

**Testimony of**  
**Evan F. Kohlmann**  
**with Josh Lefkowitz and Laith Alkhouri**  
**Before the**  
**House Committee on Homeland Security**  
**"Jihadist Use of Social Media – How to Prevent Terrorism and Preserve**  
**Innovation"**

**The Antisocial Network: Countering the Use of Online  
Social Networking Technologies by Foreign Terrorist  
Organizations**

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**A Biographical Sketch**

Evan Kohlmann is a founder and Senior Partner at Flashpoint Global Partners, a New York-based security consulting firm. During the course of his research, Mr. Kohlmann has amassed one of the largest and most extensive open source databases in the world of original documents, communiqués, and multimedia from Al-Qaida and other international terrorist organizations. He has testified twenty-one times as an expert witness in U.S. federal courts, and has served at various times as a contract consultant in terrorism matters on behalf of the U.S. Department of Defense, the U.S. Department of Justice, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Office of the High Representative (OHR) in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTFY) at the Hague, the Australian Federal Police (AFP), the U.K. Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), Scotland Yard's SO-15 Counter Terrorism Command, the Central Scotland Police, West Yorkshire Police, and the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET). Mr. Kohlmann currently works as an on-air analyst on behalf of NBC News / MSNBC.

*"Mr. Kohlmann is certainly qualified to provide expert testimony on [terrorism] issues... Mr. Kohlmann has conducted first-hand interviews of several leaders of terrorist organizations and has reviewed reams of information about al Qaeda... It is apparent that these subjects are Mr. Kohlmann's life work, and he has, therefore, acquired a considerable amount of information and documentation on these subjects."*

- U.S. District Judge Mark Kravitz (2/20/08)

*"Kohlmann has developed an understanding of terrorist organization structures, operations, and membership, allowing him to speak with authority about Al-Qaeda in Iraq, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Jaish-e-Mohammed. His research and experience have provided him a base of understanding far greater, and far more sophisticated, than of the Court or of jurors... A person lacking Kohlmann's advanced knowledge of JeM and LeT essentially would not be able to recognize the information on Khan's hard drive as information that might link a person to JeM or LeT."*

- U.S. District Judge William S. Duffey Jr. (6/1/09)

Mr. Kohlmann holds an undergraduate degree in International Politics from the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service (Georgetown University), and a graduate degree in law from the University of Pennsylvania Law School. While at Georgetown, he worked as a research assistant to Dr. Mamoun Fandy in the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies (CCAS). Kohlmann is also the recipient of a certificate in Islamic studies from the Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding (CMCU) at Georgetown University, where he was mentored by Dr. John Voll.

Though the term “social networking” tends to conjure up immediate visions of Facebook and Twitter, the origins of the term are far less humble. In the era before the existence of the Internet, social networking was the process of conventional human interaction that took place in key locations like schools, marketplaces, religious centers, and sports events. Consequently, for traditional terrorist organizations like Al-Qaida’s first generation, the critical social networking hubs consisted of secretive guesthouses, a handful of notoriously extremist mosques, and fixed training camps scattered alongside the Afghan-Pakistani border.

In the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, these conventional hubs were quickly targeted by the U.S. and its allies. Under overwhelming pressure, training camps were shut down, guesthouses raided, and notorious recruiters jailed. Al-Qaida Inc. was seemingly put out of business. Yet, as new generations have come of age in the Internet era, the Al-Qaida organization has spread its online presence, establishing a tenacious beachhead in cyberspace. In the face of constant pressure from U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies, Al-Qaida has defiantly organized a cabal of critical jihadi-oriented online social networking forums. Likewise, its members, allies, and supporters heavily populate conventional services like YouTube and Facebook. And for those who make contact with groups like Al-Qaida and the Pakistani Taliban through these services, the reality is no less meaningful than having done so in person. This is the primary emerging frontier of Al-Qaida recruitment and financing.

