Degrading Terrorists' Influence Online Begins in America

A Policy Primer

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Author Note

Michael S. Smith II is a terrorism analyst who specializes in the influence operations of Salafi-Jihadist groups part of the Global Jihad movement. A contributing expert to the Congressional Taskforce on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare, his perspectives on topics covered herein are sought by members of Congress, as well as counterterrorism practitioners from the United States Intelligence Community. With former CIA senior al-Qa'ida analyst Cynthia Storer and Dr. Allen Newton, Smith is currently authoring a book (referenced herein) that examines the growth of the Global Jihad movement and the Islamic State's use of terrorism in the West to outbid al-Qa'ida for support. As Smith is frequently quoted in news stories on terrorism-related developments, his input contained within materials cited herein is noted by way of reference to "the author." This phraseology is also used to make note of material authored by Smith.

Scope Note

This material was developed to stimulate critical thinking among policymakers about regulations which—whether mandated by the Federal Communications Commission, Congress, or both—could help to disrupt US-designated foreign terrorist organizations' uses of American companies' Internet technologies to advance their agendas at the expense of US/allied interests. As the author has observed that policymakers and their staffs tend to invest more energies in "moving" legislation containing policies conceptualized by them, rather than furnish a list of prescribed action items, the author has highlighted issues of concern to national security managers while calling attention to certain types of policies which, if mandated by federal regulations, could degrade the online influence of terrorists and their supporters. While there is not space sufficient to address the uses of these technologies for other criminal purposes, such countermeasures may concomitantly serve to deter exploitations of American firms' Internet technologies to support an array of other illicit activities, ranging from stock price manipulation schemes to child predation. Indeed, a solution discussed herein might also help to mitigate the issue of cyber bullying on social media that First Lady-elect Melania Trump voiced concerns about during the 2016 campaign.

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DRAFT

"Mike Smith and the members of the team he leads are among the very best in the field of 'Open Source Intelligence,' or OSINT. And with extremist groups like the Islamic State generating so much activity in social media and the Internet, the ability to collect and analyze OSINT as impressively as Mike and his team do is hugely important. Their insights are absolutely invaluable."

—D/CIA (Ret) Gen David H. Petraeus
Correspondence referenced in Graham, 2016

Comprised of Salafi-Jihadist groups like al-Qa'ida and the Islamic State, the Global Jihad movement constitutes the greatest source of terrorist threats to the United States and its allies (Gunaratna & Oreg, 2015, p. 6). An unprecedented competition for dominance in the Global Jihad movement erupted when the group then known as ISIS declared it had established a caliphate, and rebranded as the Islamic State while demanding all other Salafi-Jihadist groups disband, with their members pledging allegiance to the newly-appointed "caliph," Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (Adnani, 2014b). To enhance its capabilities to outbid al-Qa'ida for support, in the cyber domain, the Islamic State has waged the most aggressive worldwide recruitment-cum-incitement campaign of any terrorist group in history. Recently, a former Islamic State member confirmed that, due to the perceived difficulty of deploying terrorists trained in the "caliphate" to the United States, the group aims to radicalize and mobilize would-be terrorists in America over the Internet (Callimachi, 2016). Ironically, American companies' social media platforms and file-sharing sites are used as tools to bolster the group's capacity to recruit and incite violence far beyond its primary areas of operation, including within the United States. Meanwhile, since 2014, the higher instance rate of attacks in the West attributed to Islamic State supporters not formally trained by the group versus attacks attributed to al-Qa'ida suggests the Islamic State may have engineered a set of narratives that has enabled the group to accelerate the radicalization process. Amplification of Islamic State narratives tailored to incite violence before Western audiences has been greatest on Twitter, which is also used to encouraged Islamic State sympathizers to contact group members. Given Twitter's posture of resistance to cooperation with federal agencies, prudence welcomes consideration of regulatory regimes designed to compel American social media and file-sharing companies to implement policies to more effectively deter conversions of their technologies into tools used to build support for terrorist groups calling for attacks targeting Americans and our allies.

