally engaged due to the bonds and friendships already established with their recruiters, and it can be challenging to counter these emotions.

I also realized during my past interactions with people targeted by terrorist recruiters, particularly young people, that without the assistance, guidance, and supervision of parents or family members, including older siblings, interventions would have limited success. In my experience, halting the recruitment process of young subjects proved to be more challenging if the families were not involved. Consequently, families and friends are the best protectors of their loved ones. They can usually keep a constant eye on their children and friends, and they are certainly a lot better at supervision than outsiders or intervention teams. Also, the involvement of the families is also beneficial in regard to protecting the siblings and close relatives of the prospects, who also often become the targets of recruiters.

How to Identify Potential Recruitment Subjects

Because this model is based on interrupting the recruitment process in as timely a way as possible, it is essential to identify potential candidates as early as possible. There are a number of ways to do this that involve different stakeholders, including law enforcement agencies, counterterrorism authorities, local partners, school administrators, and social media interactions.

First, the most reliable way to identify potential targets is through continual law enforcement and counterterrorism work. Based on how they are set up, law enforcement agencies and counterterrorism authorities carry out counterterrorism investigations daily, just as the FBI does in the US. These agencies are the best sources for determining if a known

terrorist recruiter is approaching a potential subject. counterterrorism identification of the subjects can be done easily through investigations of cases or individuals, and by uncovering terrorists' connections through intelligence work or forensic examinations of evidence, such as data from electronic devices, cell phones, computers, email accounts, peer-to-peer communication applications, and so forth.

In this case, the counterterrorism authorities must decide how to best reveal the identity of such a subject and/or approach that individual, based on the particular circumstances of an operation. In my case, when I administered a counterterrorism program in Sanliurfa, Turkey, I tried my best to extract as many names as possible for intervention purposes, even in some cases risking an ongoing operation, so we could interrupt the recruitment of an individual.

Stand-alone intelligence operations targeting terrorist organizations through electronic surveillance activities disclose almost all possible new recruits, because during the identification and initial contact process, even if the recruiters are careful with their communications, whether via cell phones, emails, applications or social media, their subjects are generally not so careful, at least up to a certain point. Usually, depending on the circumstances, intelligence agencies can easily share appropriate names with the intervention or prevention authorities without compromising their operations.

The analysis of open source social media like Twitter, Facebook, and peer-to-peer applications can reveal a lot of names of people who are interacting through known terrorist channels, and even ascertain their locations.

Counterterrorism authorities should monitor people, particularly students, and interact with known terrorist-affiliated fronts, including their foundations, associations, neighborhood study centres, bookstores, and any other sites the organizations employ to recruit. Additionally, events sponsored by terrorist organization fronts, such as concerts, demonstrations, meetings, training courses, and sports activities, serve as occasions for identifying candidates. Families whose children have already been recruited to a terrorist organization and who are being sought through outstanding warrants, or have become foreign fighters by moving to a conflict zone, are under the constant threat of further efforts to have other family members recruited. Therefore, special consideration should be given to the siblings of recruits among the groups mentioned above, even if they do not interact with known terrorist recruiters.

Furthermore, the family members, siblings, cousins, and nephews of imprisoned terrorists, and those who have conflicts with government authorities, should also be considered vulnerable. These family members are under constant threat of recruitment, as terrorist organizations often use their connections and emotional leverage to recruit among family members via special handwritten notes from prison or specific requests via intermediaries like lawyers or other family members who have access to prisons. These people also should be considered high-risk and vulnerable.

The groups listed above are not criminals or terrorists, nor should they be considered such. They certainly should not be profiled in terms of their affiliations; rather, they constitute vulnerable groups terrorist organizations tend to recruit more easily than outsiders. Therefore, reaching out to individuals among these targeted populations could easily help authorities prevent the recruitment of new members if they can intervene in a timely and professional manner.