In fact, the word “emerging” hardly captures the reality of what is actually happening right now on the Internet. Each week, new Internet personalities disappear from the web on a mission to live out their outlandish jihadi fantasies. Flashpoint Global Partners has identified at least 120 such individuals (including U.S. nationals) who have graduated from being mere “pajama-hideen” to taking a real role in terrorist activity over the past seven years. Of these 120 hardcore extremists, more than half are now dead—killed in a barrage of Predator drone strikes, failed bomb-making activities, and in gunbattles with the U.S. military and various other “infidel” adversaries. The numbers increase dramatically each month. On August 14, 2011, users on the radical “Ansar al-Mujahideen” chat forum were notified that one of their fellow members, “Hafid Salahudeen”, had been killed in a U.S. drone missile attack in Pakistan’s restive Waziristan region along the Afghan border.<sup>1</sup> Only one week later, on August 23, 2011, another “Ansar al-Mujahideen” user “Khattab 76” was reported dead after clashes with the Egyptian military in the Sinai Peninsula, where he had gone to “fight the Zionists.”<sup>2</sup> According to Ansar forum administrators, inspired by what he saw on the web, “Khattab 76” had made several previous failed efforts to join Al-Qaida in both Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup> On September 18, 2011, moderators on Al-Qaida’s premiere “Shamikh” web forum advised their comrades that user “Qutaiba” had departed for Algeria to join Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). They quoted a final message from him sent over the Internet: “I am here amongst the mujahideen in the Islamic Maghreb...I advise my beloved ones to join the convoy before it is too late... Your brothers in AQIM are waiting for you.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=46237>. August 14, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=46873>. August 23, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=46873>. August 23, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=127866>. September 18, 2011.

Arguably, the most famous individual to self-recruit on the Internet using Al-Qaida's social networking websites was a young Jordanian doctor named Humam al-Balawi (a.k.a. "Abu Dujanah al-Khorasani"). On December 30, 2009, al-Balawi—a former administrator on top-tier Al-Qaida social networking forums—blew himself up at a secret CIA base along the Afghan-Pakistani border.<sup>5</sup> At the time, CIA and Jordanian intelligence agents believed they had successfully recruited al-Balawi as a double agent to help hunt down Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri and other top Al-Qaida figures. In fact, al-Balawi was offering a starkly different perspective to his associates on the jihadi web forums. In an interview published on Al-Qaida's "Al-Hesbah" forum in September 2009, only three months previous, al-Balawi appealed, "How can I encourage people to join the jihad while I'm staying away from it? ...How do I become a burning wick for others follow the light of? Can any sane person accept that? Not me."<sup>6</sup> As for Al-Qaida's social networks, he crowed, "I left behind on the forums some brothers who are dearer to me than members of my own family... When I meet any mujahid here who knows about the forums, I rush to ask him who he knows from al-Hesbah—as he might be one of those whom we loved in the cause of Allah, from amongst the administrators or members, and I would hug him as one brother longing for another."<sup>7</sup> These now-prophetic warning signs were ignored by many at the time, who dismissed al-Balawi's threats as merely inflated Internet rhetoric. It came at an enormous cost—seven CIA agents killed, including some of the agency's top experts on Al-Qaida.

Al-Qaida itself is well aware of the key role that jihadi web forums are playing in recruiting a new generation of militants willing to sacrifice themselves on its behalf. No longer are Internet-based social networks the exclusive domain of aspiring, would-be terrorist neophytes. Indeed, the veteran Yemeni explosives expert accused by the U.S. government of helping organize al-Balawi's deadly suicide bombing attack, Hussain al-Hussami, was likewise an active user on the Al-Hesbah online forum.<sup>8</sup> On October 1, 2009, he posted a request on the forum on behalf of "the Jalaludeen Haqqani Organization": "dear brothers, I have some Shariah and military guides printed in the Russian language, and I want to translate them into Arabic. If you can assist me, whether with software, websites, or translators, may Allah reward you generously."<sup>9</sup>

Recognition of the brave new world of terrorist communications and recruitment has reached the highest echelons of Al-Qaida. In June 2010, the group released an audio message from Shaykh Mustafa Abu al-Yazid—third-in-command behind Usama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri—hailing "my brothers—the shadowy knights of the [jihadi] media, a school whose alumni includes the hero 'Abu Dujanah al-Khorasani'... and those who remain and continue their efforts and sacrifices" and calling on them "to stand in the trench that Allah has chosen them for their own well-being... You are the

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<sup>5</sup> Oppel, Richard A. Jr., Mark Mazetti, and Souad Mekhennet. "Attacker in Afghanistan Was a Double Agent." *New York Times*. January 4, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> "Vanguards of Khorasan" Magazine. Vol. 1; Issue 15 (September 2009).

