

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 21, 2023

Linda Yaccarino
Chief Executive Officer
X, Inc.
1355 Market Street, Suite 900
San Francisco, CA 94103

Elon Musk
Owner and Chief Technology Officer
X, Inc.
1355 Market Street, Suite 900
San Francisco, CA 94103

Dear Ms. Yaccarino and Mr. Musk,

We write to express our grave concern surrounding X's ongoing failure to abide by its own policies governing the promotion of misinformation and hateful, violent, and terroristic propaganda videos, which shockingly have been used by the company for profit.

This follows a troubling pattern of increased antisemitism on the platform since Mr. Musk's purchase. A March 2023 study by CASM Technology and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) documented a near-doubling of the total number of antisemitic tweets in his first three months of ownership.¹ In September, in response to this dramatic increase of antisemitism on X, Israel's Prime Minister personally urged Mr. Musk to tackle antisemitism on the platform.²

Now, in the days following Hamas' horrific October 7th terrorist attack on Israel, we've seen an inexcusable situation become outright indefensible.

Several weeks ago, reports from multiple nonprofit research groups showed X Premium accounts spreading Hamas terrorist propaganda videos glorifying barbaric acts of violence against Israelis.³ Further, these reports demonstrated that X is profiting from the spread of this gruesome and harmful propaganda through account subscription fees and ad revenue.

In fact, in mid-October, European Union (EU) regulators announced a probe to determine whether X continues to violate European law in allowing terroristic content and misinformation

¹ Carl Miller, David Weir, Shaun Ring, Oliver Marsh, Chris Inskip, Nestor Prieto Chavana, *Antisemitism on Twitter Before and After Elon Musk's Acquisition*, CASM Technology and Institute for Strategic Dialogue (Mar. 20, 2023), https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/understanding-antisemitism-on-twitter-after-musk/.

² Barak Ravid, *Israel's Netanyahu asks Elon Musk to Combat Antisemitism on X*, Axios (Sept. 18, 2023), <https://www.axios.com/2023/09/18/elon-musk-netanyahu-israel-antisemitism-x>.

³ Tech Transparency Project, *X Premium Accounts Spread Hamas Propaganda Videos of Attack on Israel*, (Oct. 12, 2023) <https://www.techtransparencyproject.org/articles/x-premium-accounts-spread-hamas-propaganda-videos-of>; Moustafa Ayad and Tim Squirrell, *Illegal, violent terrorist content related to Hamas-Israel conflict reaches millions on X*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue (Oct. 13, 2023) https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/illegal-violent-terrorist-content-relating-to-hamas-israel-conflict-reaches-millions-on-x/.

to remain online.⁴As you are no doubt aware, the EU’s Digital Services Act prohibits large social media companies from allowing the spread of “illegal content, online disinformation or other societal risks.”⁵

As of today, most of the terrorist propaganda posts flagged by these researchers inexplicably remain live on your platform. Given the many flagrant examples of X profiting off this content, we need detailed answers from X in considering potential legislation that would prevent such activity in the future.

X Amplifying Terrorist Propaganda

On October 12, a report from the Tech Transparency Project (TTP) documented numerous examples of X Premium accounts openly spreading Hamas propaganda videos—the same videos featured on the website of the military wing of Hamas, the Ezzedeen al-Qassam Brigades (EQB), which has been designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the United States.⁶ These videos, which included Hamas branding and imagery, featured scenes of bloodied bodies on the ground, gunmen shooting at buildings with automatic weapons, and rocket and drone attacks on Israeli tanks and vehicles.

TTP’s report also documented numerous posts by a non-premium X account that appears to be linked to the EQB. The X account, @Pal_resi48, also goes by EQB, and is hyperlinked directly from the Ezzedeen al-Qassam Brigades website.

In addition to posting videos glorifying and celebrating terrorism, this EQB account has recently begun spreading propaganda about Hamas’s purported treatment of hostages in several languages to make its propaganda accessible to the international community.

A separate report released last week by ISD further confirmed and quantified the spread of official Hamas propaganda videos on X.⁷ In a 24-hour period, ISD researchers identified 128 posts from 45 unique accounts “containing glorification and support for terrorist content on X.” Researchers described uncensored videos depicting the desecration of corpses and “CCTV footage in which civilians are shot and subsequently dragged from their vehicles.”

ISD explains that these posts were surfaced by searching for the ‘al-Aqsa Storm’ hashtag in Arabic. This same hashtag is also used by many X users to provide updates and track the conflict generally, leading researchers to conclude that “average users trying to engage with the rapid escalation of events on the ground will likely be exposed to al-Qassem propaganda.”

⁴ Adam Satariano and Kate Conger, *E.U. Probes Elon Musk’s X Platform Over Violent Israel-Hamas War Content*, New York Times (Oct. 12, 2023), <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/12/world/middleeast/x-twitter-elon-musk-eu-israel-hamas.html>.

⁵ European Union Regulation 2022/2065, 2022 O.J. (L 277).

⁶ Tech Transparency Project, *X Premium Accounts Spread Hamas Propaganda Videos of Attack on Israel*, (Oct. 12, 2023) <https://www.techtransparencyproject.org/articles/x-premium-accounts-spread-hamas-propaganda-videos-of>.