The Logic and Method of Intervention to Prevent Recruitment

The foremost critical aspect of preventing terrorist recruitment is intervention. The goals of the authorities and teams intervening should be clearly defined and specified, and they should be openly communicated to those on-site - in this case, mostly the parents and other family members. The initial communication with the families is critical. Conveying the objectives is one of the toughest hurdles in this process because often family members may believe their

loved ones are about to run away any moment to join a terrorist organization or are in danger of being arrested. Therefore, the concept of the program and the message that the objective of the intervention program is to prevent recruitment so that their loved ones do not become terrorists should be clearly communicated as soon as the initial interactions start.

The second most important procedure is not to stigmatize families by appearing in their neighborhood as counterterrorism officers, law enforcement agents, or representatives of a government agency, in an effort to make families comfortable to meet with the authorities.

Third, clear messages that the intervention team is not conducting a counterterrorism or intelligence operation and that their loved ones are not under the threat of arrest through their family interactions should be conveyed, so that the family members can be relieved from the stress of those outcomes at the beginning of the interactions. The message that “we are here to help you help your children or loved ones, so we can save them from the hands of terrorist organizations together”, coming from the intervening authorities, is essential at this step.

The ideologies of the family members or their loved ones should never be an issue during these interactions. The prevention of terrorist recruitment is not a deradicalization program. Discussions of ideological or religious beliefs are often counterproductive and, in this case, are not among the objectives for the prevention of recruitment. Authorities should always respect the ideologies and belief systems of the families. Instead, the message that “people are free to believe what they would like to believe, as long as their activities do not involve violence” should be conveyed if ideological issues emerge.

At this intervention stage, when the authorities, teams, and individuals meet with the families, the following messages should be communicated for a successful prevention program;⁸⁸

- The teams are not here to investigate. This is a prevention program, and there are no judicial or law enforcement investigations involving their loved ones.
- There has not been, and will not be, any official recordkeeping; these activities are not going to show up in any records going forward.
- There is no ongoing judicial process involving the subject, and the teams are here to prevent such a process by making sure that the subjects do not become members of a terrorist organization.
- The team is not here to collect any information or intelligence, and they are not going to make any requests or try to acquire any information regarding the terrorist organizations trying to recruit the subjects. (Such a message is essential to ensure family members that their loved ones are not going to become informants, and that the objective of the visit is not to make progress in that direction).
- This prevention process is voluntary and is not a legal requirement; rather, the team is here to help the subject through the involvement of the family.
- The team members would like to work with your family so they can assist you in helping your children from being recruited. (The team members should not meet with the subjects unless the family members request it, and the initial interactions should not involve the subjects if the families are deemed to be cooperative.)
- Interactions and observations will continue until the teams make sure that the subjects cut their ties with their recruiters. The teams will be in touch with the family in the case of possible risks or unforeseen developments involving their loved ones, such as attempts to run away or ongoing relationships with terrorist groups.

Example of a Recruitment Prevention Program: Sanliurfa Program for the Prevention of Terrorist Recruitment Through Early Intervention by Involving Families

I designed an intervention and prevention program specifically to establish initial contacts with the families of vulnerable youth in Sanliurfa, Turkey; it was implemented between 2010 and 2014. The program was meant to interrupt the recruitment process of terrorist organizations in Sanliurfa, where I was police chief for counterterrorism. Our team members consisted of male and female police officers who had degrees in social work and psychology. They spoke Arabic and Kurdish, as well as Turkish, so they could communicate clearly with the families of the subjects.

Our prevention process started as soon as we identified possible subjects of terrorist recruitment. First, we opened positive communication channels with the families to build mutual trust. We made sure that they understood that we were offering assistance to help them save their children from being recruited by terrorist organizations. When we met with them, we also promised both the families and the subjects that they were not going to face prosecution or investigation if they cut their ties with the terrorist organizations. Our ultimate objective, which was clearly communicated to the families, was to persuade the prospective recruits to cut their ties with their recruiters, distance themselves from terrorist organizations, and accept professional and psychological assistance, if necessary, with the participation of their families. We also wanted to make sure that the families would be part of the prevention and recovery process.⁸⁹

