



Questions for the Record
Submitted to Shona Brown, Senior Vice President, Google.org
From Senator Joseph I. Lieberman
Homeland Security Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery
and Intergovernmental Affairs

**“Understanding the Power of Social Media as a Communications Tool in the
Aftermath of Disasters”**
May 5, 2011

1. The Committee recently released an investigative report entitled *A Ticking Time Bomb: Counterterrorism Lessons from the U.S. Government’s Failure to Prevent the Fort Hood Attack*. The report stated, “In the past, face-to-face interactions were essential for violent Islamist extremist groups to identify followers and to facilitate the radicalization process. However, face-to-face interactions have begun to be replaced by the internet as the primary means by which violent Islamist extremism has spread globally. Al Qaeda and other violent Islamist extremists recognized the potency of the internet after 9/11 when they created a relatively structured, online media campaign that targeted western audiences. Over time, violent Islamist extremists have continued to evolve and improve their ability to use the Web to broadcast the ideology. Their violent propaganda has spread from password protected forums to include “mainstream” sites.”

These mainstream sites include YouTube, which in recent years, has become a primary communication tool for al Qaeda and its ideological allies to spread their message. In November 2010, YouTube instituted a “flag” for videos which “promote terrorism.”

a. How is YouTube promoting this new terrorism flag to its users? Please give specific examples.

YouTube’s flagging menu contains a number of labels to help users identify and flag material that violates our Guidelines. Our users choose flagging categories like “violent or repulsive content” and “hateful or abusive content” to identify this type of content and bring it to our attention. To make it even easier for our users to identify material that incites violence, in November 2010 we added a flag labeled “promoting terrorism” to the menu, which appears directly below every one of the hundreds of millions of videos on YouTube. At the time of the addition we briefed numerous reporters about the new flagging option. To help our users understand how the flag should be used, we added further details about the new flag to the [YouTube Help Center](#).

b. YouTube's Terms of Service (ToS) were updated to expressly prohibit terrorist content. Will Google update its overarching ToS and other specific ToS, such as that for Blogspot, to accord with YouTube's ToS?

Blogger's policies prohibit threatening content, content that promotes "dangerous and illegal activities," contains hate speech, or inciteful material that encourages "violent action against another person or group of people." Similar to YouTube, when material of this nature is reported to Blogger, review teams take action to remove the content quickly.

c. How many videos have been flagged for promoting terrorism since YouTube instituted this flag on a monthly basis? How many videos have been removed as a result of this flag on a monthly basis?

YouTube users flag thousands of videos every day, and our global policy enforcement team reviews content around the clock, routinely removing material that violates our policies. While we don't comment publicly on flagging volumes, we can confirm that the promotes terrorism flag, as well as other flags for violence and hateful content, are being actively used by our community to bring potentially inciteful content to our enforcement team's attention.

d. Does YouTube proactively scan its site for terrorist content? If so, how many videos are taken down on a monthly basis (on average over the last twelve months) as a result?

Video is uploaded you YouTube at the rate of 35 hours per minute. Because of the massive scale of the platform, it is not possible to pre-screen content. To ensure that our policies are followed, we have a community policing system in place whereby users report prohibited material by selecting the "Flag" link under every video. Our policy review team reviews flagged videos 24 hours a day, seven days a week, removing material that violates our Guidelines. In addition, we have a Help & Safety Tool that lets users contact us about threatening comments. A staff of specialists is on hand around the clock taking action to remove and, when appropriate, report such comments.

e. Once the videos are flagged, a YouTube employee reviews the content to make a final decision on removal.

i. Are there specific guidelines for removal of content that promotes terrorism? If so, please provide them.

Every video flagged for our attention is reviewed for violations of our Community Guidelines, and material found to be in violation is promptly removed. YouTube's Guidelines prohibit users from uploading videos or posting comments that contain hate speech and threats of violence against specific individuals or groups. We also prohibit videos that promote dangerous or illegal activities (including bomb-making, sniper attacks, or other terrorist acts), and videos that are posted with the purpose of inciting others to commit specific, serious acts of violence. In addition, we remove all videos and terminate any account registered by a member of a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) and used in an official capacity to further the interests of the FTO.