A View to the Threat

As consensus on the definition for the term *terrorism* has remained elusive for even federal agencies in the post-9/11 era (Hoffman, 2006, Chapter 1), it is important to define what is meant by the uses of the terms *terrorism* and *terrorist* herein (Smith et al., 2016):

terrorism A term used to describe unlawful, intimidatory, and/or coercive actions, especially the public use of force or violence, or threats of such actions against a government, civilian populace, or any segments thereof, through which the actor (***terrorist***) seeks to achieve any array of behavior-modifying psychological effects within specific audience segments for the purpose of advancing agendas typically characterized by either political, economic, or social (i.e., religious) interests, or any combination thereof.

As the Islamic State is the terrorist group of primary interest herein, it is useful to note effects achieved by attacks attributed to the group may include admiration manifesting in varying forms of increased support, including additional attacks (Smith et al., 2016). Indeed, as noted in a report prepared to help inform then United States Special Operations Command Central Commander Major General Michael K. Nagata's understanding of the Islamic State's "intangible power" (Nagata In Schmitt, 2014), for a group like the Islamic State, "success breeds success" (Canna, 2014, p. 22). Meanwhile, as terrorist attacks in the West can help the group compete with al-Qa'ida for support, increased instances of attacks in the West attributed to the group may motivate al-Qa'ida to orient more of its resources to execute attacks here (Smith et al., 2016).

This leads us to the issue of the centrality of violence in Salafi-Jihadist groups' strategies to build the perceptibility of legitimacy—and leadership—thus worthiness of support. Known as Salafiyya Jihadiyya, the ideology which informs the agendas of al-Qa'ida, the Islamic State and all other groups comprising the Global Jihad movement is an intensely orthopraxic subset of Sunni Islam. For Salafi-Jihadis, faith is demonstrated by action—jihad. As Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi put it in a May 2015 address (Baghdadi) while rallying support for his group's global jihad, "Speech will not benefit you without action, for there is not faith without action." For groups part of the Global Jihad movement, primary targets include secular Western powers and their allies in the Muslim world, or the so-called "enemies of Islam." As the world's dominant superpower, Salafi-Jihadis view the secular United States as the chief source of "unIslamic" influence in the international system. That influence, they claim, is the primary threat to the faith, as America's secularist influence is the chief impediment to the restoration of a caliphal model of governance— existence of which, they argue, is necessitated by Islamic scripture and the model of life offered by the *Salaf* (first three generations of Muslims).

Al-Qa'ida's charter (Qa'ida, n.d.) reveals the paramountcy of jihad in relation to the *aqida* (creed) traditionally adopted and promoted by Salafi-Jihadis. Accordingly, since its formation in 1988, jihad has been al-Qa'ida's "only mission." Thus perceptions of al-Qa'ida's credibility are linked to the violence attributed to it. In other words, by not waging jihad, al-Qa'ida would fail to meet expectations established with this very mission statement, rendering the group an illegitimate claimant of its formal namesake, *Qa'idat al-Jihad* (Base of Jihad). Given that the Islamic State insists it is now the torchbearer of this mission (discussion below), for the Islamic State's acquired and prospective supporters, the same metric for measuring legitimacy applies.

As noted in al-Qa'ida's charter, the group is waging jihad in pursuit of the chief goal defined therein: Restoration of the caliphate. For al-Qa'ida, spectacular attacks became the means to achieve vanguard status within the Global Jihad movement, and, with it, support from other Salafi-Jihadist groups which share the goal of restoring the caliphate. As al-Qa'ida's current leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, is keenly aware, once al-Qa'ida began executing attention-winning attacks targeting Westerners during the 1990s leaders of other Salafi-Jihadist groups sought to join al-Qa'ida. Notably, during the summer of 2001, al-Zawahiri merged the faction of Egyptian Islamic Jihad he was leading with al-Qa'ida. As he and Islamic State leaders are aware, the boost in al-Qa'ida's brand equity derived from the 9/11 attacks and being named the top target in the United States-led Global War on Terror further stimulated interest in deepening ties with al-Qa'ida among leaders of ideologically-aligned groups. Indeed, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the founding leader of the group now known as the Islamic State, merged his group with al-Qa'ida to form its Iraq branch.