This program became very influential as it progressed. At first, some families were reluctant to accept our help, and there were lack of trust issues. However, as people realized that we were sincere in our efforts and recognized that dozens of children were saved from joining terrorist organizations, some families started to reach out to us on their own. The success rate of the program during the first four years was 87 percent, meaning that our efforts prevented around 2,000 people from being recruited by terrorist organizations between 2010 and 2014. One of the most important findings from the program was the fact that 88 percent of the families indicated that they had not been aware of their loved ones' interactions with terrorist recruiters. This gave us a clear indication of how terrorists, even at the very early stages of the recruitment cycle, ensured that the rules of isolation and secrecy were readily applied.⁹⁰

Counterterrorism/Intelligence Investigations and Operations

Many counterterrorism operations, investigations, and intelligence collection activities are great opportunities to undermine and interrupt terrorist recruitment activities. Furthermore, counterterrorism operations reveal new names associated with terrorist organizations in almost every case. Terrorist organizations usually structure themselves in cells, which provides security safeguards that enable them to continue to operate, even if there are mass arrest operations that threaten their structure. However, these cells are typically found in the armed wings or the senior-level members of the group; recruiters are not usually members of terrorist cells, and they are not in hiding.

Consequently, each counterterrorism operation is a new opportunity to uncover new and unknown names of people who are associated with a terrorist group and whose connections can improve the authorities' grasp of the organization, whether the people are subject to recruitment or part of the recruitment teams.

Furthermore, the analysis of evidence acquired during counterterrorism operations, including digital evidence such as data from computers, cell phones, hard drives, flash drives, CD-ROMs, and cameras, and handwritten notes, connections lists, and any other material which might help uncover new names or clues, is essential to investigating recruitment

operations. Not only can counterterrorism authorities build court cases based on such evidence, but each finding and new name can prompt a new investigation and contribute to the undermining of recruitment activities.

The last consideration from the counterterrorism operation perspective is the social media and internet activities of terrorist organizations at given locales. Counterterrorism authorities can track down individuals who are interacting with known terrorists through social media accounts, internet sites, and peer-to-peer communication applications. Given the fact that terrorist propaganda is now significantly present and proliferating on the internet, it is essential to trace terrorist accounts and determine if anyone is interacting or communicating through them, which can enable local authorities to intervene.

Following Front Establishments, Recruiters, and the Base

Counterterrorism authorities should closely monitor the social base of a terrorist organization, its public activities designed to gather people together and attract outsiders, its known active recruiters, and its front operations. Front establishments are one of the best sites for terrorist recruiters to meet people who are interested in becoming more affiliated with a terrorist organization or who are disposed toward a given terrorist ideology that attracts them to the terrorist front organizations.

Terrorist-sponsored public events can also attract thousands of people and give the organizations a considerable amount of opportunities to meet new people and extend their base. In particular, events carried out under innocent-looking religiously affiliated covers can attract many under the guise of attending an honest and sincere program, but can, in fact, be sites where terrorist affiliates have platforms and means to reach out to attendees. For example, Hezbollah has been very successful in attracting people to its Ashura Day celebrations. Similarly, Turkish Hezbollah has been successfully gathering thousands of people for its *Mawlid an-Nabi* ["Birth of Prophet Muhammad"] celebrations. The last such gathering I observed as the chief of counterterrorism in Sanliurfa in 2013 brought over 35,000 people together for an outdoor event.

The DHKP/C used to host concerts at sports arenas and stadiums through its music group affiliates, where the musicians and singers would openly push the propaganda of the terrorist organization. Members of the organization would distribute their newspapers, journals, and pamphlets to the attendees, most of whom would be high school and university students who happened to be there for the music and entertainment. I remember that such a concert in Ankara in 1997 attracted around 8,000 people, mostly youth, and the terrorist organization took advantage of the opportunity to connect with a large number of students. In one of the interviews with a captured terrorist, she told me how she was first recruited at this concert in 1997 and became involved with the DHKP/C members. Likewise, after-school activities, including sports activities such as football or basketball, specific courses like karate, or neighborhood study groups, are occasions where terrorist recruiters can attract young students and spend time with them for recruitment purposes.

