



VIRTUAL JIHADISM – HOW TO COUNTER IT

Jihadism on the Internet

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Executive Summary

The main aim of this dissertation is to find answer to the central question of this thesis: What are the most effective measures to counter the spread of virtual Jihadism in the Netherlands? In order to investigate and give answer to the research question, research has been done by analysing existing scientific literature, written by experienced experts knowledge.

Jihadists use the Internet in artistic and innovational ways, often leaving experts and policy creators behind underdeveloped. The most actual threat are jihadist groups who use the interactive nature of the Internet for propaganda and recruitment to influence other potential jihadists, among which brainwashing, indoctrination and socialising those who seek out the jihadist ideology. Therefore, the results of this research defines the Internet as a facilitation tool for a large part of the radicalization process of jihadists. On the basis of the substantial threat in the Netherlands, an Action Program has been established with counter measures that combat virtual Jihadism. The most effective counter measures that have been taken are: criminal prosecution, countering radicalization and combating terrorism financing. So far 52 passport measures have been taken, 29 assets have been frozen and at least 115 investigations are held on at least 135 suspects. Also, debates and dialogue activities have provided a counterbalance to jihadist propaganda.

At the same time the Action Program includes a countermeasure which has disadvantages for the relationship between the government and the private sector. As an important countermeasure is the voluntary code of conduct for the private sector, where request of content removal by the states should be honoured. Removing content that is placed on privately owned platforms is complicated since such platforms rely on user-generated content and already have their own legal jurisdictions.

It is recommended that states should exercise their power to bring various parties together by organizing events that will allow these organizations to meet each other and to join forces. In essence, a platform is needed that brings the representatives together to discuss the concerns, to establish communications channels and to develop actions. In particular, states should form close relationships with private sector companies such as Facebook, Twitter and Google. The communication between these parties is necessary, because private sector companies have an interest in protecting free speech and individual freedom. Therefore, it is important that states should set up channels of communication with the private sector and not play their own judge. Furthermore, counter jihadist information should be as suitable, tempting and impressive as jihadist messaging. The ultimate goal to counter virtual Jihadism is to take away the enchantment and temptation from extremist messaging.

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Preface

Before you is my dissertation for the conclusion of my bachelor's degree on European Studies at the Hague University of Applied Science.

Several people have supported me during my bachelor's dissertation, without whom I would have never completed in a timely manner. Without their contribution it would have been a stressful and lengthy process. I wish to express my sincere appreciation for their support, motivation, encouragement and guidance.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my family for their love and confidence during my time studying at the Hague University. Thank you for never losing faith in me.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Topic Introduction

Due to widespread and heavy dependency, jihadists probably know best how to use the Internet more so than any other ordinary citizen. The Internet does not only create several prospects for the market, the state and civilians, but also serves radical Islamic groups to use the Internet for different purposes - from recruiting, funding, propaganda to a virtual training camp. According to the General Intelligence and Security Service (GISS), the Internet has now increasingly developed to be a powerful tool for jihadists. The GISS estimates that about 25,000 jihadists worldwide, from over 100 countries, are active in the barely visible corners of the Internet to the outside world. The worldwide increase of the number of Internet users has led to the globalization of virtual Jihadism.

1.2 The Aim, Research- and Sub Questions

The main aim of this dissertation is to achieve a comprehensive understanding on the current counter measures being taken to refute the spread of virtual Jihadism. In order to obtain an answer to the research question, it is necessary to start at the very foundation. The research and sub-questions that are formulated for this aim are as follows:

Research question:

What are the most effective measures to counter the spread of virtual Jihadism in the Netherlands?

Sub questions:

1. What is virtual Jihadism? How does it work?
2. What are the two main processes that characterise virtual Jihadism?
3. What kind of individuals play an important role in the aforementioned processes?
4. To what extent and in what way do Jihadists use the Internet as a tool?
5. What are the current efforts of countering the spread of virtual Jihadism in the Netherlands?

This report will essentially focus on jihadist terrorism and jihadist radicalization. These concepts will also emphasise Islamic terrorism and radicalization and between these two terms no differentiations are going to be made. The broad subject matter of terrorism will be addressed as terrorism is a difficult concept to grasp in its entirety. The distinction between terrorism and Jihadism has not always been distinct in the literature.

The usage of the Internet by offenders of variable felonies such as cybercrimes will not be addressed in this dissertation. This research will not be about scams, the increase and spread of viruses, spyware,

economical- and industrial undercover operations or cyberwar. This dissertation will focus on the usage of the Internet by jihadists and the measures to counter the spread of virtual Jihadism (not on the wider scopes of ICT). The Internet is a complicated and broad area of research within itself. Another restriction of this dissertation is, that the focus will mainly be on the Netherlands. However, data available may not always be fair, unbiased or practical because of its broad nature.

1.3 Methodology

As mentioned above, the Internet is a complicated and broad area of research. The usage of the Internet by jihadists is so intensive and complicated, that its research will demand the help of professionals through the advancing years. As mentioned above, this dissertation will be global. The objective is to answer the questions through findings by the use of secondary data, such as:

- Academic literature
- Dutch websites and forums
- Newspaper articles

Secondary data is the data that is already available from other sources. This methodology is necessary for exploratory research to investigate the field of the subject with as much openness and curiosity as possible in order to collate important themes with the objective being to obtain a strong understanding of the subject matter. Furthermore, secondary data also provides a basis for comparison and more importantly it simplifies the research, because secondary data is easily accessible.

2. Virtual Jihadism

The first chapter of this dissertation will describe what virtual Jihadism entails, the type of influence the Internet holds on this movement, and how Jihadists operate around the Internet.

The Internet has become one of the prime resources in jihadist communications strategies (Kohlmann, 2006). Terrorists make use of technology for communication purposes on a large scale, as well as for recruitment, training, fundraising and propaganda (Weimann, 2006). The Internet is a paradigmatic arena for activities by terrorist organizations, as it offers the following advantages to them:

- The Internet is inexpensive, fast, easily accessible and has a practically global reach.
- The Internet has limited or, in some countries, no regulations, censorship or any means of government supervision. It is considered to be the largest forum in which relatively anonymous, people can give their opinion and be uninhibited in their radical statements by social control or the threat of judicial persecution.
- The Internet has a huge scale of audience worldwide and therefore the target audience is expansive.
- The Internet offers a quick stream of information.
- The Internet is a multimedia domain. It is capable to incorporate texts, videos, audios, graphics, as well as allowing users to download and stream movies, books, songs and so forth (Weimann, March 2004).

In addition, several security officials, researchers and policy analysts have identified the Internet as a compelling terrorist recruiting tool that poses a developing security risk. Many worry that rapidly evolving technical skills offer terrorist groups a new strategic weapon in which they can attack their enemies (Janbek, n.d.). Furthermore, worldwide it is evident that the Internet is of great and growing importance to the radicalization and recruitment for the jihad and the ideological and organizational development of jihadist networks. For instance, the radical and extreme messages disseminated through the Internet have both an inspiring and mobilizing effect on local jihadist networks and individuals in Europe. The Internet also promotes and accelerates the formation of ordinary and virtual networks. Hence, it also serves as a source of information on terrorist methods and resources and thus functions as a virtual training camp. Lastly, it is also easy to meet like-minded people through the Internet, which quickly makes the targeted individual(s) to feel absorbed in a virtual community (Eur-lex.europe, November 2007).

2.1 The Virtual Ummah

According to the General Intelligence and Security Service (GISS), the rapidly developing Internet has become very important for terrorists of all sorts over the last decade (Boon, Huq, Lovelace, jr., 2011). The Internet can now be identified as one of their most favoured communication tools, as it establishes an immediate relationship between the target individual(s) and a virtual Muslim community (Ummah) (Duarte, Ganor, Knop, von, September 2006, p.154). According to the GISS, developments such as globalization and individualization form a constant threat to the social and cultural cohesion in the modern western world. Moreover, the individual freedom and the rapid influx of immigrants in recent years has changed the Dutch society radically in a short amount of time and has also placed existing traditions and authorities under a lot of pressure. In their need to belong, individuals and communities therefore increasingly seek to secure an identity. According to the GISS, young people in particular are often involved in that search for their own identity. During which, they find support amongst peers, local groups and subcultures that share a common cultural, political and/or religious interest (Boon, Huq, Lovelace, jr., 2011).

As mentioned above, the Internet today holds a significant influence over many individuals, especially amongst the youth. Therefore, the discussion will be about how the Internet succeeds by connecting people over the entire world with each other. According to the GISS, the Internet does not only succeed in connecting local and international groups and individuals together, it also creates an emotional connection. For example, the visual culture of these movements are easily portrayed from the jihad videos that are posted on several sites on the Internet. The GISS also mentions that these videos have a great emotional impact on youngsters. For instance, an individual web surfer in the Netherlands can directly witness and empathise with the emotions of struggling and suffering Muslims around the world. This results in an emotional connection and a degree of identification with victims on the other side of the world (Boon, Huq, Lovelace, jr., 2011).

Additionally, the emotions stimulated can be so strong that an urge to act upon such feelings is born with the objective to undo a perceived injustice. Also, through the Internet, the Dutch surfer comes in contact with like-minded people worldwide, who are willing to fight the same battle for justice with radical ideologies that not only justify the struggle, but also provide a clear solution to the problems. The latter often takes the form of a comprehensive explanation of the causes and identification of enemies to be fought against (Boon, Huq, Lovelace, jr., 2011).

