



# Lawsuit accuses Twitter of providing material support to ISIS



Twitter

By Katie Bo Williams - 01/14/16 10:47 AM EST

The widow of a man who was killed in a November terrorist attack is suing Twitter for allegedly allowing the “explosive growth” of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), resulting in the death of her husband.

“Without Twitter, the explosive growth of ISIS over the last few years into the most-feared terrorist group in the world would not have been possible,” according to a complaint filed Wednesday in federal court in Oakland, Calif.

Tamara Fields’ husband Lloyd Fields, a government contractor, was killed in an ISIS strike on a police training facility in Amman, Jordan in November 2015.

Fields is seeking unspecified damages from Twitter for “knowingly or with willful blindness” providing material support that allows the group to commit terrorist acts “including the attack in which Lloyd Fields, Jr. was killed.”

A March study from the Brookings Institution estimated that from September through December 2014, ISIS supporters used at least 46,000 Twitter accounts, although not all of them were active at the same time.

ISIS uses the microblogging site to spread propaganda and recruit extremists to its violent message, according to the Brookings study.

The lawsuit cites numerous instances in which Twitter has allegedly rebuffed calls to restrict terrorist use of its network.

Although Twitter recently placed a formal ban on content that “promotes terrorism,” the company has faced accusations in the past that it doesn’t do enough to remove extremist content from its platform.

Twitter deactivated around 10,000 accounts associated with ISIS for “tweeting violent threats” in April, but has largely played a game of whack-a-mole with extremist accounts: It shuts one down only to have the same user crop up again under a new handle.

In the past, the company has been outspoken about the need to protect its integrity as a free-speech platform.

In July, a Twitter official speaking anonymously to The Washington Post defended the company’s reputation for supporting free speech but said that it “has clear rules governing what is permissible.”

“The use of Twitter by violent extremist groups to threaten horrific acts of depravity and violence is of grave concern and against our policies, period,” the official told the Post.

But the recent attacks on Paris and San Bernardino, Calif. have raised the **pressure** on Twitter to crack down on extremist use of the platform.

Top Obama administration officials on Friday met with Silicon Valley executives from Google, Twitter and others to discuss ways to combat terrorists’ use of social media.

The House in December **approved** the Combat Terrorist Use of Social Media Act last month, which would require the president to provide Congress with a strategy for combating terrorists’ use of social media.

In the Senate, Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) has reintroduced legislation that would force social media companies to notify federal authorities of terrorist activity on their networks.

But experts note that there are risks to the federal government encouraging a private company to censor speech.

Some civil liberties activists have expressed concerns that deactivating large groups of ISIS-associated accounts could chill an outlet for free speech in regions where dissidents rely on Twitter to make their voices heard.

Meanwhile, some intelligence experts are worried that silencing ISIS on Twitter will represent a net loss of needed intelligence.

Twitter did not respond to a request for comment from The Hill.

“While we believe the lawsuit is without merit, we are deeply saddened to hear of this family’s terrible loss,” Twitter told Bloomberg in an email. “Violent threats and the promotion of terrorism deserve no place on Twitter and, like other social networks, our rules make that clear.”

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