Terrorist bases may not necessarily involve people who are carrying out illegal activities, but they can offer opportunities for terrorists to mobilize the assistance of people, based on their ideologies and belief systems. Often, people in the base might want to distance themselves from the violence and are not eager to get directly involved in terrorist operations, but the organizations can easily enlist their indirect and passive support since they might make connections through their ideologies or through family/friend relationships.

For example, I once arrested a terrorist who left eight sticks of dynamite hidden in a bathroom scale along with some of his laundry in a duffel bag at his older sister's house, telling her that he would pick them up later. When we searched the house, we found the bathroom weight scale with the dynamite, but the sister had no idea she was hiding explosives at her

home, where she lived with her young children and husband. Similarly, in 2012, a smuggler helped a terrorist pass through the border between Turkey and Syria and smuggled him into Sanliurfa, took him to one of his friends, and asked if the friend would allow him to stay at his farm for a few days. The terrorist, meanwhile, met with his connections and acquired a car, which he rigged with explosives he had brought from Syria to build a SVBIED (Suicide Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device), and the car was used later for a suicide attack in Sanliurfa. When confronted, the farm owner and his family members explained that the terrorist had stayed at their farm, but the farmer had not been involved in the attack. As can be seen from this, prior connections and ideological relationships can always be utilized to further the objectives of terrorist organizations, sometimes without the knowledge of the people involved.

Additionally, front organizations are often the best places for terrorist organizations to attract people, particularly youth, based upon their interests or ideologies. As mentioned before, these places are operated legally and are open to the public. Terrorists try to pull people into them, so that they can start interacting with prospects and target them for recruitment. Often, these front establishments are places in neighborhoods where people can casually interact through a variety of activities such as courses, training programs, sports, and reading, or where people can simply spend spare time, such as in internet cafes or tea/coffee houses. Front organizations can be extremely useful for influencing young people, who do not have much to do in their spare time and who are vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment. Terrorists also target certain neighborhoods with fitting and more attractive front establishments, based on the demographics and opportunities of the jurisdiction in which they are operating.

Moreover, legally, it can be challenging to close these places, since they do not directly represent terrorist organizations, and in the courts, it might sometimes take years to prove ties to a terrorist organization - meanwhile, they can continue to operate freely. Therefore, monitoring front organizations and establishments is one of the essential tasks in preventing terrorist recruitment. Families can easily be alerted about their children's interactions with the people in these places and informed of their real intentions. Sometimes charities are used as fronts. In 2002, the United States Department of the Treasury designated the Global Relief Foundation (GRF),⁹¹ an NGO based in Bridgeview, Illinois, as a terrorist entity, after the FBI raided it on December 14, 2001.⁹² The GRF began its operations in the US as a charitable non-profit organization in 1992 with tax-exempt status⁹³ and continued its activities until the end of 2001, all the while supporting Al-Qaeda and some other Salafi Jihadist terrorist organizations.⁹⁴

Schools and Universities

Educational Institutions can easily become breeding grounds for terrorist organizations, particularly high schools and universities. It is easy for terrorist recruiters in schools to get acquainted with their fellow students, as they spend ample time together, which makes the school setting very suitable for radicalization and recruitment. Therefore, counterterrorism authorities should closely monitor the movements and activities of terrorist organizations at schools, with special attention given to hot spots and schools where terrorists are known to have recruited successfully in the past. Authorities should also be in touch with school administrations and teachers. Moreover, when appropriate, counterterrorism agencies should give informative seminars on the tactics of terrorist recruiters, so teachers and administrators can be alerted to signs of recruitment activity and contact the authorities. Such preventive measures are vital where there is intense recruitment activity; these can serve as an early warning system with the participation of the schools.

