



Committee on  
**HOMELAND SECURITY**  
Chairman Peter T. King

**Opening Statement**

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**Statement of Chairman Meehan (R-PA)  
Subcommittee on Counterterrorism & Intelligence**

**“Jihadist Use of Social Media – How to Prevent Terrorism and  
Preserve Innovation”**

**December 6, 2011  
Remarks as Prepared**

Welcome to today’s Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence hearing on jihadist use of social media. I would like to thank you all for joining us today and I especially want to thank our panel of witnesses for testifying on this issue.

Over the past year, this subcommittee has examined threats to the U.S. Homeland from around the world. We began with a look at Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), an al Qaeda affiliate in Yemen with a sophisticated media wing led by the late Anwar al Awlaki, which included *Inspire Magazine*.

We then turned our attention to the tumultuous events in the broader Middle East and considered how al Qaeda and other terror networks would use the upheaval to their advantage. Later, we held hearings on the threat from terror networks in Pakistan, Hezbollah’s operations in the Western Hemisphere, and last week on the emerging threat from Nigeria’s Boko Haram.

One common theme throughout all these hearings was that terrorist networks are spreading their message, recruiting sympathizers, and are connecting operationally online.

For years, terrorists have communicated online, sharing al Qaeda propaganda or writing in online forums dedicated entirely to the prospect of Islamist terrorism. But they have recently evolved with technological changes, utilizing social media sites such as Facebook and YouTube to enhance their capabilities. In the same places the average person posts photos and communicates with friends and family, our enemies distribute videos praising Osama bin Laden.

Terrorists also disseminate diatribes glorifying the murder of innocents, and even make connections with each other internationally to plot attacks. In the case of al Awlaki, jihadists live on virtually after they've been physically removed from the battlefield.

Prior to coming to Congress, I served as the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. After my tenure as US Attorney ended, a local woman named Colleen LaRose was arrested on her return to the United States as part of a terror plot that targeted a Swedish cartoonist.

LaRose would later become known to the world as "Jihad Jane." However, what is less well known to the world was she received that moniker because it was the name she employed online, where she became a committed jihadi.

This is notable because she did not receive formal training in a terrorist camp in Afghanistan or Pakistan, but in her own apartment in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. She enthusiastically posted and commented on YouTube videos supporting al Qaeda and their allies, but her enthusiasm for jihad went beyond watching videos and offering moral support. She made contacts online with other jihadis, solicited funding, and orchestrated an actual terror plot.

Her case is a shocking example of how easy it can be to find jihadi content online and make operational connections with others who want to commit violent acts of terrorism. The Jihad Jane case is not the only one. Only a few weeks ago, Jose Pimentel was arrested for preparing bombs to use in attacking targets in New York City. Before his arrest Mr. Pimentel had been

active online. He ran a blog, held two YouTube accounts, and operated a Facebook profile, all dedicated to jihadi propaganda.

In a case that illustrates terrorist recruitment in the homeland via social networking, in December of 2009 a group of five men from the Washington, DC area were arrested in Pakistan for attempting to join militants fighting along the border with Afghanistan. Later known as "The Virginia Five," they were reportedly contacted by a Taliban recruiter through YouTube after one member of the group praised an online video showing attacks on American troops.

These examples highlight the incredible challenge posed by terrorists engaging online. The Internet was designed to ease communication, and it must stay that way. However, we cannot ignore the reality that we have been unable to effectively prevent jihadi videos and messages from being spread on popular social media websites like YouTube and Facebook. I have called this hearing today to learn more about what has been done and what must be done moving forward.

Another central issue I hope to learn more about is whether or not social media websites can become useful sources of intelligence in our fight against terrorism. Online movements are traceable - nowhere more so than on social networks, which are designed to make connections among people easy.

I believe the intelligence and law enforcement communities can use this open information to combat terrorism and other crimes. However, it is essential that civil liberties and individual privacy be protected. I am encouraged by recent remarks made by Under Secretary for the Office of Intelligence and Analysis, Caryn Wagner, when she indicated that the Department of Homeland Security will be working to enhance its ability to monitor social media for threats against the homeland, and I look forward to learning more about that as she develops those procedures.

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