In essence, the virtual community is dominated by radical and extreme Islamic movements and preachers. This radical community forms a so called 'beacon', around which a global gathering of radicalizing Muslims flock. In this 'beacon', they find inspiration and motivation for their

mobilization of the jihad. Moreover, this radical community form groups by having discussions together, by developing an abstract religious political ideology, by the practical application in life, and by the struggle that happens in their eyes for pure Islam. However, there is no question of a social political program that is tested or one that should be adapted to specific social conditions. What it comes down to is that the pure virtual world takes the place of concrete reality. The virtual community detaches individuals from their surrounding society and turns them against everyone. This all happens in an ideological manner and eventually advances to violence. Consequently, social cohesion is affected and radicalized individuals can therefore easily make the leap to the use of violence (GISS, March 2006, p.46).

Another important feature of radical Islam - which is stimulated by the abstract virtual world of the Internet, is the neglect of the historical-cultural context. According to the GISS, events and traditions from the time of the Prophet Muhammad are easily transposed without any sense of history to the world of today (GISS, March 2006, p.46). This is linked with the aspect of deculturalization. Oliver Roy (2006, p.155), a French political scientist, points out that the process of deculturalization especially takes place amongst the youngsters of the second and third generations. They abandon the religious and cultural customs of their parents and increasingly become more open to other influences, which includes the transnational religious nature of the country they now live in. Roy also states that these youngsters become more susceptible to radicalization under the influence of these new perceptions of religion. In addition, the concept of 'Islam' and the 'Ummah' become more meaningful to them than the country of their parents, or the country where they currently reside.

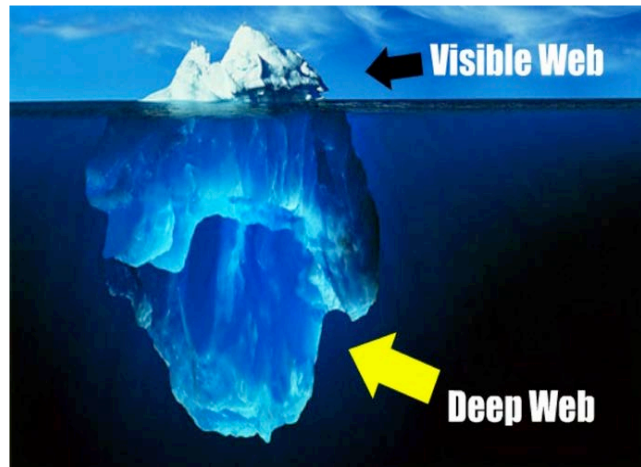
As a result, mutual cross ethnic violent battles occurs for the Islam because the virtual community places no value to cultural-historic and social conditions. This also provides an explanation for the increasing multi-ethnicity in national and international jihadist networks, and the ease of entering into mutual alliances within the movement of the global jihad.

2.2 The Operation of Virtual Jihadism

The above sub-chapter explained what virtual Jihadism means and its contribution to the global jihad. This sub-chapter will explain how virtual Jihadism works. According to the GISS, jihadists around the world find each other more quickly due to the interactive nature of the Internet. Jihadists do not only meet each other on public virtual sites such as social media, web forums and chat programs, but also on semi-public or private virtual spaces. As stated in the report of the GISS, jihadi activities and processes find meeting areas, especially on semi-public and private virtual spaces that constitute most of the fear (GISS, January 2012, p.5). These private virtual places are a large part of the invisible web, also referred to by scientists as deep web, darknet or undernet. Additionally, this invisible web refers to that part of the World Wide Web that cannot be or is not indexed by search engines like Google (Balduzzi, Ciancaglini, McArdle, Rosler, 2015).

Figure 1: The Dark Side of the Internet

The visible part of the Internet, also called surface web, is that part of the Internet that is retrievable and searchable (Lakhani, February 2016). Based on an American research from 2003, the GISS states that the invisible web is 550 times larger than the normal visible web (GISS, January 2012, p.5). Researchers at Berkeley University in California compared the number of terabytes of the visible Internet and the so-called deep web. In 2003, the



terabyte count of the invisible web was 91.850 and the terabyte count of the visible web was 167 (Lyman, Varian, 2003). The statistical data is now quite outdated, but no recent research is available according to the GISS (GISS, January 2012, p.5).

2.3 The Core and Secondary Forums

The deep web (invisible web) is divided between two layers: core forums and secondary forums. Core forums are web forums on the deep web that form the basis and drive of the global virtual jihadi movement. The GISS estimates that about 25,000 jihadists originating from more than over 100 countries are members of this group of core forums. As reported by the GISS, jihadist criminals and hackers dive into the invisible web and do everything to make their activities non-retrievable. Furthermore, hidden in the invisible web are virtual meeting points that are built, managed and protected by fanatical jihadists themselves. These jihadists often do not have any formal ties with jihadi organizations. It is estimated that there are several hundred jihadist platforms globally, such as websites and web forums (GISS, January 2012, p.6). According to a report by Weimann (March, 2004):

(...) terrorist organizations and their supporters maintain hundreds of websites, exploiting the unregulated, anonymous, and easily accessible nature of the Internet to target an array of messages to a variety of audiences.

Furthermore, one of the most powerful features of the core forums is that all members can participate in group discussions on a wide range of topics. The topics include current subjects or concerns that are discussed from a jihadist perspective, new released jihadi propaganda material that are being analysed, individual members who suggest possible targets to attack or jihadi martyrs who are being honoured

(GISS, January 2012, p.6). What it comes down to is that such types of interactive group discussions form the basis of radical discourse, which works towards legitimized violence against enemies of the 'true Islam'. This discourse leads to processes of ideological formation and strengthening and ideological indoctrination in the core forums

One step before becoming active on the core forums is being active on secondary forums. As stated in the report of the GISS, participants of the core forums have often come from a long virtual journey. The prelude of their radicalization goes through different websites and forums that play a role in the jihadist Internet. This often involves less radical platforms which form a partial section of the invisible web; as such less radical platforms are designated as secondary forums by the GISS. Although these platforms do carry a radical discourse, neither participants nor discussions are explicitly of violent nature, because the jihadist ideology experiences more criticism on these platforms. Moreover, the dynamic interactive processes that form the basic characteristics of the core forums does not or only partially takes place on the secondary forums (GISS, January 2012, p.7).

Furthermore, secondary forums are also considered secondary because they merely re-post content from other sites (Torres-Sorianom, 2012, p.2). They play an important role in the re-distribution of jihadist propaganda material. Individual supporters on these secondary forums re-distribute propaganda to the visible surface web by posting them on social media such as Facebook and YouTube (GISS, January 2012, p.7). In this case, the secondary forums can be seen as forums that serve as a bridge between the core forums and the surface web (visible web).

2.4 The Limited Use of The Surface Web

Obliviously jihadists are also active on the surface web. The web we know and use every day, composed of websites accessible through well-known search engines such as Google, is called the surface web. Jihadists not only use social media, but also various applications such as email, Internet telephony and chat programs on the surface web. On these virtual places and through any type of communication, jihadists are actively spreading the jihadist ideology, recruiting new jihadists, and continuously distributing propaganda. However, no or limited dynamic interaction takes place on the surface web as the surface web is easily traceable by the government. Jihadists are afraid that their identities, activities, and locations will be traced (Berton, June 2015, p.1).

Regarding to social media jihadists are fairly restrained. The open, individual communication that characterise social media is at odds with the secretive and violent nature of the Internet activities of jihadists. In addition, the GISS concluded that people who radicalise sooner or later delete their account on social media. They consider the (American) social media as sites of the Kuffar (unbelievers), which makes these sites unacceptable and unsafe. Lastly, another factor is that the moderators remove inappropriate expressions on social media. As a result of these limitations, social

media is primarily used for (temporary) republication of jihadist propaganda (GISS, January 2012, p.8).

2.5 Sub Conclusion

It can be concluded that the Internet has become important for terrorist throughout the entire world. It has also become one of their most favoured communication tools. The Internet has established a relationship between the individual and a virtual Muslim community (Ummah). It allows the individuals to become detached from their surrounding society and even allows them to turn against that society. This all happens in an ideological manner and eventually advances to violence. In short, the virtual world takes the place of concrete reality. Associated with this, the interactive nature of the Internet ensure that jihadists through the world have fast, easy accessibility, and a practically global reach. Jihadists can meet and communicate with each other on the surface web (the visible web), on secondary and core forums (the invisible web), and will do everything in their power to make their activities non-retrievable.

3. The Two Main Processes That Characterise Virtual Jihadism

The first chapter of this dissertation was about virtual Jihadism. The second chapter of this dissertation will be an analysis about the two main processes that characterise virtual Jihadism, namely the processes of (self) radicalization and network formation.

3.1 The Process of (Self)-Radicalization

With the emergence of the Internet and the growth in the numbers of applications that are thereby developed, this medium has become one of the most important places of contact between the youth and the radical Islamic teachings. According to the GISS, the Internet in the meantime has become “one of the most relay channels of extremist views and influences” (GISS, April 2005, p.37).

The influence of the World Wide Web is in two ways important for the radicalization. To begin with, there are Internet Islamists who seek to bring the Muslim youth into contact with the radical Islamic message by creating websites to which they apply their range of ideas or by direct contact with young people through forums or chat rooms, in the hope to convince them and encourage their radicalization process. On the other hand, recently there has been more and more talk of self-radicalization under the Muslim youth. Young people infect themselves and continue to infect each other with the radical Islamist ideology, with no middleman who tries to radicalize them in this process (GISS, December 2004, p. 43-44). The bottom line is that, young people self-radicalize and within this process there is a central role reserved for the Internet.

