

Response to Written Questions Submitted by Hon.
Jerry Moran
Written Questions for the Record to
Juniper Downs

Question 1. Your testimony covered the “counter-narratives” that YouTube is currently utilizing to speak out against terrorism. Last week, I had the pleasure of hearing about the important work that is being done in this effort within Jigsaw’s project called “Redirect Method.”

Response. Yes, these strategies have been researched and developed over many years, and we appreciated your acknowledgement of that work in the hearing.

Question 2. Could you please describe how this project targets the most susceptible audience to “redirect” them to videos debunking recruitment materials?

Response. The Redirect Method uses Adwords targeting tools and third party curated YouTube videos to confront online radicalization. As you mentioned, the targeting efforts focus on the slice of ISIS’ audience that is most susceptible to its messaging, and redirects them toward third party created YouTube videos debunking ISIS recruiting themes. This open methodology was developed in part from interviews with ISIS defectors. Jigsaw initially tested the Redirect Method in an ISIS-focused campaign in Arabic and English. Over the course of 8 weeks, 320,000 individuals watched over half a million minutes of the 116 videos we selected to refute ISIS's recruiting themes. The Redirect Method has recently been deployed in the UK and France. The Redirect Method is open for any institution to use in their work.

Question 3. Does “Redirect Method” or YouTube create the videos that program redirects the audience to? If not, why is that the case?

Response. Many previous efforts to push back on extremist propaganda have focused on creating new content -- writing, videos, etc -- to dispel extremist narratives. Through our research, we found that content that had been created for the sole purpose of dispelling extremist narratives didn’t tend to resonate as well as much of the organic content that was already available online. For this reason, The Redirect Method focuses on curation of pre-existing content to push back against extremist propaganda while more effectively reaching the target audience. We work with local scholars and experts to curate the videos in Redirect playlists. In France, our interdisciplinary research team of scholars is based at the Castex Chair of Geostrategy. In the UK, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) and Moonshot CVE participate in our curation and research efforts.

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Question 1. Social media companies are increasingly able to remove terrorist recruitment, incitement, and training materials before it posts to their platforms by relying on improved automated systems. Other than content removal, what else can be done to limit the audience or distribution of these dangerous materials?

Response. YouTube's Community Guidelines set the rules of the road for content that we allow on the platform. Our policies include prohibitions on hate speech, gratuitous violence, incitement to violence, terrorist recruitment videos, and violent propaganda. We also have robust advertiser-friendly guidelines and demonetize videos that don't comply with those policies, and can age-restrict or place a warning interstitial in front of content that may be shocking.

If our review teams determine that a video does not contain a direct call to violence or incitement to hate but could be inflammatory we may disable some features. Identified borderline content will remain on YouTube behind a warning interstitial, won't be recommended, won't be monetized, and won't have key features including comments, suggested videos, and likes. This new treatment has been positive, with substantial reduction in watch time of those videos.

We disable access to our services for users who repeatedly violate our policies -- and, for egregious violations, for the first offense. We also terminate the Google accounts of entities on the U.S. State Department's Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) list, regardless of the content they are posting.

In addition to ensuring our policies are effectively enforced, we invest heavily in counterspeech. We see lots of examples of counterspeech working, such as creators stepping up to refute content related to violent extremism. In many cases, these creators are driving even more engagement than the original objectionable content. Exposing susceptible individuals to counterspeech content is universally viewed as a critical component of counterterrorism and other counter radicalization strategies. To that end, we've held over 20 counterspeech workshops around the world, pairing anti-radicalization NGOs with YouTube creators who know how to best engage with and relate to their audiences. In 2016, we launched YouTube #CreatorsforChange, a global counterspeech initiative aimed at amplifying and multiplying the voices of role models who are tackling difficult social issues such as xenophobia, hate speech, and extremism.

Question 2. Terrorist how-to guides are protected by the First Amendment in the United States, but violate the content policies of many social media companies as well as the laws of some international partner nations. What countries have laws that go beyond your company's content policies and can you give examples of how you have worked with those countries to de-conflict those differences?

Response. Although we are a US-based company, we respect the law in countries where we operate. Sometimes those laws restrict speech more than our Community Guidelines require.

Holocaust denial, for example, while protected by the First Amendment in the United States, is against the law in many European countries. In countries where we conclude the law so requires, we would remove such content from our results.