



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-4302

October 25, 2018

Pavel Durov  
Founder and CEO, Telegram Messenger LLP  
71-75 Shelton Street  
Covent Garden  
London  
United Kingdom

Dear Mr. Durov and Counsel:

In December 2016, we sent you a letter expressing grave concerns about reports of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) and their supporters increasingly utilizing Telegram's platform to incite violence and organize attacks. Unfortunately, that letter was never answered. As Chairman and Chairman Emeritus of the House Foreign Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, we remain deeply concerned about these illicit uses of your platform, but also by your failure to acknowledge and address them in response to an official congressional inquiry.

Almost two years later, the problems discussed in our letter appear to have significantly worsened. Just in the last few months alone, we have seen jihadists use Telegram to claim responsibility for attacks in Paris, France, and Liege, Belgium and praise their perpetrators.

It is well documented that violent extremists are finding a home on Telegram and remaining there. Although encrypted services can be valuable tools for privacy and countering censorship, we must also recognize that others use Telegram to disseminate propaganda, drive terrorist fundraising, recruit new members, and coordinate attacks. Some channels encourage "lone-wolf" attacks by sharing tutorials on terror tactics, such as bomb-making, conducting stabbing attacks, target selection, and methods to avoid detection by security services. A recent ISIS-linked campaign on your service called on Muslims to move to Afghanistan to wage jihad. ISIS affiliates have even used Telegram to distribute "kill lists" with the names, addresses, and other personal details of U.S. government personnel, police officers, and employees of major U.S. companies. Other terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, one of the world's most lethal terrorist groups, as well as Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Taliban have also adopted Telegram to disseminate propaganda. Despite these dangerous trends and increased vigilance by other social media platforms, channels such as the ISIS-affiliated Al-Nashir news channel continue to encourage attacks on U.S interests over Telegram with impunity.

With Telegram's launch of its Telegram Open Network (TON) blockchain and Gram cryptocurrency, there is additional concern that such applications will make it even easier for terrorists to fundraise without disruption. Terrorist fundraising is already a persistent problem on Telegram due to the anonymity and privacy that the platforms provides. Groups such as the ISIS-affiliated Ibn Taymiyyah Media Center (ITMC) host elaborate fundraising campaigns on your platform. Through an online campaign called "Jahezona," ("Equip Us"), launched in 2015, ITMC raised funds for Salafi jihadi organizations in the Gaza Strip by urging supporters to donate money to militants as a required religious duty. The Syrian jihadist group Ha'yat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) has a campaign underway on Telegram to raise funds, stating that preparing a suicide bomber costs \$20,000 and carrying out a deep-strike operation costs \$1,500. Earlier this year, the al-Qaeda-linked English-language magazine Al-Haqiqa, which is distributed over Telegram, published an article stating "we see lots of potential for the use of cryptocurrencies for our purposes." We believe that given Telegram's popularity among known terrorist groups, its use as a terror financing tool will only increase unless immediate steps are taken.

As our previous letter noted, Telegram need not face this challenge blind or alone. We hope Telegram learns from other platforms that have reduced extremism on their platforms while still maintaining an emphasis on privacy. For example, other platforms have made it easier for users to report terrorist content, introduced algorithms and other automated mechanisms to assist manual reviews and remove accounts promoting violence, trained review teams on what to look for and ways terrorists abuse their platforms, and, more recently, collaborated on a shared database of terrorist content. We also suggest that you work with the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, which is a new tech industry consortium pooling resources and know-how to confront terrorists online.

As Members of Congress, we are strong advocates for the right to privacy and appreciate Telegram's strong commitment to protecting this right. We also appreciate the power of encrypted technologies to undermine censorship and enable free speech in certain critical contexts. However, when a company's services are being used to promote and facilitate terrorist activity that results in the deaths of innocent individuals, we have an obligation to speak out. We acknowledge that your "ISIS Watch" application does claim to have removed thousands of terrorism-linked accounts, however we do not believe—given the examples listed above—that this has sufficiently stopped extremist activity on your platform. We urge you to take additional steps to curtail jihadist content on Telegram.

We ask that you respond to this letter with immediate urgency specifying a plan of action to combat extremist content on Telegram and create safeguards to prevent terrorist groups from using the platform as a secure fundraising tool. This includes a detailed summary of what measures you will undertake to ensure the addition of cryptocurrency functionality on your service will not facilitate money laundering or terrorist fundraising efforts. Without credible and verifiable steps taken within your company, we may be compelled to pursue other measures to ensure the security of Americans and our allies. Recently, a number of technology platforms have been called to testify under oath before Congress, so we hope you appreciate the keen interest of the American people in preventing the illicit use of online services. Again, we urge you and your company to take immediate action.

We look forward to your cooperation on this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ted Poe", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ted Poe  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Terrorism,  
Nonproliferation, and Trade

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brad Sherman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Brad Sherman  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Asia  
and the Pacific