Why do these young people (self) radicalize? To some extent the explanation lies in the particular situation in which young Muslims see themselves placed in a modern and globalized society: A Large group of Muslims, especially young Muslims, emerge in Western-non-Muslim countries. These Muslims feel isolated in the society they live in. This because these young people, unlike their parents, orientate their future towards the West, but at the same time feel a strong sense of distrust in that society. Furthermore, these individuals search for their own identity and their positioning in the Western society and are struggling with numerous of questions about life and religion. Looking for answers to those questions, these individuals seek an environment they are familiar with and that is easily accessible, namely the Internet. Not only do they find a lot of information, but they can additionally also be part of a virtual (Muslim) community. In this virtual community they can exchange information with like-minded companions and let off steam by expressing their frustration. These individuals see the Internet in summary as follows:

(...) one of the few resources available in their struggle and they feel relatively safe while using the Internet. Safe from the police and intelligence security, but also safe with regard to family and traditional influences. The corrective influence of parents and cultural norms and values disappeared for a large extent during the use of the Internet (Roy, 2005, p.153-170).

The next logical question would be: how do young Muslims become influenced? In the first instance recruiters or radical Islamic preachers personally approach the Internet user through the Internet for radicalization purpose. They create series of websites where they place various of texts or video messages or they complement existing websites with their contributions in the hope to get a response from young Muslims. Moreover, they also enter into a discussion by answering the questions and concerns of young Muslims on chat sites or Internet forums (GISS, June 2004, p.8).

After examining a large numbers of websites Roy (2003) states that “sites and discussion lists keep stabbing in extreme dogmatism. Insult, exclusion, mudslinging, slander, gossip and unverifiable or tendentious information are typical characteristics”(p.154). According to Roy (2003), it is almost always about websites containing a radical Islamic trend (p.154).

According to Roy (2003, p.158-159), Islamists try to bind young people by giving them advice and guidance on how they should live as a ‘true Islamic’ in society. Their way of binding people is usually indifferent and even self-hostile to the Islamic religion. In addition, the radical websites are often interconnected, so they offer young people a virtual Ummah (community), as described in the previous chapter and paragraph. The Islamist gives the alienated young people the feeling that there is something like a community of believers that is independent of territory, ethnicity or social context. The Internet thereby serves as a meeting point for the members of the worldwide community of believers.

Furthermore, the research of Roy is confirmed in practise. After the murder of Theo van Gogh the GISS conducted an investigation on the perpetrator Mohammed Bouyeri and the radical Hofstad group Bouyeri belonged to. The GISS established that:

“The Internet played a very important role in the radicalization process. Many of the reasoning found in the letters of Mohammed B., circulated some time in newsgroups and chat rooms or are from international websites on which lectures can be found about the ‘true’ Islam. The Hofstad group was not only ideologically nourished through the Internet, but through this way they also came in contact with young people who were open to this kind of thinking” (General Intelligence and Security Service [GISS], 2005, p.20).

The second way in which the Internet has an influence on the contact between Muslim youth and the radical Islamic ideology is closely connected with the process of self-radicalization. Young people radicalize regardless of the presence of a real recruiter and autonomously try to proceed with the Islamic struggle (GISS, 2005, p.22). The GISS believes that peer pressure in this process plays an important role. This means that young people radicalize by persuading other young people to follow them in the process (GISS, 2005, p.22). In addition, the World Wide Web boosts the self-radicalization process in two ways: 1. through the dissemination of texts on the Internet that are downloaded and examined by youngsters and 2. by the presence of chat rooms and forums on the Internet.

In the first case the Internet plays the role of a distributor of radical texts and manuals, which are collected and discussed by Muslim youths. According to Garbi Schmidt (2004, p.36), a senior researcher at the Danish National Institute for Social Research, it is common for young Muslims to bring texts that are retrieved from the Internet to study groups and to discuss them. In the case of radical Islamic texts, this could be the beginning of the process of self-radicalization.

On the other hand, Islamic chat rooms and forums are also very important on the Internet in the process of self-radicalization. A number of comments on forums show that Muslim youths bring each other into contact with radical Islam or use inflammatory language themselves, which is very close to the Islamic discourse. In the annual report of 2004, the GISS reported the following:

“Despite the regulatory activities of forum administrators you could still read controversial, shocking and even threatening statements. These comments were mainly directed against 'The West' and the infidels in general, and against politicians and opinion makers. (...) Furthermore, average Muslims are also a frequent target; they among others, were depicted as "apostates," "hypocrites" or "collaborators with the West" (GISS, 2005, p.37).

In this manner, young people 'infect' each other with the radical Islamic ideology (GISS, 2005, p.33).

To illustrate the radical excesses that are placed on chat forums, a closer look can be taken on the forum www.marokko.nl. This website is very popular among Dutch Muslims. Some forum visitors openly display their sympathy for the terrorists of September eleventh. A person with the nickname 'Hamas_Mujaheed' says in this regard:

“Bismi Allahi Rahmani Rahim I would like to ask your attention, dear brothers and sisters, for our brother that is stuck in Guantanamo Bay. This brother goes by the name of Omar Khadr and is since July 27, 2002 stuck in prison and during his arrest in Afghanistan he was only 14 or 15 years old. He was possibly arrested because he fought against the cross worshipers with the Mujahideen, whether this is true, is not certain, because it is said by the kuffar and since the kuffar can only lie, cheat and deceive, we should not label this as truth, wa Allahou a3lam (...) And this is not even half of the injustice that is done to him, I came across this story from brothers and sisters and felt I had to share this with you. I would like to ask you to do du'a brother, this is the least we can do for these brave brother may Allah release him and all other imprisoned brothers and sisters worldwide, and may Allah give them Swt hen sbar and bestow them with martyrdom, Allah Ouma ameen”¹.

Another example of an illustration on the forum www.marokko.nl. A person with the nickname ‘Peej’ says the following:

“They are coming to make the little heads of your brother smaller, and that fat pig Allawie (sic.) Because what you call scum, I call men with balls, and not like those little gays (sic.) who attack from the Apaches and f16's. Moreover, they belong there, that is their home, and I cannot say the same about those pink pigs. They are roughly 12.000 km away from their home and hopefully go back into pieces”².

These texts illustrate the discourse that can be found and read on such forums. It can be concluded that the Internet is an important source for the radicalization of the Islamic youth; both as a means for contact between the Internet user and the recruiter and for the process of self-radicalization. According to Kepel (2004, p.161), a French political scientist and a specialist on the Islamic and contemporary Arab world, the current terrorism would not have existed without the Internet. As an example he refers to the terrorist attacks in Madrid on March 11, 2004, arguing that the perpetrators got the knowledge they needed to carry out the attacks largely from the Internet.

3.2 The Process of Network Formation

Before explaining how important the role of the Internet is in network formation, it is necessary to find an answer on the following question: What is a jihadist network?

¹ A fragment posted on 26 December, 2006 by ‘Hamas_Mujaheeed’ on the forums www.marokko.nl, viewed on May 15, 2016.

² A fragment posted on 1 November, 2004 by ‘Peej’ on the forums www.marokko.nl, viewed on May 15, 2016.

A jihadist network consists of people who are guilty of supporting, preparing and executing terrorist attacks. Within these networks, they work individually or together in small groups. A Jihadist network is not the same as other terrorist groups or organizations, because it does not have a formal structure. A jihadist network has an informal adjustable membership and the leadership often varies. However, it is inaccurate to state that the jihadist network does not have its own structure. It is specifically about individuals, amongst whom communication takes place with a view to reach a common goal (GISS, 2006, p.13-14).

The adjustable and easy-going character of the membership adds to the ease in which individuals from the network are placing more emphasis on permanent partnerships. Also, individuals are creating temporary contacts with other people and are exploring for personal initiative at the same time. Within a network there is the existence of relationships that are constantly changing in terms of nature and permanence. In most cases, we can determine a core group that is related to a universal network of people, where central control is usually limited to a minimum. Nonetheless, personal ties between members hold the network together. These relationships are usually established on a common political-religious ideology, communal trust and social ties due to family, friends or other relationships that were developed from shared experiences in training camps or jihad areas. All in all, the existence of a common enemy stimulates the formation of strong inter-relationships of trust within the network (GISS, 2006, p.13-14).

Moreover, the members of a jihadist network differentiate themselves from other jihadists, because the former propagates violence in word and deed. For the members of the network it is more about supporting a broader category of extremists' jihadists and propagating themselves, while they have not yet taken the step to use violence. However, the willingness to engage in violent activities in the future are not excluded (GISS, 2006, p.13-14).

Based on the analysis stated above the following definition can be formulated:

“A Jihadist network is a fluid, dynamic, frequently demarcated structure that includes some people (radical Muslims) who have a mutual relationship, both at individual and aggregate level (cells/groups). They are at least temporarily connected by a common interest. That interest is pursuing a Jihadism (including terrorism) related target. Individuals who are part of the network are interpreted as members. One is member if one actively and consciously contributes within the limits of the network to the realization of the above-mentioned goal” (GISS, 2006, p.13-14).