When I was the chief of counterterrorism, for more comprehensive and successful prevention, we assigned one experienced and trained counterterrorism officer to each high school and middle school in the city of 2.5 million people. These officers had this assignment in addition to their daily duties. Each officer visited school administrators and school social workers to talk about the objectives of their assignment, describe the tactics and methods terrorists might try to use, and exchange cell phone numbers so school officials could reach them directly, if need be. We also assigned senior management officers, like captains, to the schools deemed vulnerable and critical. They monitored these schools very closely and interacted with the school administrators. To Harran University in our city, with over 20,000 students, we dedicated a team of officers led by one officer who was designated as the university counterterrorism police captain, to monitor the activities of terrorists in and around the university. However, these officers were not tasked for investigations or intelligence collection; they were simply liaison officers, and their main job at the schools was to make sure that no student was being recruited and that no known terrorist recruiters were operating there.

In addition to these counterterrorism officers, to each school, we assigned a patrol car with at least two officers to be present and visible in front of the school gates before school started and when it finished, not only to deter criminals, but also to send the message that we were taking the protection of the students seriously in regard to any type of crime, including terrorism. While such precautionary and preventive measures may not be feasible for every jurisdiction, due to limited resources, in our case, they were very effective, as the number of new terrorist recruits among the students decreased by at least 50% during the first year these measures were put in place.

Community Policing

Counterterrorism authorities cannot control every single movement of terrorist organizations in their jurisdictions. There are always going to be terrorist activities that slip through the cracks. However, police presence and community policing activities are great tools for reaching out to communities to detect possible terrorist activities. Furthermore, in many cases, through the interactions of regular law enforcement work, tips may be offered up by people who are willing to talk to officers directly about what they have observed, if they trust the police. Therefore, community policing activities and regular law enforcement work can contribute to counterterrorism activities and the prevention of recruitment by establishing strong relationships between the communities and authorities.

Furthermore, basic law enforcement work, including patrolling the streets on foot or by cruiser or interacting with people in their own neighborhoods, always provides great opportunities for law enforcement agents to monitor a community for terrorist activities, principally if they are trained on how to spot various terrorist activities. For example, some terrorist organization members may dress or act in certain ways, especially if they are not trying to hide. This was true for ISIS members, who dressed in a particular style, with long hair, beards, and shaved mustaches. While not everyone who looked like this qualified as a terrorist, these types of clues, along with other attributes, can lead to new findings. For example, in this case, one could easily distinguish ordinary Muslims who were growing their beards from ISIS members, who had long hair, as well as long beards.⁹⁵

Hotlines and Helplines

A hotline can be a lifesaver, especially if the purpose of a preventive or assistance hotline is clearly communicated to the community, and the anonymity of callers is guaranteed and

respected. In practice, authorities cannot reach everyone who is being approached or identified for recruitment purposes. However, people who are aware of terrorist recruitment activities and who do not want to call 911 or contact authorities directly can easily make an anonymous call to help others. Different countries have a variety of established mechanisms to prevent terrorist activities. For example, the German *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz* (BfV), operates an anti-terrorism hotline,⁹⁶ for such purposes. The authorities appeal to the public to support them via confidential hotlines operating via email, mail, telephone, or cellphone applications if they have knowledge of planned violence or attack plots, know any individuals involved, see terrorism being promoted, or become aware of individuals radicalizing themselves.

Depending on the circumstances, people might sometimes be more comfortable reaching out to a hotline or helpline if an NGO administers it. For example, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) was established to help people save the children from crimes, abuse, and terrorism, with the motto “every childhood is worth fighting for.”⁹⁷ The NSPCC defines its objective as “protecting children from radicalization,” stating, “It can be hard to know what to do if you’re worried about the radicalization of a child. We’ve got advice to help.” On its website, the NSPCC provides tips for spotting signs of the radicalization of children, noting that it can be difficult. Their information highlights children who are:

- isolating themselves from family and friends
- talking as if from a scripted speech
- unwilling or unable to discuss their views
- suddenly displaying a disrespectful attitude towards others
- showing increased levels of anger
- becoming increasingly secretive, especially regarding internet use.⁹⁸

