



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

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Hearing Statement of Intelligence and Counterterrorism Chairman Max Rose (D-NY)

Artificial Intelligence and Counterterrorism: Possibilities and Limitations

June 25, 2019

AI can perform a myriad of complex tasks that formerly required a human being. Social media companies use AI to help identify and remove terrorist content and materials that violate their terms of service, so far with mixed results at best. But we've seen in gruesome detail the failures which serve as a critical reminder that AI is not up to the task. On March 15th, a white supremacist extremist opened fire at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, killing 51 people and wounding 49 more. Shockingly, the terrorist was able to live-stream the attack on Facebook because its Artificial Intelligence, or AI, did not deem the footage gruesome enough. The video was then uploaded to Facebook by other users and 300,000 of these attempts made it through – proving that their technology is not yet up to the task.

In fact, instead of preventing terrorist content from spreading, the Associated Press recently reported that Facebook's AI was making videos of and promoting the terrorist content it should have been removing. I hope our witnesses will help us better understand the current state of AI and its limitations, capabilities, and future promise, especially as it relates to countering online terrorist content. This incident is a wake-up that not enough is being done either through technology or human moderators to protect us from terrorist threats on social media – including terrorists using these platforms to recruit, plan and broadcast their attacks. Two years ago, the big tech companies—led by Facebook, Twitter, Google, and Microsoft—got together to form the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, or GIFCT (pronounced gif-see-tee), to share best practices and certain basic technologies to combat the spread of online terrorist content.

While the GIFCT touts impressive numbers in removing terrorist content automatically, recent reporting and persistent lack of transparency from the tech companies have raised fundamental questions about the effectiveness of AI and other technologies to at identifying terror content. I come to this hearing with an open mind and a willingness to work with social media companies to do what is right, but I have been disappointed so far. There has been a frustrating lack of transparency from the social media companies about their efforts to address terror content on their platforms.

Weeks ago, I wrote asking about their personnel and resources committed to this important effort, and I have yet to receive satisfactory answers. They must do better. We, as Congress, must do more to hold them accountable. Our national security is at stake.

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