Also in the development of local jihadist networks in our country, the role of the Internet is of great importance. As stated by The National Coordinator for Counterterrorism (NCTb), the greatest advantage of the Internet is the possibility to create virtual networks. This means that members have come across with each other online and thereupon only meet each other online. These virtual networks are categorized as follows:

- New networks
- A combination of new networks with current networks
- A combination of current networks

By trailing these individuals for instance during chat discussions and by one-on-one communication in closed environments, an expression of the reliability and dedication of the individual can be inferred (NCTb, 2007, p.88). The GISS calls this phenomenon virtual trust (GISS, January 2012, p.13).

How does this virtual trust starts? According to Marc Sageman (2008), a forensic psychiatrist and a counter-terrorism consultant, the technical means that protects the interactive communication on the Internet ensures that members of virtual networks have a feeling of being amongst equals. This is because many feel rushed in their real life. The Muslim youth constantly monitors if their jihadist lifestyle draws the attention of the authorities. What also counts is that they often come in conflict with their immediate surroundings at the beginning of their radicalization process. In other words, they gradually withdraw from their original social environment and surround themselves with new friends who strengthen them in their ideological motivation. Thanks to the interactive nature of the Internet, youngsters find new friends faster and more often on the Internet than in the physical life. In this virtual network, youngsters find like-minded companions and role models who they can trust. Furthermore, the members of these core forums make them feel like they belong to a global exclusive group fighting for the good cause. In addition, the member of these core forums convinces them that fighting for the good cause makes them greater Muslims. Their virtual activities are significant to them and give them a goal to their lives. Particularly jihadists who live in Western countries have this dissatisfied feeling in their real life and see their virtual life as the right path. This experience is continually enhanced and deepened by the interaction on the core forums.

The GISS mentions additional benefits. People from local networks can instantaneously form contacts worldwide. In addition, the members of these virtual networks can also take part with a substantial amount of anonymity (NCTb, 2007, p.88). This benefit is evident in the following text of the GISS:

“As these networks only exist in virtual reality and their members are not necessarily in actual contact with one another, it is very difficult for police and intelligence services to identify

these networks and the persons participating under sometimes frequently changing virtual nicknames. (...) Members of actual and virtual networks can meet up with one another at private Internet sites which serve as a global virtual platform, temporarily or permanently. This enables members of local networks to make ad-hoc contacts worldwide in order to arrange, for example, logistical support or weapons for the preparation of attacks. The virtualisation of jihad thereby affords enormous opportunities for international cooperation between networks and individuals, which enhances the power of the jihadist movement'' (GISS, 2006,p.48).

Virtual networks also has disadvantages. According to Jan Kortekaas (2005, p.107-114), National Police Expert in Crime, the most known disadvantage of virtual networks is the changeability of contacts and identities. Communicating within a virtual network is not genuine, this because individuals can have different backgrounds. In addition, individuals easily use nicknames and often change them (Kortekaas, 2005, p.107-114). This means that you never really know who you are communicating with. The virtual person can easily be a policemen or someone working for the authorities. Moreover, inside the illegal virtual world, it is very pivotal to know if individuals are trustworthy. The GISS says the following in this situation:

''On the other hand, however, it should be mentioned that mutual distrust and a high level of security awareness among jihadists may also have a restraining effect on rapid virtual network formation. Only if there is real mutual trust can concrete joint operations be mounted via the Internet. This means that jihadists either already know one another from the actual world, or that they have common friends, clan members or relatives. They often test each other in detailed ideological discussions or make a careful selection before new participants are admitted to certain private websites which can usually only be accessed with certain - often frequently changing - passwords'' (GISS, 2006, p.49).

Regarding to the formation of virtual networks, it can be concluded that in the future and in particular because of the Internet, more and more people will, sooner or later, be ready and inclined to participate in activities for the jihad.

3.3 Sub Conclusion

It can be concluded that contact with individuals are made on certain websites and chatrooms where recruiters try to gain the confidence of potentials recruits. On the other hand there are also more and more cases of self-radicalization in which young people autonomously radicalize, without any influence of a recruiter. Moreover, the other process that characterises virtual Jihadism is the process of network formation. The greatest advantage of the Internet is virtual networks - networks where members meet each other online to support, prepare, and execute terrorist attacks.

4. The Individuals That Play an Important Role in The Aforementioned Processes

The two main processes that characterise virtual Jihadism, namely the processes of (self)radicalization and network formation has been explained in the previous chapter. Chapter four will describe the individuals who play an important role in the aforementioned processes.

To begin with, several individuals play an important role in the processes described above. Concrete activities that are carried out within partnerships provide insight into the orientation of Jihadism. Some examples include (but are not limited to): terrorist and criminal acts; jihadi preparation and supporting activities; specific trips; and conversations and meetings. These all create an image of individuals who shape in various ways to a militant ideology with global pretensions. Based on their influence and the threat they generate, this chapter distinguishes the following groups of individuals, namely members of jihadist organizations, the delegators of jihadist organizations, the recruiters, the consumers and the so-called lone wolves.

4.1 First Phase: The Composition of Jihadist Organizations

There is a high threat from individuals who are secretly active in the jihadist Internet; not to mention, those who belong to jihadist organizations such as the core group, Al Qaeda. Although Al Qaeda no longer exists as a tightly organized group, the anti-Western Jihadism is now commonplace for an inspired, grown and highly decentralized militant movement. Furthermore, the underlying networks calls upon followers of organizations that previously persuaded purely domestic goals, but over the years have been influenced by groups from the Sudanese, Pakistani and Afghan breeding grounds. Such groups, of which most are of North African decent are active on the European soil, now feel compelled to contribute to the jihad (Bijen, Poot, de Verkuylen, Sonnenscheln, Soudijn, 2009, p.41-42). Specifically, the groups that share common goals are Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Al Shabaab or the Islamic Jihad Union. These are relatively small movements who are hardly recognizable on the Internet. Moreover, the virtual threat that is posed by members of jihadist organizations lies under the assumption that these members can use the Internet to communicate, and to get into contact with Western jihadist, thereby guiding them with the process of jihad or in the execution of attacks (GISS, January 2012, p.17).

4.2 Second Phase: The Delegation of Jihadist Organizations

The following individuals who are involved in the two processes mentioned above are the delegators of jihadist organizations. The delegators join forces to set like-minded individuals from home and abroad to achieve jihadist violence. Simply put, they facilitate any type of criminal or unlawful acts. To illustrate, a group of fundamentalist men fulfil a supporting role in a cross-border partnership, which plots and prepares murders, and bomb attacks against the Western world affiliated targets. For

most part in the Netherlands, this group support these ambitions with targeted offenses such as burglary, passport forgery and credit card fraud. They also act as key intermediaries and providers of logistics services. In short, this group of delegators are actually followers of a charismatic coordinator, who persuades them into puritanical beliefs and the international relations system of Mujahedeens (one engaged in jihad) (Bijen, Poot, de, Verkuylen, Sonnenscheln, Soudijn, 2009, p.54).

4.3 Third Phase: The Recruiters of Jihadist Organizations

According to Prof. Dr. Marianne van Leeuwen (2005,p.87), a professor of modern trans-Atlantic relations, professional recruiters are often itinerant jihadist preachers who 'spot' individuals at various locations. In other words, they seek out young people who seem prone to violent Islamic extremism and are susceptible to influence. Sometimes they also look for specific possessions among their potential followers, such as possession of the correct travel documents, residence permits, and/or relevant technical knowledge. Throughout Europe, the operating preachers often stems from North Africa or the Middle East, even though they have often established themselves in Europe (possibly illegally). These recruiters can be theologians who make tours around mosques where they can carry out a violent radical message to gauge reactions and attract interested parties. Furthermore, recruiters also have (or pretend to have) a background as a veteran in the jihad, for example in Afghanistan. With this intention they are able to engage potential followers with their religious knowledge and gain admiration amongst the youth by highlighting their battle experiences to support their message. On the whole a recruiter offers his followers a new sense of identity, a purpose in life and practical support; however a recruiter prepares his followers with some caution for supporting or carrying out violent actions. Their orientation is illustrated by an excerpt from the chat conversation between the recruiting agent 'X' and the interested sympathizer 'Y':

Sympathizer 'Y': "but I want to go to England. Abou hamza33 is there and people form Al Qaeda".

Recruiter 'X': "I know. But you have no freedom there. Come to Pakistan. There they are going to train you. They are going to learn you how to handle weapons and how to make bombs. You will learn just about everything. After that you can still come back" (Bijen, Poot, de, Verkuylen, Sonnenscheln, Soudijn, 2009, p.55).

This text above illustrates the discourse that can be found and read on such forums. In essence, the recruiters are from fanatical jihadist group who maintain and nourish (ideological), the main meeting-points of the jihadist Internet. Overall, it is about jihadist ideologues whose knowledge, opinions and advice are highly valued and have a radicalizing influence on individuals.

4.4 Fourth Phase: The Consumers of Jihadist Organizations

The consumers are locally born and/or bred Muslims, converts with or without Muslim background and others who primarily base their belief on local experiences, role models and influences. The scientific literature has given considerable consideration to individuals encountered in this mixed category. Roy (2004, 2005) discloses that "uprooted" Muslims of the second generation 're-Islamize' in a radical way in the West. According to Roy, the global version of the violent struggle for these people is something attractive as they are alienated from the religious countries of origin of their parents. Furthermore, Sageman (2008) describes 'home-grown wannabes' as local radicalized Muslim youth and converts who see Bin Laden as their inspiring Robin Hood. In addition, Muslims with little (political) religious backgrounds who immigrate in (young) adulthood to the West and who embrace the extremism as 'reborns', can also be grouped in this category (as cited in Bijen, Poot, de, Verkuylen, Sonnenscheln, Soudijn, 2009, p.45).