<sup>7</sup> "Vanguards of Khorasan" Magazine. Vol. 1; Issue 15 (September 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Baldor, Lolita and Matt Apuzzo. "Top Al Qaeda Operative Reportedly Killed In U.S. Drone Attack." *Associated Press*. March 17, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.alfaloja.net/vb/showthread.php?t=86082>. October 1, 2009.

thundering voice of jihad, its mighty arrows, and its roaring weapons that have caused so much concern amongst politicians at the White House.”<sup>10</sup>

Yet, perhaps what is most startling about this phenomenon is the sharp increase in the use of brand name U.S. commercial social networking services such as YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook by terrorist organizations and their supporters. On password-protected top-tier Al-Qaida web forums, contributors are boasting that “YouTube is among the most important media platforms in supporting the mujahideen, as it is ranked third in the world with more than 70 million daily visitors.”<sup>11</sup> This is reflected in the increasing occurrence of hardcore jihadi videos hosted by YouTube as evidenced in federal terrorism cases.

- On February 1, 2011, Colleen R. LaRose (aka “Jihad Jane”) pled guilty to charges in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, including conspiring to provide material support to terrorists.<sup>12</sup> LaRose was an unusually prolific presence on YouTube; court documents highlighted a particular posting – under the name “JihadJane” – in which she indicated she was “desperate to do something somehow to help” suffering Muslims.<sup>13</sup>
- On February 24, 2011, Northern Virginia resident Zachary Chesser was sentenced to 25 years in prison “for communicating threats against the writers of the South Park television show, soliciting violent jihadists to desensitize law enforcement, and attempting to provide material support to Al-Shabaab, a designated foreign terrorist organization.”<sup>14</sup> According to court filings, “Chesser...started his own YouTube.com homepage, utilizing userID LearnTeachFightDie, where he posted videos and hosted discussions. Chesser explained that this name perfectly symbolized his philosophy at the time: learn Islam, teach Islam, fight for Islam, and die in the name of Islam...” After closing that account, “he then opened a YouTube site utilizing user name AIQuranWaAlaHadeeth.”<sup>15</sup>
- Joseph Jeffrey Brice was charged in May 2011 for making and detonating an Improvised Explosive Device – consisting of TATP, APAN, and ANFO – along a highway in Washington State. According to court filings, Brice – who was seriously injured in the blast – set up a YouTube channel that “was used to post videos that depicted the use of explosives. Some of these videos contained the embedded logo of the Al-TawhidWal Jihad (Al-Qaida in Iraq) and a jihad chant soundtrack, known as Nashid....two of them depicted the use of explosives in the

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<sup>10</sup> As-Sahab Media Foundation. “He Who Equips a Fighter Has Waged Battle Himself, by the Mujahid Shaykh Mustafa Abu al-Yazid—May Allah Accept Him.” First released: June 15, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=62982>. May 16, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> “Pennsylvania Woman Pleads Guilty in Plot to Recruit Violent Jihadist Fighters and to Commit Murder Overseas”. U.S. Department of Justice Press Release. February 1, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. v. LaRose. Eastern District of Pennsylvania. Criminal No. 10-123. Superseding Indictment. Filed April 1, 2010.

<sup>14</sup> “Virginia Man Sentenced to 25 Years in Prison for Providing Material Support and Encouraging Violent Jihadists to Kill U.S. Citizens.” U.S. Department of Justice Press Release. February 24, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. v. Chesser. Eastern District of Virginia. Criminal No. 1:10mj504. Affidavit of FBI Special Agent Mary Brandt Kinder. Filed July 21, 2010.

Clarkston, Washington vicinity...” He also posted numerous comments on YouTube. For example, on January 8, 2011, in response to the shooting of Congresswoman Gifford, he wrote, “...as long as it’s one more dead American kuffar, what difference does it make to me if she is a democrat or a gop?” On December 27, 2010, he wrote, “NPED [non-primary explosives detonator] can now be purchased in most states legally through pyrotechnic dealers.”<sup>16</sup>

- On December 2, 2011, Virginia resident Jubair Ahmad pled guilty to providing material support to Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)<sup>17</sup>. According to DOJ, “in September 2010, Jubair produced and uploaded a propaganda video to YouTube on behalf of LeT, after communications with a person named ‘Talha.’ In a subsequent conversation with another person, Jubair identified Talha as Talha Saeed, the son of LeT leader Hafiz Mohammed Saeed. Talha and Jubair allegedly communicated about the images, music and audio that Jubair was to use to make the video. The final video contained images of LeT leader Hafiz Saeed, so-called jihadi martyrs and armored trucks exploding after having been hit by improvised explosive devices.”<sup>18</sup>

