



World Jewish Congress: Public Comment

CONTENT SHOWING TERRORIST ATTACKS

Since its founding in Geneva, Switzerland in 1936, the World Jewish Congress (WJC) has acted as the diplomatic arm of the Jewish people. The WJC is the leading international organization connecting and protecting Jewish communities globally, in more than 100 countries. Its overriding goal is to allow Jews everywhere to live freely as Jews, without discrimination or the threat of persecution. The WJC collaborates with platforms and government authorities to combat propagation, antisemitic, and terrorist content. The Jewish community has been suffering from terrorist attacks against it for decades. Just this month, on July 18, we commemorated the 30th anniversary of the terrorist attack on the AMIA Jewish Community Center in Argentina, that took the lives of 85 people, Jews and non-Jews, and injured hundreds. As a community that for decades has suffered from terrorist attacks globally, we aim to reduce exposure to terrorist content online and to materials that may further increase extremism, radicalization, and violence.

During the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel on October 7th, 2023, and in the months following it, the widespread dissemination of horrific and gruesome videos from the attack had malignant effects. This footage encouraged and helped facilitate outrageous attacks on human dignity worldwide, traumatized the families of victims and all viewers, and further polarized those engaged in the media war. [WJC's report](#) published in October 2023, "A Flood of Hate: How Hamas Fueled the Adversarial Information Ecosystem on Social Media", presented how as Hamas terrorists entered Israel on October 7th, the organization's media units quickly began ramping up the "Al Aqsa Flood", the campaign name designated by them, content on Telegram, providing graphic photos, videos, and news updates about their terror campaign in near-real time. What began on Telegram quickly flooded major platforms like Facebook and Instagram, with content including graphic and violent photos and videos that dehumanized Jews and praised the terror attacks. Much of such material has since been removed by the platforms, but much damage has been done nevertheless. Moreover, in such events the understanding of who is a "bystander" or "third party" is problematic, as many accomplices were filming and distributing terrorist content.

The escalation of online violence and its real-world repercussions are observable and deeply concerning. Recently, in July 2024, the WJC has, in cooperation with Memetica, published a [report](#), "From Virtual Vortex to Real Life Violence. The Links Between Online Antisemitism & Offline Terrorism" that analyses this connection in detail and calls for enhanced content moderation, international cooperation, and support for de-radicalization to combat this threat effectively. The report is relevant also to this request for comment, as it offers insights into the use of "third parties" by terrorist organizations to avoid bans on their content and propaganda on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. For example, the report presents a connection between the "Resistance News Network" (RNN) channel which had a massive spike in engagement on Telegram during recent months, and used the anti-Israel encampments on Universities to spread terrorist-linked propaganda. RNN published a call for the encampments to adopt the "Unity of the fields" concept to ensure action goes "beyond divestment" to achieve "the real isolation of the Zionist entity from the normalization it enjoys on western university campuses." While the direct messaging avoided explicit calls for violent action, a magazine edition citing Mohamad Deif, military leader of Hamas in Gaza, was distributed by the "Palestine Action US," part of a social media network that advocates for "direct action" to "dismantle Zionism" on college campuses. The channel encouraged sharing



such content on social media accounts. This, and other examples, shows that what may be perceived as third-party videos or content may actually be used by terrorist organizations that have been designated as such by Meta.

Moreover, Meta has recently implemented several revisions to its hate speech policies and dangerous individuals and organizations policies, which allow for more terrorism-related content on the platform. For example, following the Oversight Board recommendation, Meta removed the ban on the use of the term "shaheed" on the platform with regards to designated dangerous organizations and individuals. It has also made changes to its policies on social and political discourse of DOI. All of these have contributed to additional terrorist-related content on the platform already.

Therefore, we recommend that the oversight board upholds Meta's existing regulations governing the dissemination and posting of terrorist videos. This will protect its users from radicalization and psychological repercussions, while also holding terrorists accountable and prohibiting the unfettered dissemination of their propaganda.

Psychological Impact and Negative Consequences

There is significant evidence that exposure to violent content can lead to severe psychological distress. These effects are particularly noticeable when looking at children with prior trauma. For example, it has been stated that if children are constantly exposed to violent media, it raises their risks of choosing to use aggression themselves when put in a conflict situation.¹ Humans tend to mimic observed behaviors, and exposure to violent images can trigger pre-existing aggressive thoughts and feelings. Repeated exposure to such media makes these aggressive thoughts and feelings more accessible, increasing their influence on behavior.² Our recommendation, in case the oversight board recommends that Meta allow certain types of terrorist attacks footage to remain on the platform, is to limit the allowed audience automatically to people whose birth year states they are over 18.

Secondly, it is important to note that if people view footage of terrorist attacks online, and they or their family members or friends have been victims of an attack, it may lead to secondary victimization³ and re-traumatizing. This repeated exposure to traumatic content can aggravate the initial trauma, causing prolonged psychological effects. The constant reminder of the violent event can slow the healing process and intensify feelings of fear, anxiety, and helplessness, making it challenging for individuals to recover from the incident. This prolonged impact highlights the need for careful consideration in the dissemination and consumption of such sensitive material. Thus, it is our belief that footage of terrorist attacks should never be allowed to stay on the platform if the faces of the victims are not blurred or made unrecognizable using another method. If the board were to recommend allowing footage of terror attacks to be available on the platform, it could consider limiting the amount of time the content can be on the platform which would be considered a reasonable time for the material

¹ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-baby-scientist/201801/violent-media-and-aggressive-behavior-in-children>;

https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/140/Supplement_2/S142/34161/Screen-Violence-and-Youth-Behavior?autologincheck=redirected

² <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/08/120827130728.htm>

³ <https://medium.com/@okonagata/beyond-the-crime-understanding-secondary-victimization-and-its-impact-on-victims-dd25e071a486>



to be viewed to “inform the public”. After that time, the footage could be automatically removed from the platform.