Now the leader of al-Qa'ida, al-Zawahiri has affirmed killing Americans remains a priority for his group. In his memo titled "General Guidelines for Jihad," al-Zawahiri (2013) advised the United States remains atop the group's target list for its "military operations." Yet, in an address posted online in April 2014, Abu Mohamed al-Adnani (2014a)—who would double as the Islamic State's original spokesman and the manager of its external operations division—argued al-Qa'ida's current leadership has deviated from bin Ladin's *manhaj* (methodology). Continuing, he claimed al-Qa'ida is "no longer the base of jihad," adding the group led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is the true steward of the jihad charted by al-Qa'ida's founding leader. Nearly a year later, in the seventh issue of its flagship publication *Dabiq* (Islamic State, 2015, p. 25), the Islamic State reminded its audiences of this rebuke of al-Qa'ida's current leaders while extolling bin Ladin. By referring to bin Ladin as the "crusher of the Americans" while echoing the claim it is championing his *manhaj*, the Islamic State reaffirmed Americans should be viewed as priority targets by

members of its worldwide support base. Indeed, since mid-2014, a concerted effort to incite violence in Europe and the United States has been evident in addresses from the group's leaders and other Islamic State propaganda. All of which is published online, with a prolific social media campaign used to encourage its consumption while amplifying narratives therein.

The premium placed on appearing as a greater threat to the United States than al-Qa'ida was highlighted in January 2016 with the Islamic State's dedication of several pages of the thirteenth issue of *Dabiq* (pp. 46-47) to coverage of an oped published in *Time* by Michael Morell (2015). Therein, the former deputy CIA director noted a majority of the roughly 900 terrorism-related cases managed by federal agencies late in 2015 were linked to the Islamic State. Already, while calling for attacks in Europe and the United States in the fourth issue of *Dabiq* that was published online in October 2014, the Islamic State had instructed its supporters to clearly attribute attacks in the West the Islamic State: "It is important that the killing becomes attributed to patrons of the Islamic State who have obeyed its leadership. … Otherwise, crusader media makes such attacks appear to be random killings" (p. 44).

Two months after his rebuke of al-Qa'ida's leadership, in June 2014, al-Adnani (2014b) declared the Islamic State had achieved the primary goal pursued by al-Qa'ida: Restoration of a caliphal model of governance. Not only has this claim bolstered the perceptibility of the Islamic State being a more competent steward of the Global Jihad movement's agenda than al-Qa'ida, thereby helping generate defections from al-Qa'ida's branches like al-Shabaab while drawing large contingents of terrorist groups once aligned with al-Qa'ida into its ranks (notably members of Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, Boko Haram and Abu Sayyaf); this claim seems to have enhanced the group's capacity to persuade individuals residing in the West to execute terrorist attacks at home.

In accordance with Islamic texts and traditions, Sunni Muslims have historically pledged *bay'a* (allegiance) to the caliph, a political sovereign who held the associated title of *Emir al-Mu'minin* (Commander of the Faithful)—a title reflective of his superior rank over members of the *umma* (worldwide body of Muslims) (Petry, 2013). After it declared its "caliphate," the following set of narratives became featured prominently within Islamic State propaganda: In compliance with Islamic texts and traditions, Sunni Muslims must pledge allegiance to the Islamic State's so-called "caliph"; next, allegiance to al-Baghdadi is affirmed by one of two actions: Making *hijrah* (emigration to the caliphate) to help the group defend and expand its territorial holdings, or executing attacks at home. In his aforecited May 2015 address, al-Baghdadi transformed this set of action items echoed within the torrent of propaganda materials distributed by the group online into an official set of directives: "And we call upon every Muslim in every place to perform *hijrah* to the Islamic State or fight in his land wherever that may be." Thus we see that the Islamic State's recruitment program could more appropriately be described as a recruitment-cum-incitement campaign. Further, as evinced by Department of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson's comments during an interview on 11 September 2016 (NBC), use of this authoritative status by al-Baghdadi and his proxies like al-Adnani to incite violence in the West is an ever-growing concern for America's national security managers: "Invariably, the high probability, higher probability type of threat, another San Bernardino, another Orlando, is uppermost on our minds. It is the thing that keeps me up at night the most."