This group 'consumes' the primary activities of the recruiters. They are often daily hours on the Internet and 'consume' all the jihadist information they can find online. Consumers are mostly (still) operating on the surface web. They also play a crucial part in the re-publication of propaganda, which are eventually recognized as the 'messengers' of the jihadist ideology on the Internet. Also, consumers often catch the eye by their ambition input and intimidations on the core forums. On the Internet, they openly indicate that they want to die as a martyr for the 'good cause', that they want help with their participation in jihad, they proposition all kinds of probable targets and also urge other components to the use of violence (GISS, January 2012, p.19). These individuals are usually constantly on the Internet to post extreme radical messages. However, these individuals are not very persuasive and are therefore not seen as a threat – not in the virtual world and not in their real life (GISS, January 2012, p.20). It can be concluded that these individuals are particularly seeking virtual acknowledgment and appreciation on the core forums.

4.5 Final Phase: The so-called Lone Wolves

Within the GISS, there is a lot of discussion about the phenomenon of solitary individuals, also referred to as lone wolves (GISS, January 2012, p.20). This term is usually used for individuals who are not active within a network and who from a radical jihadist motivation typically radicalize single handed i.e. on their own. This process is also called self-radicalization. As described in the previous chapter, self-radicalization occurs when individuals proceed to radical actions without any help of a recruiter. Lone wolves are usually individuals who are inspired through the Internet or other mediums to conduct radical actions. They usually find a group on their own and also decide themselves which group they want to join. Factors that play a role include events in the media or the presence of charismatic figures (Leeuwen, van 2005, p.88).

In many situations these individuals are carrying a lot of frustration in them and therefore want to vent that frustration, preferably anonymous. Moreover, when these individuals realize that there are movements who have similar frustrations with common connecting points of interest, he or she feel compelled to join as they are desperate to find a sense of belonging. As a result, the individual feels a sense of safety, security and compassion, which he or she was lacking until recently. Sageman (2004) argues that recruitment is very important on an individual level and should not be underestimated. He describes it with the term 'self-enlistment'. Places and media such as the Internet are very popular among people who recruit themselves through various forums where they share the radical views with others and thus be more confident in their radicalism. The Internet is increasingly used to spread radical ideas as the virtual contact ensures anonymity which reduces the vulnerability (Leeuwen, van, 2005, p.88).

The following examples are used as illustration: The two boys who travelled to Chechnya in late 2002 to fight against the enemies of the Islam and the high school student from Sas of Gent who in 2004 threatened Hirsi Ali and Geert Wilders with death on the Internet. When the authorities invaded the house of the high school student, they found out that this guy had already made the ingredients for an explosive and had already put the pieces together. He did this by working long hours on his computer where he visited radical websites and chat rooms. On these websites and on the chat rooms he fed his hate with horror images from the Palestinian occupied territories (Leeuwen, van 2005, p.88).

In the aftermath of such incidents it is oftentimes detected that lone wolves hardly ever communicated with other like-minded companions in their real life. Online however they were actively in contact with other like-minded individuals (GISS, January 2012, p.21). It can be concluded that the communication between the individuals, the consumption of jihadist propaganda, as well as the discourse on the Internet, have all contributed to the radicalization of individuals. The Internet also motivated these individuals to commit violent activities.

4.6 Sub Conclusion

It can be concluded therefore that within these networks ideology-transcending goals are persuasive. The generalist substantive orientation of this relationship system to the worldwide struggle between Muslims and the enemies of the Islam allows individuals with different ideological backgrounds to join together for the jihad.

5. The Internet as an Tool for Jihadists

Chapter four described the individuals that play an important role in the processes of (self)-radicalization and network formation. This chapter will describe how those individuals (jihadists) use the Internet as a tool.

Like normal civilians even the jihadists use the Internet for various goals and see the Internet as an important tool for the jihad. That jihadists use the Internet as an important tool is also propagated in the following fragment: “This is the Internet that Allah has taken over to serve the jihad and the Mujahedeen, that has come to serve your interests - as half of the Mujahedeen battle is fought out on the Internet pages - the sole channel for Mujahedeen media” (NCTb, February 2007, p.49). Another fragment that shows how the Internet is seen by jihadists, is from a conversation by a Syrian radical cleric named Omar Bakri. In the article of Cullison, Higgins and Leggett (2002) he says the following:

“We have no problems with technology. Other people use the Web for stupid reasons, to waste time. We use it for serious things”.

The Internet has become the preferred medium of information, communication and organization for jihadists - for the same reasons it is popular with most individuals: it is fast, inexpensive, easily accessible and worldwide. The Internet gives the jihad a public face. It offers jihadists the opportunity to inspire other terrorists, provides a forum for them to associate with each other and to share information in a very short time over very long distances. Furthermore, jihadists use the Internet to bring individuals together with similar interests, aspirations and desires. Such individuals would never have met in person in the pre-digital era. An additional advantage is that jihadists can operate anonymously on the Internet. By now everyone knows that the Internet is a virtual threat. The use of the Internet by the core group Al-Qaida is one dramatic example. The Internet is a virtual battlefield on which terrorist movements fight against national states or associations of states. Jihadist use the Internet for various tools and this chapter will only focus on a few of them. The following tools will be described in this chapter, namely publicity and propaganda, recruitment, virtual training camp, and fundraising.

5.1 Publicity and Propaganda

The first way is how jihadist use the Internet as a tool is by publicity and propaganda. Terrorist groups want to accomplish a political aim with their actions, for example by carrying out attacks that result in death and serious casualties. Jihadists not only strive to reach a more broad and generic audience, but also strive to be more apparent to their victims, to influence the decision making, to put their

organization on the map and to recruit and prepare sympathisers. Furthermore, in the prominent recording that came out in the year 2001, where Bin Laden speaks about the attacks of September eleventh, he states that the culprits did not only carry out an act, however they also voiced out a tone. A tone that will be understood worldwide by everyone (Weimann, 2006, p.40). It can thus be concluded that Bin Laden sees terrorism mainly as a medium of communication.

According to Dr. Albert Benschop (December 2005), a Dutch sociologist at the University of Amsterdam's faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, jihadist organizations see the Internet as a substitute for the loss of local bases and territory. The jihadist websites are used to disseminate messages of its political leaders and for religious legitimization of terrorist attacks. The Internet functions as a propaganda medium through which support is organized for jihadist organizations, but it is also a medium where prospective jihadists can learn how to hack electronics systems and assess with which software they can commit cyberattacks to disrupt, degrade and destroy computer networks of 'unbelievers'.

Furthermore, Benschop (December 2005) states that the Internet acts as a giant megaphone for jihadists: It is even more than one newspaper, radio and television simultaneously. The Internet allows uncensored and unfiltered information and views to be disseminated globally. Users in cyberspace have full control over the content themselves and journalist can function completely independently. Websites, chat rooms, newsgroups and discussion forums are largely uncontrolled and everyone can participate under a self-selected pseudonym. Moreover, the Internet enables groups that have a few resources, in comparison to the gigantic propaganda machines in Western countries, which acts as a counterweight. It allows groups who want to attack western countries to reveal their message to the widest possible audience. Dissatisfaction and complaints can be articulated, the causes can be named, the enemies can be designated and the attack routes can be determined. Apart from that, attacks on the West are very important for Islamic terrorists, but the main purpose is to mobilize public opinions and to acquire authority among the Muslims. The core group Al Qaeda tries to capture the hearts and minds of the Muslim community through publicity and propaganda on the Internet.

The core group Al Qaeda has even publicly come out in support of the use of the Internet as a publicity and propaganda tool. This open declaration of the support of Internet usage was issued in an online magazine of Al Qaeda in the year 2004 (Weimann, 2006, p.66). Another example of the support of Internet usage is the propaganda video that is disseminated on the attacks in Brussels: The video which looks quite professional and lasts more than nine minutes contains the typical elements used by the Islamic State (IS) to recruit jihadists. The video includes statements of the US presidential candidate Donald Trump who says that Brussels was so beautiful twenty years ago and is now a

'horror story'. A voice of a journalist can also be heard in the video. He says that such attacks make it clear that "there are limits to the measures that you can take in the fight against terrorism". The video also shows recruitment taking place for the jihad, images of innocent civilians who perished in Brussels and violence being condoned by referring to the West in terms of crusaders and infidels. In addition, the IS propaganda show their audience flashing images of jihadists in action and lets them listen to rousing music (Knack.be, March 2016).

According to the GISS, Al Qaeda has been steering Muslims over the entire world to carry out their 'sacred duty' for the Islam since the year 2000. The core group - Al Qaeda - wants them to spread news and other information in regard to the Jihad on forums, websites and newsgroups. Al Qaeda even threatens Muslims over the entire world with religious sanctions: Muslims over the entire world must communicate with Allah if websites containing information in regard to the Jihad are closed down before these websites even had the chance to influence a wider audience with its content (GISS, 2006, p.29-30).

The use of the Internet as a propaganda tool is just the tip on the iceberg. Jihadist use the Internet also for recruitment, virtual training camp and fundraising. The recruitment process on the Internet will be described in the paragraph below.