Furthermore, it is no secret that viewing footage of terror attacks could encourage further radicalization or even inspire copycat attacks,⁴ imitators who self-radicalize in cyberspace.⁵ Seeing such violent acts can normalize them for some viewers, making them more likely to support or engage in similar behaviors. Additionally, terrorists often use these videos to recruit and motivate others, showing that their actions gain attention and impact. We strongly recommend limiting content visibility.

What is also important to note is that exposure to such harsh videos can foster hatred towards specific groups, stereotypes, and generalizations leading to hateful speech against them. For example, if the depiction of the perpetrator in the video is indicative of them being of a certain protected group, this can unfairly translate into increased hostility towards all members of the protected group.⁶ If the board were to recommend that such content be allowed on the platform, we would recommend adding labeling or a disclaimer not just on the violence about to be viewed but also on the danger of generalizations and hate speech against protected communities.

The distinction between perpetrator-taken/shared footage and third-party footage

Perpetrator-shared footage: Perpetrator accounts often post videos of terror attacks and hate with negative intentions, leading to correlating negative impacts. The RAND Corporation highlights how ISIS has effectively used social media to spread its message and recruit followers, leveraging gruesome content to create fear and attract attention. By allowing such content to proliferate, platforms inadvertently contribute to the spread of extremist ideologies and further victimize those affected by the attacks, sometimes even glorifying the perpetrators.⁷ During the October 7 Hamas terrorist attack on Israel, Go-Pro videos made by Hamas gunmen were shared with the purpose of, among others, further terrorizing Israeli citizens who were not yet physically affected by the attack. In some cases, this footage was even livestreamed on victims’ accounts and shared with their families. According to Thomas Rid, a professor of strategic studies at Johns Hopkins University, Hamas’s use of social media to spread terror “weaponizes social media in a way I don’t think we’ve seen before.” This phenomenon shows how unprepared society is for such psychological warfare.⁸ Perpetrator-shared footage is only shared with the worst intentions. Livestreams are also used by terrorists as a way of escalating fear and pain. Our recommendation is to always remove such content and to forward all perpetrator-shared footage to law enforcement for further analysis. We would also like to emphasize the importance of closely monitoring live streams during terror crisis events.

⁴ https://static.rusi.org/terrorism_and_the_mass_media_final_web_version.pdf

⁵ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27158149>

⁶ <https://survivorsagainststerror.org.uk/a-letter-from-survivors-isolate-extremists-from-the-majority-who-deplore-violence/>

⁷ <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2018/12/isis-use-of-social-media-still-poses-a-threat-to-stability.html>

⁸ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/hamas-launched-unique-terror-tactic-livestreaming-horrors-on-victims-social-media/>



Third-party footage: Bystanders may choose to record a terrorist attack to spread information about a dangerous situation and to alert the public. Additionally, third parties can share footage of terror attacks as part of a “narrative battle” – that has been the case in the Israel-Hamas war⁹ and has great importance in fighting misinformation. Third-party sharing of terror attacks is more acceptable on platforms due to third-party parties’ efforts to respect the dignity of victims. It can also be a way of spreading information and countering terror support in complex contexts.

However, seemingly “innocent” accounts on social media platforms can be tools for terrorist organizations to further their agendas while slipping under the radar. As noted above, the World Jewish Congress's recent report, [From Virtual Vortex to Real Life Violence: The Links Between Online Antisemitism & Offline Terrorism](#), show several accounts being used as direct proxies for terror groups that thrive on different social media platforms. However, due to the anonymity and use of certain buzzwords, these hateful and terrorist-linked accounts often evade detection by content moderators, allowing them to proliferate and go unchecked. Given the difficulty in accurately deciphering the intentions behind each account and its posts, allowing selective posting of such content is ineffective and counterproductive.

In the balance between the educational value of showing videos of terrorist attacks and the risk of radicalization, recruitment. Propagation of violence, terrorism, and secondary trauma and victimization, we suggest the removal of all content, reminding that there are other ways to educate on these issues and inform without visible videos of attacks. Unfortunately, the events that took place in Israel last fall prove that DOI are using third parties – individuals, CSOs and others, to spread their propaganda online from non-regulated platforms to social media. Having in mind the sensationalism that often follows such horrific events, sharing of content related to it can skyrocket extremely quickly – for example, on October 7th several pieces of content that originated on Telegram were quickly reposted to X/Twitter, sometimes within as little as 60 seconds after the original post. More information available in the WJC’s report [A Flood of Hate: How Hamas Fueled the Adversarial Information Ecosystem on Social Media](#).

Conclusion

WJC highly appreciates the leading role that Meta has thus far assumed in removing terrorist content, which includes footage of terror attacks disseminated by DOIs. As one of many groups representing a community that disproportionately bears the burden of global terrorism, we urge the board to recommend that Meta retains its current policy on the matter.

If recommending changes is inevitable, the WJC would like to draw attention to the EU’s strategy regarding moderation of terror attacks. These require online platforms to stop the spread of terrorist content swiftly, within the first hour of appearance, with cross-border removal orders enforceable by any EU Member State. They include exemptions for educational and research content, complaint mechanisms for removals, proactive measures by service providers, annual transparency reports, and proportional penalties considering platform size. Having the above-mentioned in mind, the WJC states that in the complexity of the contemporary climate on social media and beyond, it strongly supports Meta’s current policies on this issue and asks the Board to do so as well.

⁹ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/israel-video-of-hamas-terror-attacks-war-in-gaza/>