



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Counterterrorism & Intelligence Subcommittee Ranking Member Seth Magaziner (D-RI)

The Digital Battlefield: How Terrorists Use the Internet and Online Networks for Recruitment and Radicalization

March 4, 2025

On New Year's Day, 14 innocent people lost their lives and over 50 were injured when a terrorist drove a pickup truck into a crowd on Bourbon Street in New Orleans. In their investigation after the attack, the FBI found that the attacker had been radicalized online through information about ISIS and engagement with ISIS content.

According to the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Intelligence and Analysis, since August 2023, law enforcement has disrupted five plots in which juveniles were radicalized by foreign terrorist organizations online and mobilized to plan terror attacks. While foreign terrorist organizations like ISIS and al Qaeda exploit the Internet to spread propaganda, they unfortunately aren't the only bad actors who use online platforms to inspire individuals to violence.

In September, the Justice Department indicted Dallas Humber and Matthew Allison two leaders of the Terrorgram Collective – a far right, neo fascist terrorist organization – that used the Telegram platform to plot the murder of federal officials such as a US Senator, a US District Court Judge, and a US Attorney who they considered enemies of the white race. Terrorgram provided guidance and instructions for terrorist attacks encouraging the use of bombs to attack critical infrastructure such as government buildings and energy facilities.

In December 2023, the FBI arrested an Arizona man for using social media to incite a “religiously-motivated terrorist attack,” in Australia – an ambush shooting that killed six people including 2 police officers. Gareth Train, his brother Nathaniel Train and Nathaniel's wife Stacey Train, motivated by a Christian extremist ideology - attacked and killed the victims simply for being law enforcement officers.

We also know that online radicalization played a key role in the white supremacist extremist attack in Buffalo in 2022, when an 18-year-old terrorist killed 10 people – all of whom were African American. An investigative report by the Office of the New York State Attorney General found that the Buffalo terrorist learned about the so-called “Great Replacement Theory” via memes – an ideology he cited as the basis for his racist terrorist attack.

These are just a few examples of domestic violent extremists' use of the internet and digital content for recruitment and radicalization. Congress is not powerless to stop this.

Social media companies can and should moderate violent extremist content online with proper consideration for protected speech. They should also cooperate with law enforcement investigations. To be clear: American citizens have a first amendment right to hold and espouse extreme ideologies.

However:

- There is no first amendment right to plot acts of violence
- There is no first amendment right to recruit others to commit acts of violence
- Foreign terrorists have no first amendment rights of any sort
- And social media companies are in no way compelled to allow terrorists or criminals to use their platforms.

In fact, they should face consequences if they knowingly do so, and that is something that Congress needs to act on.

I worked with Ranking Member Thompson to request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) examine how social media and gaming companies report mitigating online content that promotes domestic violent extremism and the extent to which the FBI and DHS have developed goals and strategies for sharing information on the threat of domestic violent extremists with social media and gaming companies.

GAO produced its findings in January 2024, which included that neither DHS or FBI have developed such a strategy. They must do so, and the strategy must be comprehensive to include all forms of online radicalization, any incitement of violence, whatever the ideology behind it may be. It is my recommendation that the subcommittee continue today's conversation with both representatives from the social media and gaming industry and the agencies so that we can explore real answers in combating online radicalization.

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[Media contact](#)