Every submission to these hotlines should be investigated thoroughly to make sure that the subjects are evaluated well enough before a case is closed, regardless of the hotline or caller. Khuram Butt, the ringleader of the 2017 London Bridge attack in the UK, was apparently reported to an anti-terrorist hotline but later passed a background check when applying to work for the London underground metro system.⁹⁹

Tips or Designated Hotline Numbers and Investigations

Designated hotline numbers to dispatch centers or dedicated numbers for terrorism-related tips, like the one used by the NYPD¹⁰⁰ or the FBI tip line,¹⁰¹ are important tools for preventing or signaling recruitment and other terrorist activities. Law enforcement tip lines might be the fastest and most reliable resource for people who are seeking a quick solution or who see something they believe is credible enough to report. Tip lines are also essential for investigative purposes, particularly in the wake of a terrorist incident.

In the US, the FBI established such a tip line modeled after 911, which, according to the agency, receives about 100 actionable tips every day. For example, over half of the 50,000 tips submitted to the FBI within the first two days following the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013 were submitted through the website www.tips.fbi.gov.¹⁰²

Another important aspect of tip lines is the ability to relate seemingly regular crimes to terrorism-related incidents. These could be as simple as an arson being called into the dispatch center and the responding officers’ having been informed about the intention of a terrorist organization to carry out such an attack, so that the possibility of a connection can be considered.

Furthermore, officers who respond to regular crimes might find out possible connections to terrorism after an initial assessment. For example, in 2012, when the dispatch center in Sanliurfa, Turkey, received a call in the middle of the night about the vandalism of a hair salon, the responding officers initially reported that the suspect was drunk and under the influence of

drugs and concluded that it was a random attack. However, later, they realized that the suspect broke the salon windows because the owner had recruited his fiancé to a terrorist organization while she was working at the salon, and the terrorist organization had sent her abroad without his knowledge.

Conclusion

Regular law enforcement practices often assume that counterterrorism operations, like arresting terrorists, are the same as preventing terrorism, when in fact, with terrorism, this is not the case, because terrorism involves ideologies, and terrorists often dedicate themselves fanatically to their causes. This chapter on the prevention of recruitment to terrorism, as a first line of defense, examines and offers a variety of tactics and methods that can be used to decrease terrorist organization membership, which, in turn, can reduce the numbers of terrorist attacks and related casualties.

Prevention activities are always less expensive and require fewer resources than other methods of counterterrorism. Additionally, if a prevention program is developed properly and becomes successful, it might eventually lead to the extinction of a terrorist group further down the time-line, simply because these organizations cannot survive without recruiting new members. However, prevention of recruitment to terrorism is not a stand-alone counterterrorism method and should be utilized in conjunction with other counterterrorism and preventive measures. Nevertheless, it could certainly be the most effective counterterrorism method; particularly, given the fact that many of the other measures the world took to deal with Al-Qaeda after the 9/11 attacks had questionable outcomes.

Finally, when it comes to the prevention of terrorist recruitment policies, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. A combination of approaches and policies, many of which are presented in this chapter, should be applied holistically, based on demographics; population characteristics; terrorist organizations and their ideology, their social background and base – but also the psychology of the individuals involved.

For a successful intervention, it is essential that terrorism prevention teams reach out to the individuals targeted by terrorist recruiters, and, if possible, work with their families and close networks as support groups, before they become radicalized or are indoctrinated into terrorist ideologies. In addition to these ideologies, social networks, schools, neighborhoods, and various local and global pull factors are essential factors in terrorist recruitment that should be considered in any intervention program. It is also vital that policies aim to identify individuals as soon as they start to interact with terrorist recruiters, so that intervention can be initiated at the very early stages of the terrorist recruitment cycle, and certainly before an individual is recruited or gets involved in crimes. Each and every human soul deserves a second chance, as life is nothing without mistakes, especially for youth, and it might well be, as I believe, that reaching out to vulnerable prospective recruits before they are radicalized and criminalized is the best way to counter terrorism.

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