Since June 2014, in propaganda tailored for audiences in the West, the Islamic State has increased emphasis on calls for attacks here. In his 2016 Ramadan address, al-Adnani (2016) advised that, if barriers to making *hijrah* are too high, it is incumbent upon Islamic State supporters in Europe and the United States to execute attacks in the West. Weeks later, in Orlando, Omar Mateen used a recorded 911 call and reportedly—like a terrorist responsible for the San Bernardino

attack—Facebook (Engel, 2015) to attribute the deadliest terrorist attack in America since 2001 to the Islamic State (Blinder et al., 2016). More recently, in his writings about jihad, Ahmad Rahami, who is accused of executing the 17 September 2016 attack in New York (*US v. Rahami*, 2016), reverently referred to al-Adnani (i.e., "Brother Adnani") and the Islamic State (i.e., "*Dawla*") as sources of guidance to "attack the *kuffar* [disbelievers] in their back yard" (Rahami, n.d.). However, unlike the attack executed in Minnesota the same day, the Islamic State has not claimed credit for the attack Rahami is accused of executing in New York. (Nor has the group claimed credit for the attack targeting a police officer in Philadelphia in January 2016 that Edward Archer said was meant to demonstrate his support of the Islamic State (Berman, 2016).)

While the topic has not been sufficiently covered in open source literature, a review of terrorist attacks since June 2014 indicates the introduction of a caliphal figure who is—both directly and via proxies—commanding receptive audiences to target Americans has fueled a more effective framework for motivating individuals residing in the United States to execute attacks than al-Qa'ida's ongoing calls for such attacks. Online, al-Qa'ida has continued petitioning for so-called "lone wolf" attacks in the United States, presenting attack plot concepts and bomb-making instructions with its Yemen branch's ongoing publication of *Inspire* (AQAP, 2014-2016). Yet, since the Islamic State declared it established a caliphate in June 2014, no attacks in America have been attributed to al-Qa'ida. Meanwhile, the Islamic State has claimed credit for 5 attacks in the United States. Executed in Orlando, the penultimate of these attacks explicitly claimed by the group resulted in 49 deaths (Stolberg & Pérez-Peña, 2016). Meanwhile, more so-called "lone wolf" attacks have occurred in Europe since June 2014.

Social Media: A Tool Used to Bolster Persistent Threats Posed by Salafi-Jihadist Groups

Prior to social media's rise in popularity, during a congressional hearing focused on denying terrorists sanctuaries Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz (H.A.S.C. No. 108-36, 2004) presciently advised, "we need to pay attention to what you might call cyber-sanctuary, the space that exists through communication networks made possible by modern technology." Continuing, he warned: "These networks are wonderful things that enable all kinds of good things in the world. But they are also a tool that the terrorists use to conceal their identities, to move money, to encrypt messages, even to plan and conduct operations remotely." Years later, from Yemen, American-born al-Qa'ida cleric Anwar al-Awlaki converted YouTube and Facebook into international broadcasting tools used to call for attacks in the United States while encouraging sympathetic parties to contact him. Among those lured to established contact with al-Awlaki was Army Major Nidal Hasan (Johnston & Shane, 2009), who executed the attack at Fort Hood in November 2009. Following the declaration of its caliphate, the Islamic State took the cleric's online program that emphasized enhancing ease of access to both incitement-focused messaging and actual group members to new heights. As the author noted in an interview with Voice of America (Bernard, 2015), "Through the Internet, the Islamic State is engaging in one of the most— if not the most—effective global influence operation of any terrorist group in history." As Twitter accounts used by al-Qa'ida propagandists and senior al-Qa'ida figures like so-called "Khorasan Group" leader Sanafi al-Nasr had followings of thousands of accounts when the Islamic State declared its caliphate (Screenshots in Smith, 2016a), Twitter, which the National Counterterrorism Center has reported the Islamic State demonstrates "particular affinity for" (NCTC, 2016, p. 8), became a key space of the Internet where the Islamic State would compete with al-Qa'ida for influence.

In a March 2015 story published by *The New York Times* (Gladstone), the author noted the Islamic State had established a "massive" presence on Twitter. Indeed, as reported in that story, "By some estimates, 70,000 to 90,000 Twitter accounts [were] used by the Islamic State to spread images of beheadings and other brutalities, lure recruits and even relay battle positions—all with relative impunity because the system is free, enormous and, to a large extent, according to critics, unsupervised." Roughly ten months later, in an official blog post titled "Combatting Violent Extremism" (Twitter, 2016), Twitter claimed it had suspended "over 125,000 accounts for threatening or promoting terrorist acts, primarily related to ISIS." Yet an April 2016 *Wall Street Journal* report (Stewart & Maremont) which covered the author's work tracking the Islamic State's activities on Twitter highlighted managers of Islamic State-linked accounts are not deterred by Twitter's suspension campaign. Instead, they tout as credentials the number of times their accounts have been suspended. Meanwhile, as with news reports on attacks (Ingram, 2015), coverage of the Islamic State's dynamic social media campaign can bolster its capabilities to eclipse the specter of al-Qa'ida in the eyes of prospective supporters in the West.

