

Recruiting Terrorists Online

The recruitment of lone wolf terrorists relies on online platforms and requires a gradual transition through numerous phases.

1

The Net

All online platforms may be used at this stage, official websites, Facebook pages, and personal email to YouTube video clips and Twitter messages. At this step, recruiters view the whole population as primed for recruitment and exposes it to an online message, video, taped lecture, or word document.



The target audience is viewed as homogeneous enough and receptive enough to be approached with a single undifferentiated pitch, to which some members will respond positively, others negatively.



2

The Funnel

When a terrorist recruiter believes a target is ripe for recruitment yet requires a significant transformation in identity and motivation, he or she uses an incremental, or phased, approach that capitalizes on a wealth of techniques well studied in cognitive, social, and clinical psychology. This stage relies on a virtual social bonding, based on the target's alienation, social frustration, solitude, and personal pessimism. It involves online exchanges and further exposure to religious, political, or ideological material.



3

The Infection

The infection stage often relies on the "seed crystal" practice, comparable to lowering the temperature of a glass of water until ice crystals form as the seeds of a complete freeze. In "seed crystal" recruitment, different forces can be used to "chill the glass" and increase the hardness of the "freeze." These forces may include advanced radicalization by continuous exposure to online radical material and virtual online guidance. In terms of al-Qaeda, the seed crystal approach is most successful in diasporas or populations where open recruiting is difficult or impossible.



4

The Activation

This step includes practical instructions (via online manuals) on using explosives, weapons, poisons, and chemicals; directions regarding the selection of target, location, and timing; and the final send-off.