Nor has this phenomenon been limited to the U.S. In the United Kingdom, a 21-year old woman, Roshanara Choudhry, made headlines in May 2010 when she stabbed and attempted to assassinate British MP Stephen Timms at a community center in East London. According to British authorities, “When interviewed by police, Choudhry said she stabbed Mr Timms because he voted for the Iraq war and she wanted to achieve ‘punishment’ and ‘to get revenge for the people of Iraq’.”<sup>19</sup> In her police interview, she explained that she “wanted to be a martyr” because “that’s the best way to die.” She further told the interviewer that she had adopted that perspective after listening to lectures by Yemeni-American cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, killed in a U.S. drone strike in Yemen in September 2011. Asked how she found out about al-Awlaki, she explained, “On the internet ... if you go on YouTube, there’s a lot of his videos there and if you do a search they just come up... I wasn’t searching for him, I just came across him... I used to watch videos that people used to put up about like how they became Muslim.”<sup>20</sup>

It is often forgotten that YouTube is not merely a video hosting site, but also a formidable social networking forum. Contributors can draw the attention of registered subscribers who then are able to comment on video uploads and communicate back and forth with the original source. Users subscribe to each other’s feeds based on mutual interests—in this case, various aspects of Al-Qaida and violent extremism. The process is so efficient and precise that it has repeatedly attracted the interest of the Pakistani

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<sup>16</sup> Re: 538 Riverview Boulevard #3. Clarkston, WA. 99403. Affidavit of FBI Special Agent Leland C. MeEuen. May 6, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> “Pakistani National Living in Woodbridge Pleads Guilty to Providing Material Support to Terrorist Organization.” U.S. Department of Justice Press Release. December 2, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> “Woodbridge Man Charged with Providing Material Support to Terrorist Organization”. U.S. Department of Justice Press Release. September 2, 2011.

<sup>19</sup> “Woman sentenced to life imprisonment for attempted murder of MP”. Metropolitan Police Service Press Release. November 3, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Roshanara Choudhry police interview. Interview conducted on May 14, 2010, in Forest Gate police station.

Taliban, not merely to spread propaganda, but also to engage in a dialogue with viewers and even recruit those interested in joining a foreign terrorist organization. On December 9, 2009, five young Muslim-American men from the Washington D.C. area were arrested by authorities in the Pakistani town of Sargodha. The men were accused of attempting to join Al-Qaida forces on the Afghan-Pakistani border. According to a Pakistani police report quoted by ABC News and the New York Times, a Taliban recruiter first made contact with the group via Ahmed Abdullah Minni, who had “repeatedly posted comments on YouTube praising videos showing attacks on American troops.”<sup>21</sup> The 20-year old Minni had allegedly “become a regular feature” on YouTube with his campaign of online vitriol—so much so that a Pakistani Taliban recruiter known as “Saifullah” took an interest and began writing back to him.<sup>22</sup>

The Pakistani Taliban carried on their brazen recruitment campaign using YouTube in May 2010. Within days of a failed car bombing in Times Square, New York by Faisal Shahzad, a naturalized American recruited by the Pakistani Taliban, the group published a video recording featuring its leader Hakimullah Mehsud boasting of its role in the would-be attack.<sup>23</sup> The video was posted by an official Taliban online courier “TehreekeTaliban” registered as a contributor on YouTube, who engaged in a back-and-forth discussion with critics and supporters in the comment section on the video. One respondent asked, “what is he saying? Can someone translate?” The courier replied, “subtitles are in English, you can easily understand inshaALLAH.” When another viewer condemned the Taliban for their role in the Times Square incident, “TehreekeTaliban” insisted, “I would recommend you to read Quran again with good translation and... to do learn... from a good shaykh like Imam Anwar Al-Awlaki. You can download his lectures from net, just search google.”<sup>24</sup>

As the social networking website Facebook has quickly become a ubiquitous part of many Americans’ online activity, it too has enjoyed increased significance as an amplifier for violent extremist viewpoints and a way for Al-Qaida supporters to identify each other and build budding relationships. In March 2010, one user on Al-Qaida’s then-preeminent “Fallujah Islamic Network” appealed, “the least we can do to support the Mujahideen is to distribute their statements and releases.” He added, “we wish from the brothers to also distribute the statement via Youtube and widely... and on Facebook.”<sup>25</sup> The user offered a cautionary note about using Facebook: “the suggested method is to always access it via proxy, otherwise you’re in danger. Make one email on Yahoo that’s dedicated for the [online] battle only. After creating the email, register on Facebook under an pseudonym with the email you created, and via which the account will be activated. Search for all the profiles and groups.”<sup>26</sup>

Like YouTube, the role of Facebook in terrorism investigations can be charted as it increasingly surfaces as evidence in federal criminal indictments. In December 2010, Baltimore resident Antonio Martinez was charged with plotting to attack an Armed Forces recruiting station in Catonsville, Maryland. As recounted in a press release from

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<sup>21</sup> Shane, Scott. “Web Posts Began Tale of Detained Americans.” New York Times. December 14, 2009.