In August 2016, Twitter announced it had suspended 235,000 accounts used to promote extremist content, many of them linked to the Islamic State and al-Qa'ida (Francis, 2016). As the author noted in a report published by *Foreign Policy* in August 2016 (Francis), since June 2016 Twitter has more rapidly suspended clusters of accounts linked with accounts used to amplify narratives from Islamic State propaganda than in the past. Meanwhile, as it is now rare for these accounts to remain open long enough to attract the thousands of followers which many would in 2014 and 2015, counterterrorism officials like Michael Lumpkin, who presently leads the State Department's Global Engagement Center (State Department, 2016), have painted dubitable pictures of a reduction in the Islamic State's online influence capacity (Lumpkin In Klapper, 2016).

Despite Twitter's insistence it is working to deny terrorists and their supporters capabilities to exploit its technologies, Twitter has left open accounts for influential clerics linked to other groups designated foreign terrorist organizations by the United States. A notable example is the account managed by the Jordan-based, al-Qa'ida-affiliated cleric Abu Mohamed al-Maqdisi (Smith In Francis, 2016). In his latest book focused on the Global Jihad movement, terrorism studies scholar Daniel Byman (2015, p. 75) explained, "al-Maqdisi is perhaps the most important living ideologue in the Salafi-Jihadist world today—far more influential than even Ayman al-Zawahiri." With a following of nearly 50,000 accounts the day Twitter touted its suspension of 235,000 accounts, al-Maqdisi had more followers on Twitter than Special Presidential Envoy to the Coalition to Counter ISIL Brett McGurk (Smith, 2016c). Given the competition for influence underway between the Islamic State and al-Qa'ida, the persistent presence on Twitter of clerics like al-Maqdisi, who rejected the Islamic State's claim of having restored a caliphate (Oddone, 2014), can provide incentives for the Islamic State to maintain its presence on Twitter. Meanwhile, as the Islamic State's global terrorism campaign may reduce confidence in al-Qa'ida, accounts managed by al-Qa'ida-affiliated ideologues could also be used by Islamic State recruiters to identify disillusioned al-Qa'ida members and sympathizers who might be persuaded to support the Islamic State. Certainly, accounts like this might also be used by al-Qa'ida's external operations division to identify al-Qa'ida sympathizers who may be pressured to execute attacks in the West.

Ultimately, inasmuch as American companies' popular social media platforms are powerful marketing tools for terrorist groups like the Islamic State they are also both powerful market research and relationship-building tools, as they can enhance a terrorist group's capabilities to identify sympathetic or impressionable parties whom recruiters may initiate contact with and begin grooming to provide various forms of support, including by executing attacks in the United

States. According to former Islamic State member Harry Sarfo (Callimachi, 2016), the group is indeed focused on radicalizing Americans over the Internet. Sarfo told *New York Times* reporter Rukmini Callimachi, "For America and Canada, it's much easier for them to get them over the social [media] network," adding Islamic State recruiters believe they "can radicalize them easily."

An especially alarming use of social media to encourage would-be terrorists in the West to interact with Islamic State members was seen in the online activities of British hacker turned Islamic State member Junaid Hussain. By advertising in his Twitter profile his contact details on encrypted texting applications like Telegram Messenger (Screenshot In Smith, 2016a), Hussain used Twitter to cultivate awareness of the importance of communications security among would-be terrorists while encouraging individuals in the United States to interact with Islamic State members located overseas using technologies that are difficult for counterterrorism practitioners to track. Indeed, before he was killed in a drone strike in Syria in 2015, Hussain communicated with several individuals who planned and executed attacks in the United States, including one of the Islamic State supporters responsible for the May 2015 attack in Garland, Texas (DoJ, 2016a; Goldman, 2016; McLaughlin, 2016). As the author noted in March 2016 (NPR), encrypted texting apps like those promoted by Hussain remain important tools in the group's incitement program.