5.2 Recruitment

Where propaganda is focused on winning souls, recruitment causes individuals to be actively engaged in terrorist activities (NCTb, February 2007, p.79). Recruitment is therefore clearly a step further. As stated by the GISS, through recruitment terrorist organizations worldwide form a reservoir of individuals with diverse backgrounds, skills and capabilities that can be deployed to support the jihad and armed actions. The GISS also concludes that recruitment that takes place in the Netherlands, in favour of the jihad, cannot be dismissed as incidents that are connected to an external threat of Islamic terrorist networks. On the contrary, the phenomenon in the Netherlands is strongly rooted within the society, because stagnant integration and insufficient acceptance of Muslims prove to be a breeding ground for radicalization (GISS, December 2002, p.2).

To where such processes may eventually lead has become visible with the successful and foiled Islamic terrorist attacks that the West faced in recent years, such as the Christmas market in Strasbourg in December 2000, the WTC building and the Pentagon in the United States in September 2001 and during a flight from Paris to Miami in December 2001. As reported by the GISS, in all these cases, individuals were involved who were recruited in the west in favor of the jihad. Even the Netherlands is not immune to these recruitment problems. A conservative estimate of the GISS concludes that within

our borders certainly ten recruiters are active or have been active in the recent past (GISS, December 2002, p.2). On this basis it can be assumed that there are some ten dozens of young Muslims established in a recruitment process.

Furthermore, Benschop (December 2005) states that the Internet is also an important tool for recruitment. Individuals who have sympathy for the 'good cause' are more likely to be convinced by the images and messages of jihadist organizations. The interactive nature of the Internet, in which videos are also included, simply adds a step further. The Internet accessibility to such videos creates contacts for men and women who are committed to the 'good cause'. Jihadist organizations collect information about individuals who visits their websites. Contact is sought with individuals who show the most eagerness and admiration for the jihad. Recruiters also look for new potential jihadists in web forums, chat rooms and cyber cafes. At the same time, the Internet is also used by individuals who self-radicalize and want to register themselves with Al Qaeda or other jihadist organizations. These potential recruits are served with an abundance of religious decrees, anti-Western propaganda and manuals with which one can learn about 'how to be a terrorist'. These individuals are all led through a maze of secret chat rooms, where they eventually get specific instructions on operational issues such as 'how do I get in Iraq' or 'what training camp can I visit'

According to the GISS, a noteworthy interactive method of recruiting is seen on the Internet into the hands of locally Dutch networks. This is also highly related to the interactive techniques of extending propaganda. The GISS has the following to say concerning this phenomenon:

“Communication is quite open at the outset but then becomes more confidential within a limited circle and finally ends up as clearly conspiratorial behaviour. First of all there will be a posting on a website or newsgroup, including a reference to a certain site, where there can be a discussion (including on matters of faith) using a chat program with a larger number of participants or on an individual basis. Some individuals are then propositioned to explore matters further in a one-to-one chat session. This bilateral chat session will often be clearly focused on recruitment. Pundits who might be susceptible to this type of recruitment via the Internet are passed on, by participants, to certain charismatic or ideologically better-educated young people. These self-styled ideologues and recruiters frequently maintain bilateral Internet contacts with a substantial group of potential recruits” (GISS, 2006, p.48).

As said before in the previous paragraph, individuals who self-radicalize also use the Internet. This individual adopts the violent jihad solemnly on his/her own without ever communicating with a recruiter, with hardly ever visiting a radical mosque and without any way or form of physical

influences (Leeuwen, van, 2005, p.87). What it comes down to is that self-radicalism does not need two parties: The individual will take the plunge on his/her own initiative. In addition, self-radicalism can also not be seen as recruitment in the proper sense, because there is no communication between a virtual recruiter or selectee. The following example can be given for self-radicalism:

“At the end of September 2004 in the Netherlands, Yahya K., an 18-year-old student from Sas van Gent, who had issued threats on the Internet against the Dutch MP Hirsi Ali and the AIVD, was detained. During his arrest he was found in possession of home-made explosives that he had assembled using knowledge derived from the Internet. He had undergone the entire radicalisation process from in front of his computer screen in the virtual world as well” (GISS, 2006, p.50).

Jihadist also use the Internet as a virtual training camp and for fundraising. The virtual training camp will be described in the paragraph below.

5.3 Virtual Training Camp

As reported by Benschop (December 2005), jihadist also use the Internet as a virtual training camp. An aspiring jihadist no longer has to travel to a barely reachable training camp for example in Afghanistan or Ukraine. The Al Qaeda- and jihadist organizational-related websites offer potential jihadist visitors the opportunity to follow a DIY (do it yourself) course. Furthermore, textbooks packed with strategic, tactical and operational information are also used a massive online library of training materials is available. Some of the courses are even supported by experts who answer questions in chat rooms and discussion forums. The classification of a ‘modern jihadist’ increasingly takes place from a distance, in other words in specialized online learning communities (Benschop, December 2005). This becomes evident in the following fragment of the online magazine ‘Al Batter’. In this magazine potential recruits are urged to use the Internet as a virtual training camp:

“Oh mujahedeen brother, to join the great training camps you do not have to travel to other countries. Alone, in your own home or with a group of your brothers, you too can begin to follow the training program” (Olmer, March 2006).

A large assortment of jihadist training methods is retrievable on the Internet. This has partially to do with the fact of the vanishing of physical training camps in the Middle East. Therefore, the urge for training camps online has remarkably increased. Furthermore, several jihadist web forums also accept the names of noted training camps in the Middle East (Rogan, 2006, p.26). The fact that the Internet is of great value for training jihadists can also be seen in the announcement mentioned above “It is not

necessary for you to join a military training camp, or travel to another country. You can learn alone, or with other brothers, in [our arms] preparation program'' (Olmer, March 2006).

Moreover, reports of the GISS have evidently shown that jihadist in the Netherlands as well are very much searching for practical information on the Internet. This is evident on the basis of the arrested perpetrators of the Hofstad group: Bombs that were made at home had been found when several numbers of domestics break-in and arrests were done by the authorities. The bombs were apparently made with information found on the Internet (GISS, 2006, p.51). In addition, the hard drives that belonged to the perpetrators of the Hofstad group consisted of information that was found online relating to manuals from the army (Recht.nl, March 2006).

In summary, the virtual training camp contains detailed information and instruction material for the making of bombs, weapons and other resources.

5.4 Fundraising

Lastly described in this chapter will be fundraising. According to Benschop (December 2005), the Internet can also help to raise funds for a poor jihadist network group. The core group Al Qaeda for example, used Islamic humanitarian 'charities' to obtain money for the jihad against alleged enemies of the Islam. The Al Qaeda-related websites consisted of announcements which called for the return of the Islamic caliphate. The visitors of such websites were called upon to financially support them in this cause. Furthermore, the Internet is also used to publish bank account numbers where 'sympathizers' can deposit money. Another example of earning money by jihadist groups is credit card fraud. Many Islamic jihadist groups are financed in Europe and North Africa through such criminal activities.

According to the NCTb, fundraising through the Internet has various forms (NCTb, February 2007, p.78). The first form of fundraising is straightforward and is easily accessible on websites (as mentioned above). Several websites explain the significance of funding networks in coercive texts. Gabriel Weimann (2006, p.153-138), a Communication Professor and expert in Science and Technology, Security and Defence, Cyber Security Middle East, North Africa and Israel, gives a few examples: The network Hamas describes the expenses they made on bullets and the acquirements of other resources they (still) need. The network Hezbollah spreads the specifics of three bank accounts where individuals can make a donation. In addition, the network also displays the expenses one can make for martyrs that were hurt during the 'good cause' and also for their families (individuals could support an orphan for example for 360 dollars or a widow for 300 dollars). Another example is the network Pakistani Let: This network openly displays their demands for money and computer

appliances. According to Weimann (2006, p. 153-138), this type of support is particularly used for Muslims who personally do not want to involve themselves for the jihad.

Furthermore, another form of fundraising through the Internet that is used by jihadists is public fundraising activities such as chain letters which are mailed to 'sympathisers'. Supporters of the 'good cause' can also donate money by the use of financial service abilities on the Internet for instance, via the popular online payment service PayPal (NCTb, February 2007, p.78). The following text of the NCTb is a perfect example of how jihadists appeal for support on several jihadist forums:

“Do not be lazy.... Do not stay behind. Make your move now, time passes and the situation gets worse. Transit for help and medical aid will not be prohibited, even in [sic] all the doors are locked in front of us. We will never abandon our brothers in Palestine. Put an [sic] effort to spread the campaign” (The National Coordinator for Counterterrorism [NCTb], February 2007, p.79).

5.5 Sub Conclusion

It can be concluded that the Internet facilitates a large part of the radicalization process and thus is an important tool for jihadists. For every stage of radicalization there are several sources available. Seen from the angle of radicalisation, the largest threat comes from propaganda that is disseminated through the Internet, connected with a rather large group of individuals (young Muslims) who are searching for answers on multiple questions they have about their life and religion. Furthermore, propaganda and recruitment do not need two parties. Jihadist nowadays self-radicalize and take the initiative themselves to contact other groups with whom they share common interests. When connected with the reality that mainly young individuals eagerly use the Internet, it can be concluded that Internet propaganda has a large hand in (further) radicalization. Seen from the angle of terrorism, the largest threat at this rate comes from the recruitment of new potential jihadists and the intensive use of online training methods. Being groomed for terrorist attacks and actions is one thing, however having the right people, the abilities, the right techniques and funds is equally crucial for them.

6. Current Counter measures of Virtual Jihadism in The Netherlands

Virtual Jihadism and its outcomes are described in the previous chapters. Chapter six will describe how virtual Jihadism is currently countered. The following question will be answered in this chapter: What are the current efforts of countering the spread of virtual Jihadism in the Netherlands?

