



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-4302**

September 21, 2012

Robert S. Mueller, III  
Director, Federal Bureau of Investigations  
935 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20535-0001

Dear Director Mueller:

We are writing to express our concern about designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations' (FTOs) use of Twitter to further their jihadist agendas.

Designated FTOs like Al-Shabaab (@HSMPress), Hamas (@hamasinfo, @AlqassamBrigade, and @AqsaTVChannel) and Hezbollah (@almanarnews) all have active Twitter handles and use Twitter to recruit members, disseminate their message and encourage violent acts.

On February 26, 2008, the U.S. government, pursuant to Section 1(b) of Executive Order 13224, designated the Somali al-Qaeda affiliate Al-Shabaab as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist entity. Al-Shabaab is responsible for killing nearly 80 people in a series of suicide bombings in Kampala, Uganda during the 2010 World Cup and is currently leading the insurrection in Somalia that has killed thousands and displaced millions. On December 7, 2011, under the title "HSM Press – Harakat Al-Shabaab Al Mujahideen Press Office," and with an avatar of the Al-Qaeda flag, Shabaab opened a Twitter account (@HSMPress). One of its first tweets was, "The Jihad being waged here in Somali shall continue until the country is purified of all invaders." On June 16, 2012, it tweeted, "Praise be to Allah that slavishly obedient American lapdogs are increasingly joining the long list of the damned in the Arabian Peninsula." And, on May 22 2012, it tweeted, "May Allah grant victory to the Mujahideen throughout the Jihadi fronts." On Aug 8 2012, it tweeted, "The ambitions of the Mujahideen are unequivocally expressed; establish the Rule of Allah or attain martyrdom in its pursuit!" As of August 6, 2012, Shabaab had 13,869 followers and made over 700 tweets.

Since Hamas, designated as an FTO back in April 1993, sent its first tweet on November 21, 2009, it has posted a total of over 9,220 tweets in its various accounts, and it has gained over 19,036 followers. The accounts include those of Hamas Info, the main organization's office; Hamas' military arm, Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades; Hamas' media wing Al-Aqsa TV; Hamas' Political Bureau deputy chairman Moussa Abu Marzouq; Izzat Rishq, a senior Hamas official based in Syria; and Hamas Radio. So far, Hamas' tweets have included excerpts from the Koran to incite jihad and martyrdom attacks, links to YouTube videos inciting violence, and even calls for "a new Holocaust." One tweet touted how many "Zionist soldiers" Hamas killed, while another called for abducting Israelis.

A year after the Department of State designated Hezbollah itself as an FTO, it named Al-Manar a Specially Designated Global Terrorist entity and declared that it was “owned or controlled by the Iran-funded Hezbollah terrorist network,” while the Department of Treasury, cited Al-Manar as “the media arm of Hezbollah.” Al-Manar opened its Twitter account last November and, as of August 6, 2012, Al-Manar had tweeted an average of 250 tweets per day and had 18,903 followers. It is evident that Hezbollah understands the value of Twitter when it comes to spreading its propaganda.

FTO use of Twitter to encourage violence or to recruit others in furtherance of terrorism is not protected by free speech rights. As the Supreme Court decided in *Holder v. Humanitarian Law Project*, the material-support statute (18 U.S.C. Sections 2339A and 2339B) does not violate the freedom of speech guaranteed by the First Amendment. In fact, in that case, the plaintiffs wished to advance “only the legitimate activities of” two designated terrorist groups. In the instances raised above, we have examples of U.S. government-designated terrorist groups themselves specifically promoting their illegitimate activities. Therefore, it is clear that they too would fall under the Supreme Court’s standard of “part of a broader strategy to promote terrorism” and thus not be afforded the protections of the U.S. Constitution.

The *Holder* decision has been complied with by other companies in the social media sphere, such as YouTube and Facebook, who have created policies to protect the public. YouTube’s policy is centered on the flagging of terrorist videos. Users concerned about the content of a video can flag it under the category of “promotes hatred or violence against a protected group”. YouTube then reviews the flag designation and takes the video down if the flag designation is accurate. Facebook’s policy is based on rule of law and self-governance. It states, “In addition to using the State and Treasury Department lists, and the fact that our SRR (Statement of Rights and Responsibilities) prohibits anyone on those terrorist lists from using our service, we are also proactive in screening for those names and organizations. Our internal systems also employ keyword searches related to associated terminology.” Just last month, Facebook removed a number of Hezbollah pages after both Google and Apple removed Hezbollah’s applications from their stores.


The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is the arm of the government entrusted with the authority to take down Twitter accounts held by terrorists. Twitter maintains that it will take down any account requested by the FBI. However, as of the writing of this letter, the FBI has not made a single request to Twitter to take an account down. Meanwhile, U.S. designated terrorists continue to use an American company to spread its propaganda to the world, encouraging violence and garnering new recruits to continue the cycle of violence that kills innocent civilians around the world.

We respectfully ask for the FBI to reconsider its policy regarding Twitter accounts and use the tools that Congress has granted it in order to halt the spread of terrorist propaganda and to try to limit the expansions of these organizations. We look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,

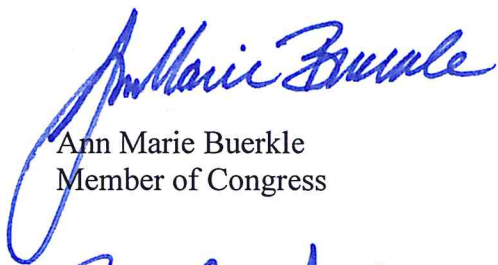


Ted Poe  
Member of Congress

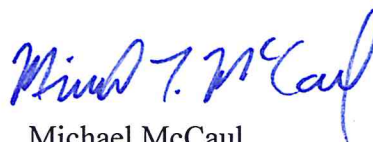


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