<sup>22</sup> See: “Interrogation Report: Profiles of the Foreigners held”. Abbas Majeed Khan Marwat PSP, ASP/UT SARGODHA. Available at: [http://a.abcnews.com/images/Blotter/ht\\_interrogation\\_report\\_091211.pdf](http://a.abcnews.com/images/Blotter/ht_interrogation_report_091211.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/user/TehreekeTaliban>. May 2, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/user/TehreekeTaliban>. May 2, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=105942>. March 6, 2010.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=105942>. March 6, 2010.

the U.S. Department of Justice, “Martinez was arrested...after he attempted to remotely detonate what he believed to be explosives in a vehicle parked in the Armed Forces recruiting station parking lot.”<sup>27</sup> According to the USDOJ:

“On September 29, 2010, Martinez publicly posted on his Facebook account a statement calling for violence to stop the oppression of Muslims, and that on October 1, 2010, he publicly posted a message stating that he hates any person who opposes Allah and his prophet. On October 8, 2010, an FBI confidential source (CS) brought these public postings to the attention of the FBI... On October 10, 2010, in response to these postings, the CS began communicating with Martinez through Facebook... During Martinez’ discussions with the CS over Martinez’ Facebook page, Martinez wrote that he wanted to go to Pakistan or Afghanistan, that it was his dream to be among the ranks of the mujahideen, and that he hoped Allah would open a door for him because all he thinks about is jihad.”

Additionally, on October 17, 2011, Martinez allegedly posted the following on his Facebook page: ‘I love Sheikh Anwar al Awalki for the sake of ALLAH. A real inspiration[sic] for the Ummah, I dont care if he is on the terrorist list! May ALLAH give him Kireameen.’” Court filings further note that his Facebook “Friends” included “two radical Islamist websites affiliated with a radical group called Revolution Muslim: Call to Islam - a United Kingdom-based online movement dedicated to the implementation of Sharia law worldwide (as stated on its website); and Authentic Tawheed - a pro-jihad group providing links on its website to materials put out by known terrorists such as Anwar al-Aulaqi.”<sup>28</sup>

There is no doubt that YouTube and Facebook have been making genuine efforts in an attempt to thwart the online activities of Al-Qaida supporters and violent extremists. However, a quick search for jihadi videos on YouTube is a fairly compelling demonstration that these efforts have thus far been insufficient in addressing the problem. Online jihadists have reacted with mirth at YouTube’s overly-optimistic strategy of relying on its own users to self-police and help to flag individual illicit contributions. The service has, in fact, added a category to its content feedback flags labeled “Promotes terrorism”—that which is “intended to incite violence... This means... videos on things like instructional bomb making... [or] sniper attacks... Any depictions of such content ... shouldn’t be designed to help or encourage others to imitate them.”<sup>29</sup> Repeated violations can lead to a user being kicked off YouTube, whose stated policy is that “if your account is terminated you are prohibited from creating any new accounts.”<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, there is minimal enforcement of this policy and users with terminated accounts often simply create new accounts under different user names, many of which are only minor variations of their blocked accounts. A user on Al-Qaida’s top-tier “Fallujah Islamic Network”

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<sup>27</sup> “Maryland Man Charged in Plot to Attack Armed Forces Recruiting Center”. U.S. Department of Justice Press Release. December 8, 2010.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. v. Antonio Martinez. District of Maryland. Case No. 10-4761 JKB. Complaint. Filed December 8, 2010 and U.S. v. Antonio Martinez. District of Maryland. Case No. 10-4761 JKB. Government Response to Defendant’s Motions to Dismiss Indictment and Suppress Statements and Seized Evidence. Filed September 27, 2011.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.google.com/support/youtube/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=139838>. Last accessed December 2, 2011.