In furtherance of the Islamic State's efforts to stimulate interest in executing attacks in the United States, Islamic State members and individuals claiming affiliation with the terrorist group have also used Twitter to distribute hit lists containing information which could be used to locate individual American targets (Smith In Moore, 2016). Established by Hussain, in 2015, the Islamic State Hacking Division used Twitter accounts to drive attention to hit lists containing information that could be used to locate more than 1,000 United States Government employees working in the national security community (Screenshots in Smith, 2016a). Later in 2015, accounts managed by individuals who claimed to be part of this entity tweeted home addresses for senior American officials, including Director of National Intelligence James Clapper and CIA Director John Brennan (Screenshots in Smith, 2016a). (In June 2016, the hacker Ardit Ferizi pleaded guilty to hacking online systems, collecting and providing such information to Hussain (Weiner & Nakashima, 2016).) More recently, hackers claiming affiliation with the group have used social media to distribute hit lists containing thousands of addresses for American civilians (Moore, 2016). In addition, the group's supporters have crowd sourced threat campaigns on Twitter targeting journalists and terrorism analysts, such as the one targeting the author the day before Omar Mateen struck in Orlando (Rice, 2016; Graham, 2016).

That Twitter remains an attractive space for Islamic State members and supporters to issue terroristic threats online is perhaps best highlighted by continued use of Twitter in 2016 by Junaid Hussain's widow, Sally Jones. Designated a specially designated global terrorist by the United States (Kerry, 2015), in May 2016, Jones used a Twitter account to harass *New York Times* reporter Rukmini Callimachi, and to draw attention to a tweet by the author which asked if Jones was training female terrorists during an unusually long period of inactivity on Twitter, meanwhile suggesting the group was preparing to strike in London (Jones, 2016; Smith, 2016b). Further highlighting Jones had not been deterred in her use of Twitter, FBI's official Twitter account was on the list of accounts she followed to draw attention to her tweets (Smith, 2016b).

A Need for Congressional Action?

During a December 2014 meeting with the author, then Special Presidential Envoy to the Coalition to Counter ISIL General John Allen, USMC (Ret) expressed more interest in countering

the Islamic State online than a proposed program focused on locating its senior leaders in Syria (Graham, 2016). Federal agencies have since engaged in overt and covert efforts aiming to degrade terrorist groups' influence capacities online. However, no initiatives aiming to disrupt the Islamic State's influence online have deterred its members from using American companies' social media technologies to recruit and incite violence. Today, it is commonplace to hear officials employed by entities like the National Counterterrorism Center explain they cannot compel social media companies to do more to deter terrorists from exploiting their technologies. Yet Congress could. Further, as these companies are not implementing policies which would diminish the attractiveness of their technologies for illicit actors like members of United States-designated foreign terrorist organizations, and as Twitter is asserting an uncooperative posture towards federal agencies that might encourage similar behaviors at other Internet technology firms, perhaps Congress should.

　　　　Deficient strategic analysis against terrorists and others who may use social media and popular file-sharing sites for illicit purposes is perhaps made most apparent by an absence of industry-wide policies that would increase risks associated with converting these sites into tools used to support criminal activities. Perhaps most striking is the absence of policies that would deny anonymous illicit actors access to these sites when simultaneously employing technologies used to prevent investigators from identifying their physical locations after criminal conduct is detected.

　　　　Since early in 2015, the Islamic State has encouraged group members and supporters to use such tools as virtual private networks, or VPNs, to mask their physical locations when online (Smith, 2016b). A noteworthy example of these instructions is found within the tenth issue of the Islamic State's online French-language publication, *Dar al-Islam*, which was released in August 2016 (pp. 40-42). Meanwhile, Twitter, Facebook and most popular file-sharing sites continue allowing managers of unverified accounts to post content while using VPNs. Yet it stands to reason that, if Wikipedia is able to deny editorial controls to parties seeking to add or edit content when a VPN is active on their devices in order to deter abuses of its highly visible website, Internet technology innovators at Twitter, Facebook and popular file-sharing sites like YouTube can prevent managers of non-verified accounts from accessing their accounts when a VPN is active.