With virtual Jihadism it is usually difficult to find locations on the Internet where jihadists operate. Virtual Jihadism has become the breeding ground of new networks and jihadist individuals. The Internet increasingly allows jihadists worldwide to form intensive partnerships with each other. On this virtual market jihadist ‘consumers’ and jihadist ‘recruiters’ come into contact with each other. The jihadist Internet ensures that the inexperienced jihadist meets the experience expert. This experience expert accelerates and enriches the dynamics within the jihadist Internet. With their knowledge, skills and connections they boost the knowledge and experience level of the inexperienced jihadist. The dynamic interaction on the jihadist Internet is aimed at violent action. The GISS has established that jihadist organizations make intensive use of this virtual pool of new jihadists. In this way, the Internet becomes a (potential) life buoy for these organizations. The GISS also estimates that there are several hundreds of supporters of Jihadism in the Netherlands and several thousand sympathizers. Supporters of Jihadism are individuals who are willing to travel to the combat area.

According to the former Minister of Security and Justice, Opstelten, and Social Affairs and Employment Minister Asscher, Jihadism represents a substantial threat to the national security of the Netherlands and to the international law. Not only in the Netherlands, but also elsewhere in the world there is growing concern about the various trouble spots. Furthermore, the rise of IS in Iraq and Syria is a destabilizing factor, both at the regional level in the Middle East and at global level. These international developments also have an impact in the Netherlands. On the one hand the reason is that jihadists seek membership of international terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda and IS and on the other hand, because supporters of the jihad also manifest openly in the Netherlands. This causes tensions in society, partly because of conflicts elsewhere in the world. According to Ministers Opstelten and Asscher, what bears the most concern is the travelling of Dutch citizens overseas to fight for the jihad. This past summer, the Netherlands has been witness to such travelled jihadists, IS flags and anti-Semitic slogans at various demonstrations and images of unprecedented cruelty (Ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie, August 2014, p.1).

6.1 The Action Program

The threat level of the Netherlands has been increased to substantial in March 2013. On that basis, an Action Program has been established on the actions and measures combatting Jihadism (Ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie, August 2014, p.2). The main goal of this Action Program is threefold: Protection of the democracy and rule of law, fighting and minimizing the jihadist movement in the Dutch society and diminishing the breeding ground for radicalization. To achieve all of this, cooperation between all partners is expected, both national and local and public and civil society, regardless of everyone's beliefs (Ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie, August 2014, p.2).

The measures that are reported in this Action Program are logically structured along five policy tracks, as follows:

Risk reduction, which means that all risks that are posed by jihadists are prevented and countered with all possible means.

Intervention, which means that potential jihadists who want to travel abroad to fight for the jihad are prevented and impeded.

Radicalization, which means that recruiters will be reported, new followers of the jihad movement will be prevented, opposing voices will be encouraged and social tensions will be prevented as much as possible.

Social media, which means that the spread of online radicalization, hateful speech and violent jihadist content will be contested.

Information sharing and collaboration, which means that there will be an investment in knowledge, skills and partnerships at local, national and on international level (Lodder, 2015).

6.2 The Current Measures

The primary focus of this chapter will be on point five of the policy tracks, i.e. combatting the online spread of online radicalization, hateful speech and violent jihadist content. According to The Ministry of Security and Justice, the NCTb and The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, the eight most current efforts of countering the spread of virtual Jihadism in the Netherlands are,

- I. Concerned citizens can report jihadist (terrorist, hate speech and violence glorifying) content that is posted on the Internet and social media.

- II. Producers and distributors of online jihadist propaganda and digital platforms who misuse these places are identified.
- III. This information is fiercely shared with operations who have the authority to prosecute any related service provider (this also includes Internet services).
- IV. A special team of the National Police fights against online jihadist content. The team will present the Public Prosecution Service on possible blameworthy statements. If application of the voluntary code of conduct does not lead to removal, an order of a criminal warrant will follow.
- V. The National Police makes agreements with Internet companies about the effective methods of banning disturbing propaganda material. The information is also sent to a team for testing.
- VI. Internet businesses who persist (even after alerting) in facilitating 'listed' terrorist organizations by the dissemination of jihadist content, will be addressed either based on an adaptation of EU Regulation 2580/2001 in conjunction with the National Sanction Regulation Terrorism 2002, or on the basis of planned future national regulations.
- VII. A special team will monitor independently, but will work closely with the online civilians' hotline.
- VIII. An up-to-date list of online jihadist websites (also social media) will be circulated. This list can be used by experts, parents and communities, amongst others. This list will help them to warn their society (Ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie, August 2014, p.11).

6.3 The Implementation of The Action Program

According to the NCTb, the implementation of the Action Program is up and running. So far 52 passport measures have been taken and at least 115 investigations are being held on at least 135 suspects. These 115 studies nearly all relate to suspects who are still in the Netherlands or who have returned to live in the Netherlands. Recent reports also show that two criminal cases were detected, the content was treated in session and the judgement has been given. In one of those cases it is made clear by the Court of Rotterdam that sending money or goods to facilitate the armed struggle can only be explained as voluntary participation in a terrorist organization. Furthermore, since the implementation of the Action Program, efforts have intensively been laboured on freezing the funds and resources of jihadists. Since December 2013 the assets of 29 people have been frozen and social benefits and allowances of 50 people have been stopped (NCTb, November 2014, March 2016).

Since the publication of the Action Program measures have been developed to prevent radicalization and put the Program in motion. There has been investments in strengthening the resilience of communities, inter alia by supporting projects of the Contact Committee Muslims and Government (CMO) and the Alliance Moroccan Dutch (SMN). The 2015 founded Expertise Unit Social Stability

(ESS) also plays an important role in supporting communities, as well as the support of professionals and local authorities with dealing with radicalization. The Family Support Centre for Radicalization has been fully operational since the end of 2015. There is an approach rolled out to schools in 18 municipalities where most problems around radicalization occur. Moreover, debates and dialogue activities for young people are supported to increase the resilience and provide a counterbalance to jihadist propaganda (NCTb, March 2016, p.2).

Also, teachers, key persons from Muslim communities, employees of municipalities and other professionals were trained in recognizing and dealing with radicalization. This occurs in those places where the problem occurs the most. Information meetings and debates are organized for parents and the youth - the aim being to minimize the radicalization taboo (NCTb, March 2016, p.2). Moreover, investments have been made to enhance knowledge, skills and partnerships, both nationally and internationally. As reported by the NCTb, The National Police and The Royal Netherlands Marechaussee, have, for the approach of Jihadism for example, furnished rural bars to operate quickly and efficiently to threats and incidents. Also, The Public Prosecution Service has made more capacity available for Jihadism related cases, therefore seven additional prosecutors are appointed for the jihad files (NCTb, November 2014).

Another further progress of the Action Program is the Protocol Suspicious Objects (PVO). The PVO describes how operational teams to collaborate from different organizations and deal with suspicious objects containing hazardous substances, such as explosives or chemicals. Aside from this, the police also intensified the investigation of trafficking illegal firearms and the possession and use of automatic firearms. Within the Public Prosecution Service, a nationwide portfolio has been appointed on firearms (NCTb, March 2016, p.4).

6.4 The Disadvantages

The Action Program also has disadvantages. The launch of such an Action Program is not new. In 2007, former Minister Guusje ter Horst (Home Affairs) presented an Action Plan on Polarization and Radicalization which was internationally praised for its strong local and preventative focus. The local approach was called a combination of 'hard' and 'soft' measures. The soft measures for instance were to encourage meetings and discussions between young people and people of different backgrounds. The hard approach was not about measures such as confiscation of passports or deprivation of Dutch nationality, but to preserve compulsory education and more street surveillance (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2007).

According to Amy-Jane Gielen (September 2014), author of the book *Radicalization and Identity*, the focus on deprivation of Dutch nationality, restraining orders, and hailing and prevention of the spread of hate speeches, suggest that there will be a radically different policy. However, the Action Program

that consist of actions and measures combatting (virtual) Jihadism offers a combination of repressive and preventive measures. De-radicalization actions, family support, mobilizing social counter-messages and tackling discrimination are just some of the 'soft' measures that are proposed in the Program. The most striking difference is the merging of law and social policy. In the old Action Plan, legislation against radicalization is not mentioned once, while it prevails in the current Action Program. As stated by Gielen, this is precisely a fact where the danger for the effectiveness of this Program lies. The effective implementation of anti-terrorism legislation implies, amongst other things, that the government knows who will possibly join a jihadist organization, who have already travelled overseas to join the jihad and who has already returned. Fortunately, the police and Intelligence Services are there to do that part, but they cannot do it alone. As reported by Gielen, it is no coincidence that various Intelligence Services in Europe maintain a margin of error between twenty to thirty percent of the number of fighters that went to Syria and Iraq, because some of them disappear 'under the radar'.

Furthermore, to reduce this error rate as much as possible the government also depends on reports from the community, from professionals such as teachers and finally from parents, who for example make a report of loss when their child leaves for Syria or Iraq. In short, it requires a high degree of trust and cooperation. As a consequence, this is where the policy will encounter problems according to Gielen. For example, a Moroccan mother will now think twice before reporting that her 19 year old son is missing as he has left for Syria. This mother will now think twice before reporting her son as missing, because she may not be able to see her son again considering that his Dutch citizenship would be taken away by the authorities (Gielen, September 2014). If it is not known who leaves the country, then it is not known who returns thus constituting as a security risk. It can be concluded that firm action is needed, however communities, families and professionals also play an important role. Although it is mentioned in the Action Program, it creates a link to and a strong focus on repression, which threatens the effectiveness of the program. It is therefore important that the government does not only include a vision of detection and prosecution, but should include a strong emphasis on protecting vulnerable young people and remove the breeding ground.