<sup>30</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/t/community\\_guidelines](http://www.youtube.com/t/community_guidelines). Last accessed December 2, 2011.



instructed his associates in May 2009 that if online adversaries start to “search for jihad clips... so that users can vote to delete them... then we must make them pull out their hair by re-uploading deleted scenes, commenting on them, and supporting them. Remember that YouTube is the biggest media podium, so the jihad videos should appear right in the face of those who enter it.”<sup>31</sup>

YouTube and its parent company Google have defended their seeming inability to prevent their video sharing service from being manipulated by Al-Qaida supporters and other violent extremists. According to YouTube, “More than 24 hours of video are uploaded every minute.”<sup>32</sup> Due to the sheer volume of new videos being posted each day, YouTube asserts it is “simply not possible” to prescreen content<sup>33</sup> and thus relies on its user community to flag inappropriate material. Yet, with this amount of incoming new material, it is equally fanciful to assume that YouTube’s user community possesses the subject matter expertise or contextual background to effectively block the spread of violent extremist content. Without some sort of automated filtering process, it does not seem realistic to believe that the use of YouTube by terrorists and jihadi extremists will begin to decrease.

If Google is indeed serious about addressing this problem, the company should start by leveraging its own existing technological solutions to ensure known violent extremist content is not distributed via YouTube. A quick comparison with how YouTube manages copyright violations is instructive. YouTube utilizes a system called “Content ID” whereby “Rights holders deliver YouTube reference files (audio-only or video) of content they own, metadata describing that content, and policies on what they want YouTube to do when we find a match. We compare videos uploaded to YouTube against those reference files. We compare videos uploaded to YouTube against those reference files. Our technology automatically identifies your content and applies your preferred policy: monetize, track, or block.”<sup>34</sup> Users deemed to be acting in violation of copyright law are “required to attend ‘YouTube Copyright School,’ which involves watching a copyright tutorial and passing a quiz to show that you’ve paid attention and understood the content before uploading more content to YouTube.”<sup>35</sup> It is hardly a great jump in logic to apply this same strategy to the large, but hardly unmanageable subset of notorious open source terrorist propaganda videos—archives of which are maintained by private organizations like Flashpoint Global Partners. YouTube has been able to effectively block the majority of pornographic video contributions, reportedly through the use of specific algorithms; similar algorithms should be developed to stem the flow of violent extremist content.

In a further development, YouTube’s parent Google has recently acquired Pitt-Patt, a Carnegie Mellon spinoff that is considered to have market leading facial recognition software.<sup>36</sup> This technology can theoretically be leveraged to identify offending video content and user profile photos that match those of known terrorists,

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=62982>. May 16, 2009.

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/t/faq>. Last accessed December 2, 2011.

<sup>33</sup> Benett, Brian. “YouTube is Letting Users Decide on Terrorism-Related Videos.” Los Angeles Times. December 12, 2010.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/t/contentid>. Last accessed December 2, 2011.

<sup>35</sup> <http://youtube-global.blogspot.com/2011/04/youtube-copyright-education-remixed.html>. Last accessed December 2, 2011.

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.pittpatt.com>. Last accessed December 2, 2011.

leading to at least an automatic flagging—if not full deregistration—of the account. Avatar images featuring depictions of high profile terrorists, such as Usama bin Laden and Anwar al-Awlaki, or the watermarked logos of groups such as Shabaab al-Mujahideen and Al-Qaida in Iraq, are unfortunately nowadays common on YouTube. However, when paired with the right image recognition filter, these watermarks and avatars can provide a powerful, effective roadmap to identify suspect contributors engaged in illicit activity. Similar technology could potentially also be deployed with similar effect by Facebook, Twitter, and other commercial social networking services beset with infiltration by supporters of violent extremism.

If real progress is to be made towards cleansing online social networks of terrorists and their supporters, the U.S. Congress must bring pressure to bear on commercial providers who are themselves being victimized in the process to start acting more like aggrieved victims instead of nonchalant bystanders. While any proposed curbs on the freedom of speech should always naturally give one cause for a moment's hesitation, in this case, it is unclear why official terrorist recruitment material is any less of an odious concern for YouTube or Facebook than pornography. Unfortunately, current U.S. law gives few incentives for companies like YouTube for volunteering information on illicit activity, or even cooperating when requested by U.S. law enforcement. If such companies are to be trusted to self-police their own professed commitments to fighting hate speech, then they must be held to a public standard which reflects the importance of that not unsubstantial responsibility.