



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on July 13, 2015

New Bill Would Make Social Media Sites Flag Posts From “Terrorists”

Be careful what you post on social media sites. Congress wants those services to watch for “terrorist activity” and report it to the Department of Homeland Security and 17 other agencies in the federal intelligence community.



As part of the Fiscal Year 2016 Intelligence Authorization Act, firms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and others would be required to “help intelligence and law enforcement officials detect threats from the Islamic State and other terrorist groups” according to an anonymous source quoted by the *Washington Post*.

Just what is the bill’s definition of a “terrorist group?” There is no definition provided in the text of the legislation, but perhaps history can be a bit of a guide as to how that term might be interpreted in this era of the all-powerful executive.

Consider this [2009 report](#) from *The New American’s* Senior Editor William Jasper:

On April 7, when President Barack Obama was winding up an overseas tour that included bowing to Saudi King Abdullah and expressing mea culpas for America’s past sins, his Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was unleashing the dogs of war against his political opposition at home: Americans alarmed by his radical policies on gun control, abortion, illegal aliens, nationalizing the economy, and more. A secret 10-page DHS document sent to law-enforcement agencies nationwide is stirring up a political firestorm. Entitled “Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment,” the DHS report ([pdf](#)), dated April 7, sloppily (or cleverly and maliciously) demonizes millions of law-abiding Americans, conflating them with violent, criminal groups such as Neo-Nazis and “white supremacists” simply because they adhere to political beliefs at variance with those of the administration.

The report employs the word “rightwing” 50 times, and in nearly every instance (47 times) it is in the context of “rightwing extremism,” “rightwing extremist,” “rightwing terrorist,” or “rightwing terrorist and extremist.” Tellingly, the report doesn’t bother to define any of these politically charged terms, a major dereliction of due diligence in such an important matter. It is similarly shoddy in using terms favored by left-wing extremists to describe their opponents on the right, such as “antigovernment,” “hate-oriented,” “paranoid,” “dangerous,” and “violent.”

This, of course, only muddies the already murky waters, as it gives no definition for “antigovernment,” “dangerous,” “rightwing,” etc.

And another thing: Vague language such as that used in this bill wouldn’t pass clarity requirements if were it used in a municipal code in the smallest town, but for some reason the undefined key terms pass



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constitutional muster when it comes from Congress.

Knowing of the establishment's loathing of liberty, is it beyond the pale of imagination to see a president or a court using this latest social media surveillance as a justification for jailing those opposed to the steady abolishment of civil liberties? What of those publicly opposing infringement of the right to keep and bear arms? What of those opposing the legalization of same-sex "marriage?" What of those sharing information on avoiding NSA surveillance? What of those who promote state nullification of unconstitutional federal acts?

In this age of unlimited government and runaway statism, is it too farfetched to believe that anyone posting on social media anything regarding these topics could be (would be) tagged and targeted as a terrorist?

This isn't the federal government's first foray into setting social media traps for those it considers "threats to the homeland." As *The New American* reported in 2014:

In order to install malware on the computers of various supposedly hard to reach targets, the National Security Agency (NSA) pretends to be Facebook, giving them instant access to the computers, webcams, microphones, and files of those fooled by the ruse.

Recently, *The New American's* Alex Newman reported on a [British intelligence social media scheme](#) with similar aims:

According to [recently published official documents](#), a scandal-plagued U.K. government snooping unit bombastically styling itself the "Joint Threat Research Intelligence Group" (JTRIG) has been using "behavioral science," social-media trolls, and online propaganda to manipulate public opinion and destroy critics at home and abroad. And it wants still more "behavioral science support" to further enhance its troubling "capabilities."

While the bill does not explicitly require Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and others to monitor user activity, it does require them to report to the director of national intelligence anything they think qualifies as potentially related to terroristic intent. This, of course, presents some potentially chilling effects on liberty. As reported by the *Washington Post*:

"The intelligence bill would turn communications service providers into the speech police, while providing them little guidance about what speech they must report to the police," said Gregory Nojeim, senior counsel for the Center for Democracy and Technology. "If it becomes law, their natural tendency will be to err on the side of reporting anything that might be characterized as 'terrorist activity' even if it is not. And their duty to report will chill speech on the Internet that relates to terrorism."

Michael Leiter, former director of the National Counterterrorism Center, called the intelligence bill's social media reporting mandate "a higher-tech version of 'See something, say something.'"

The vague language of the intelligence authorization bill, added to the federal government's history of branding opponents of its tyranny as "terrorists," creates a climate in the United States where the exercise of rights protected by the First Amendment could quickly result in the denial of rights protected by the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Amendments.

Communication among patriots was key to our forefathers' successful fight against despotism in the 18th century. In the 21st century, any arguably "antigovernment" message could now be used as an excuse to target a social media user as a "terrorist."



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Thus the ruling regime has eliminated a very popular means of sharing information.

As of press time, Google (owner of YouTube), Facebook, and Twitter have not commented on the relevant provisions of the bill.

On July 7, the bill was introduced to the body of the Senate for consideration.



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