Other disadvantages according to Pieter Nanninga, assistant Professor Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Groningen and Michael Steltman, president of The Association of Web Hosters and Service Providers, are the measures to tackle online jihadist content. The Action Program of former Minister Opstelten to address online jihadist content does not work according to The Dutch Association of Online Hosting Companies, because the plan in its current state cannot be approved by providers and hosting companies and therefore a lot of jihadist content remains online. An important measure of the Action Program is the voluntary code of conduct for Internet companies, where

requests for removal by the government should be honoured without the intervention of a judge (NOS.nl, June 2015). Steltman says the following in the article of the Dutch Broadcasting Foundation (NOS):

“The National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCTb) made an appeal to us to remove and detect active unlawful content on the basis of their terms and conditions. If we do that, it would mean that we are going to play our own judge” (Nederlandse Omroep Stichting [NOS], June 2015).

Steltman thinks that the idea for this approach is caused by a shortage of manpower at the NCTb. He further states that the indiscriminate removal of content goes against privacy rules and Internet neutrality. The Association of Web Hosters and Service Providers have specific procedures for this. A condition that is laid down, is that a judge should determine if the content is illegal (NOS.nl, June 2015). Researcher Pieter Nanninga of the University of Groningen endorses this criticism.

“Through keeping an eye on social media accounts, you may gather lots of information as the Intelligence Service. Due to removing those accounts, the information also disappears. However most of the accounts that are blocked, are often returned within a few hours” (NOS.nl, June 2015).

Nanninga, who communicates with many jihadists says that the accounts (on social media) of jihadists who have been blocked by the authorities often make another account under a different name. During the conversation with a jihadist, Nanninga found out that the jihadist had tweeted about making his 35th account. He proudly said that it gives him status (NOS.nl, June 2015). It can thus be concluded that the measure to tackle jihadist content online can be problematic, because web hosters and service providers are free to move their websites and are free to have these websites hosted and registered in different countries or jurisdictions. Furthermore, the removed websites and content can quickly reappear on another account or under a different name. Therefore the measures of content removal and filtering only work effectively as a ‘temporary interruption’.

In reality jihadist also use blogs, chat rooms, social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Reddit or websites where they can share videos. These websites and tools offer a lot of interactivity and are very efficient as a resource where jihadists can promote, communicate and discuss their radical content. Safeguarding and the removal of information that is placed on private platforms is therefore very complicated. This because the private platform relies on user-generated information and already have their own legal jurisdictions. The degree to which governments can prevent or command what

information private sectors organisations display is limited in a free society, particularly when these businesses are based as said before in a several legal jurisdictions. Nanninga says the following in the NOS:

“Social media plays an increasingly important role in the spread of jihadist ideology. That content can come from all over the world so the Dutch government has not much influence in that area” (NOS.nl, June 2015).

6.5 Sub Conclusion

In conclusion it can be argued that the current efforts to counter the spread of virtual Jihadism in the Netherlands have both positive and negative sides. Despite the fact of the establishment of an Action Programme with several approaches and measures to counter the spread of virtual Jihadism, it can be noted that some of these measures have negative results. In addition, there are also individuals who find other ways to spread the jihadist ideology. However, this does not automatically mean there is no fertile ground to develop knowledge and raise awareness.

7. Conclusion

The main aim of this report was to find out *what the most effective measures are of countering the spread of virtual Jihadism in the Netherlands*. Before obtaining an answer to that question, a closer look had to be taken at the core, namely what is virtual Jihadism?

Virtual Jihadism are the places where jihadists operate and that are difficult to find on the Internet. With the emergence of the Internet and the growth in the numbers of applications that are thereby developed, this medium has become one of the most important and prominent place of contact between the youth and the radical Islamic teachings. This is because the Internet has slight or no regulation, censorship or any other forms of government supervision and it consists of a quick stream of information. It is a virtual community that has an increasing influence on events on both a local and national context. The Internet is an excellent tool that creates an abstract and virtual community of believers that are decoupled from their respective country or culture. It is a breeding ground for new networks and jihadist individuals. The Internet causes individuals to slowly get detached from their surrounding society and eventually even turn against that society, first ideologically and then violently.

Moreover, the interactive nature of the Internet make sure that jihadists have fast, easy accessibility and a practically global reach. They communicate with each other both on the visible, as well as the invisible web and do everything in their power to make their activities non-retrievable. Furthermore, the greatest advantage of the Internet is the formation of virtual networks: Networks where members meet each other online to support, prepare and execute terrorist attacks. On this platform, jihadist consumers meet the jihadist recruiters. The jihadist Internet ensures that an inexperienced individual meets the experienced expert. This experienced expert accelerates and enriches the dynamics within the jihadist Internet. In addition, with their knowledge, skills and connections they boost the knowledge and experience level of the inexperienced jihadist individual.

The research defines the Internet mainly as a facilitating tool for the radicalization process and thus is an important communication tool for jihadists. For every stage of radicalization there are several sources available. Viewed from the angle of radicalisation, the largest threat comes from propaganda that is disseminated through the Internet, connected with a rather large group of individuals (young Muslims) who are searching for answers on multiple questions they have about their life and religion. Additionally, propaganda and recruitment do not need two parties - jihadists nowadays self-radicalize and take initiative themselves to contact other groups with whom they share common interests. When

connected with the reality of mainly young individuals who use the Internet proficiently, it can be concluded that the Internet propaganda has a large hand in (further) radicalization. Viewed from the angle of terrorism, the largest threat comes from the recruitment of new potential jihadists and the intensive use of online training methods. Being groomed for terrorist attacks and actions are one thing, however having the right people, the abilities, the right techniques and the funds are just as crucial.

It can be concluded that there are many individuals who support the jihad in the Netherlands. The threat level has therefore been raised to substantial and on that basis an Action Program is established with approaches and measures that combat virtual Jihadism. The most effective measures that have been taken are criminal prosecution, countering radicalization and combating terrorism financing. So far 52 passport measures have been taken, 29 assets have been frozen, the allowances of 50 people have been stopped and at least 115 investigations are held on at least 135 suspects. These 115 investigations all relate to suspects who are currently still in the Netherlands or suspects who have returned from the battle area. Furthermore, investments have been made to strengthen the resilience of multiple communities. This has been done in the form of support and social assistance. The research indicates that debates and dialogue activities provide a counterbalance to jihadist propaganda. Also, key persons such as Muslim communities, employees of municipalities and other professionals are trained to recognize and deal with radicalization. Information meetings and debates are organized for parents and youngsters with the aim to minimize the radicalization taboo.

The research also described disadvantages of the counter measures that are currently taken to prevent the spread of virtual Jihadism. An important measure of the Action Program is the voluntary code of conduct for Internet companies, where requests for content removal by the government should be honoured, without the intervention of a judge. However, this measure proved to be problematic. The removal of information that is placed on the private platform is complicated, because this stage relies on user-generated information and already has their own legal jurisdictions. The degree to which states can prevent or command what information private sector companies display is limited in a free society, particularly when these companies are based in several legal jurisdictions. Moreover, removed websites and accounts can quickly reappear. Therefore the measure of content removal and filtering information is only temporarily effective.

In conclusion, the disadvantages do not automatically mean that the measures to counter the spread of virtual Jihadism are not effective. It only means that more cooperation is needed between involved parties.

8. Recommendations

Jihadist are currently using the Internet in artistic and innovative ways, often leaving experts and policy creators behind underdeveloped. The most actual threat to the Dutch society are jihadist groups who use interactive nature of the Internet for propaganda and recruitment to influence other potential jihadists. The research in the previous chapters have shown that the Internet can be useful for brainwashing, indoctrination and socialising those who seek out the jihadist ideology. Based on the findings of this dissertation the following recommendations can be given:

Firstly, to combat virtual Jihadism one should offer different options on a range of subjects that jihadists want to monopolize. Also, one should challenge the ideological or political places that are presently active by jihadist content. In essence, counter jihadist measures should overshadow the information that is read by individuals who are susceptible to Islamic jihadist cultures. Additionally, counter jihadist information should be as suitable, tempting and impressive as jihadist messaging. At the same time, these messages should have the intellectual preciseness and accuracy that are not present in the current jihadist messaging. The ultimate goal to counter virtual Jihadism should be to take away the enchantment and temptation of extreme messaging.

Secondly, combatting virtual Jihadism should be a united collaboration between the state, the private sector and local society. Inside the private sector, technology companies have in particular great actors with underutilised scope to work with states and leading local society actors. Thus several forms of high-tech, political and religious expertise should connect in order to assist the progress of effective jihadist counter measures. Also, it is equally relevant to prevent negative measures of the counterproductive efforts.

Thirdly, states should exercise their power to bring various parties together and organize events that will allow different organizations and people to meet each other and to join forces. In essence, a platform is needed that brings representatives together. A platform where all parties come together to discuss the concerns, to establish communications channels and to develop actions. States should in particular form close relationships with private sector companies such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Google. The communication between these parties is very important, because private sector companies have an interest in protecting free speech and individual freedom - notably because they usually depend on user-generated content. Therefore, it is important that states establish channels of communication with the private sector, and not act as their own judge.

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