　　　　As concerns other deficiencies in Twitter's so-called "Combatting Violent Extremism" efforts, the following cases deserve attention from policymakers: Not until after the UK-based cleric Anjem Choudary was convicted of providing support to the Islamic State in August 2016 did Twitter suspend his account, which had a following of more than 30,000 accounts (Smith, 2016c). By leaving open this account, Twitter made it possible for Islamic State recruiters to identify sympathetic parties by monitoring the activities of accounts that followed it, or retweeted, liked and/or replied favorably to Choudary's tweets. Indeed, as Choudary made numerous appearances on American cable news programs, and his pro-Islamic State rhetoric was the subject of considerable online news reporting, it is possible low-information converts drawn to Salafiyya Jihadiyya—whom, according to Harry Sarfo (Callimachi, 2016), the Islamic State's external operations division views as valuable resources—would have been interested in Choudary's account. That Choudary's tweets which conveyed views consistent with those expressed by Islamic State officials did not constitute violations of Twitter's policies—for Choudary did not explicitly encourage and threaten violence—reveals yet another exploitable feature of Twitter's current policies. Similarly troubling is that a Twitter account used to promote guidance from the cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi, @alqaradawy, has a following of more than 1.2 million followers at this writing. A spiritual guide for HAMAS (Smith, 2014), al-Qaradawi is banned from entering the United States and several European countries due to his extremist guidance, which has included proclaiming that foreign fighters' participation in the jihad against Coalition forces working to

stabilize Iraq in the post-Saddam era was permitted by sharia (Islamic law). Clearly, not only is more sophisticated analysis of content required to prevent influential extremist elements from harnessing Twitter's technologies to encourage their audiences to support terrorist groups; so too is more careful examination of the biographies of individuals associated with popular accounts.

Additionally, policymakers should carefully examine Twitter's decision to discontinue support to the United States Intelligence Community (USIC) that was provided by Dataminr, a company with exclusive access to the full "Firehose" (a term used to refer to data generated by Twitter users), and whose development of technologies used to analyze extremist content therein was subsidized by CIA's venture capital company, In-Q-Tel (Stewart & Maremont, 2016b). In a report on this development published by *The Wall Street Journal* (Stewart & Maremont, 2016b)— for which the author was the lead source—the author posited, "Twitter's decision could have grave consequences." Indeed, according to a Dataminr representative whom the author met with before this report's publication, as Dataminr was finalizing negotiations for a contract to provide increased support to the USIC, Twitter, a Dataminr shareholder and board observer whose consent for the arrangement was required, intervened to prevent Dataminr from executing the contract. Asked why Twitter made this decision, the Dataminr representative said Twitter executives seemed concerned relationships with federal agencies may undermine Twitter's growth initiatives in foreign markets. Given that Twitter has meanwhile provided the coveted "verified account" status to the account managed by Edward Snowden, @Snowden, which has a following of more than 2 million accounts, perhaps a congressional inquiry concerning the company's priorities and notions of corporate responsibility in relation to America's national security interests is in order.

Although American companies' social media and file-sharing sites are predominantly used for benign purposes, these technologies are used for illicit purposes—some of which, as noted by United States Attorney General Eileen M. Decker while commenting on an Islamic State-related terrorism case, "continue to pose a grave threat to our national security" (DoJ, 2016b). Inasmuch as intelligence officials' inabilities to productively manage relations with an American company like Twitter deserves attention from policymakers so too does the absence of regulations that would require American companies managing globally-accessible social media platforms and file-sharing sites to implement policies that would more effectively deter terrorists from using their technologies to threaten Americans and our allies. Given that the increased rate of attacks executed in the West since 2014 indicates the Islamic State is far more capable of motivating individuals not trained by the group to execute attacks in furtherance of its agenda, disruption of terrorists' online incitement capabilities should be prioritized over ongoing "violent extremist" content monitoring programs, as well as online counter-messaging initiatives whose managers will be hard-pressed to quantify efficacies of their programs. (Indeed, to discourage fraud, waste and/or abuse, policymakers should inquire about metrics used to measure the efficacies of the Global Engagement Center's programs.) Meanwhile, as terrorists' exploitations of American companies' social media and file-sharing technologies to recruit and incite violence remains a persistent problem, history suggests that—unless required by law—companies like Twitter will not do all they can to help mitigate threats emanating from the Global Jihad movement via their websites.

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