Material is reviewed carefully, and videos that do not violate those policies will remain on the site. In addition, we necessarily carve out exceptions for educational and documentary content, for example the thousands of videos posted by our partners in the news media.

ii. What type of training on terrorist ideology and propaganda do YouTube reviewers receive?

Keeping YouTube safe for our users is extremely important to us. Our policy enforcement team undergoes regular training, and we are in regular communication with third-party experts and organizations on a broad range of policy issues.

f. Do you believe that other leading companies with social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, should institute such self-flagging specifically for terrorism- related content?

We don't comment on the policies or enforcement practices of other companies.

2. Industry plays a vital role in preventing violent radicalization. We have seen in the youth-driven uprisings in the Arab world that social media can be a catalyst for positive change. In many ways, Google is on the forefront of the war of ideas against violent Islamist extremism. Many Muslim Americans are fighting the ideological message of al Qaeda online but lack the technical know-how to compete on the same level of sophistication of the well-tuned al Qaeda messaging apparatus.

a. How is Google empowering those positive voices within Muslim American communities to counter messages against violent Islamist extremism?

Google has sought out and worked with groups and individuals who lead Muslim American communities in order to better educate them about using technology to project their messages. Working with personnel from key government agencies and the New America Foundation, we have provided training on Google tools and services, as well as those of other companies. We demonstrate this by showing examples of non-profit groups from many areas that have successfully taken advantage of Google tools and services. We have not worked directly on the content of the message but focused rather on increasing the groups' audience and the range of the tools they can use.

b. Does Google provide technical assistance on a *regular* basis to groups fighting this ideology?

In February, 2011, Google and Facebook co-sponsored at Google's office the first technical assistance session for these groups. Google, YouTube and Facebook personnel provided in-depth instruction in the use of tools ranging from our non-profit services to mapping technology to video to analytics (which allows a group to see who is visiting their site). In concert with other companies, Google is working on a plan that would provide more regular technical assistance to these groups and individuals.

c. Does Google provide "best practices" to such Muslim American groups for effectively promoting their messages online?

See above.

d. Is Google planning to provide and additional assistance to such Muslim American groups?

See above. Note that Google is one of a handful of companies that, under the auspices of the New America Foundation, has pledged to play a technical and financial role in the development of a campaign against violent extremism that includes Muslim American groups and others.

3. Google's think tank, Google Ideas, and the Council on Foreign Relations will host a conference soon which brings together academics, policy makers, and former radicals to discuss how to prevent violent extremism. I commend Google Ideas for being proactive in this manner.

a. News reports state this conference will be the first step in a continued process by Google Ideas to counter violent extremism. How will Google Ideas engage with Americans, specifically Muslim Americans, who are actively trying to counter radicalization within their communities?

Google Ideas is organized by focus area and one of its four priorities for 2011 is countering violent extremism. June 26-28, Google Ideas will partner with CFR to convene 80 former gang members, former religious extremists, former nationalist extremists, and former right-wing extremists. For the purposes of the conference, "former" is defined by those who left the group, renounced violence, and are now actively and publicly working against the groups they used to be part of. In addition to the formers, Google Ideas and CFR are also inviting 15 survivors of terrorism and violence as well as roughly 110 NGOs, academics, public sector officials (including from House and Senate Homeland Security Committees), and private sector representatives, who are working on countering violent extremism issues. Some of these organizations already work closely with the Muslim American community, but our goal is to connect the credible voices -- formers and survivors -- with those in the American and international Muslim communities so they can forge partnerships in an effort to counter violent extremism together.

b. Has Google or Google Ideas considered providing private funding to groups countering the message of violent Islamist extremism?

At present, Google Ideas is not a grant giving organization. However, we do believe that Google Ideas is making a valuable contribution by investing in the convening of this network. Google Ideas is also working to build a web platform, anti-extremism campaign, and several products to support the efforts of those credible voices working against violent extremism. We are also building a Formers YouTube channel, which will allow credible voices like ex-extremists and survivors of terrorism to upload videos condemning violence and speaking out against terrorism.