⁷ Moustafa Ayad and Tim Squirrell, *Illegal, violent terrorist content related to Hamas-Israel conflict reaches millions on X*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue (Oct. 13, 2023) https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/illegal-violent-terrorist-content-relating-to-hamas-israel-conflict-reaches-millions-on-x/.

This terrorist propaganda is not confined to the darkest corners of your platform. Both TTP and ISD reports note that one of the accounts spreading the unedited Hamas propaganda videos is @WarMonitors, an account which Mr. Musk personally endorsed as a good source for “following the war in real time” before deleting the post when informed of its history of antisemitism.

X Profiting from this Propaganda

We are further outraged by the clear indicators that X is profiting from the spread of Hamas’s terrorist propaganda—both through monthly subscription fees collected from some propaganda spreaders, and through ads displayed in replies to posts by both Premium and regular accounts.

TTP’s report named specific X Premium accounts that remain active. ISD researchers reported that at least 20 out of 45 accounts it found to have posted terrorist propaganda were X Premium accounts, meaning that they are paying for verification without any formalized vetting process and being promoted by the website’s algorithm.

Researchers also documented multiple instances in which X placed “conversation ads” in the replies of Hamas propaganda videos circulated by these Premium accounts. TTP noted ads from the American Investment Council and the National Football League in the replies of posts from the EQB’s @Pal_resi48 account, which misleads users into believing that these companies agree with or actively support the Hamas propaganda spread by these accounts. X has a responsibility not to harm the public image of its clients and such conduct is a gross violation of that duty.

X Profiting from Spread of Misinformation

In addition to profiting off violent content by a terrorist organization, X has financially benefited from the spread of demonstrably false and misleading content as well.

The media watchdog, NewsGuard, recently published analysis of the 250 most-engaged posts — likes, reposts, replies, and bookmarks — during the first week of the conflict that promoted at least one of ten prominent false or unsubstantiated narratives relating to the war.⁸ Their analysis revealed that 186 out of these 250 posts (74 percent) were posted by accounts verified by X — accounts that X directly profits from. NewsGuard identified these ten false or unsubstantiated claims. Their analysis also found that posts advancing these myths collectively received 1,349,979 engagements and were cumulatively viewed more than 100 million times globally in just one week.

Given X’s major cuts to content moderation staff over the last year⁹, it appears that X has willfully permitted, and benefited from, the illegal spread of terrorist propaganda. Such behavior from one of the world’s most widely used social media platforms is wholly unacceptable.

⁸ Jack Brewster, Sam Howard, and Becca Schimmel, *Blue-Checked, ‘Verified’ Users on X Produce 74 Percent of the Platform’s Most Viral False or Unsubstantiated Claims Relating to the Israel-Hamas War*, NewsGuard Tech (Oct. 19, 2023), <https://www.newsguardtech.com/misinformation-monitor/october-2023>.

⁹ Davey Alba and Kurt Wagner, *Twitter Cuts More Staff Overseeing Global Content Moderation*, Bloomberg (Jan. 7, 2023), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-01-07/elon-musk-cuts-more-twitter-staff-overseeing-content-moderation>.

Clear Violations of Twitter Policy

Many of the posts identified by ISD and TTP violate X’s “Violent and hateful entities” policy, which prohibits promotion of terrorist organizations and their propaganda.¹⁰ This policy—updated as recently as April 2023—states that examples of violating content include X users posting “*on behalf of, indirectly, or directly for violent or hateful entity*”:

- *Engaging in or promoting violent acts*
- *Recruiting, or providing or distributing services (such as media/propaganda) to further stated goals.*”

There is no question that the posting of videos that celebrate scenes of “blood-soaked” or “desecrated” bodies qualifies as the promotion of “violent acts.” An EQB thread promoting a hostage video, which purports to demonstrate Hamas’ supposedly humane care of a captured Israeli citizen, would certainly appear to “further [its] stated goals.”

X’s “Perpetrators of Violent Attacks” policy, updated as recently as February 2023, prohibits accounts from sharing content produced by the perpetrators of terrorist attacks.¹¹ This policy states that X will take action to remove “perpetrator-generated media related to the attack in all instances.”

As a reminder, the United States designated Hamas as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 1997. There is no ambiguity about whether violent videos generated by the group qualify under these policies.¹² These are videos that carry official Hamas branding and iconography. Since both policies indicate they were updated this year under Mr. Musk’s leadership, there should also be no question about whether these policies remain in effect.

We are demanding that you uphold your public commitments and enforce your policies. Accordingly, no later than December 1, 2023, we request that you provide all forms of written communications, including email, text messages, other messaging services, or X direct messages, relating to content moderation for any posts or accounts associated with, related to, or connected to Hamas.

We also ask that you provide written responses to the following questions within the same time frame:

1. Please explain how these violating posts and accounts were allowed to remain live for days after their policy violations had been publicized?
2. What action does X plan to take about Hamas-related content currently on the platform?

¹⁰ X Help Center, *Violent and hateful entities policy*, X (accessed Oct. 17, 2023), <https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/violent-entities>.

¹¹ X Help Center, *Perpetrators of Violent Attacks policy*, X (accessed Oct. 17, 2023), <https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/perpetrators-of-violent-attacks>.

¹² Bureau of Counterterrorism, *Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, United States Department of State (accessed Oct. 17, 2023) <https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/>.

3. What changes does X intend to implement to ensure that the harmful spread of terrorist propaganda does not happen again?

While many news outlets and humanitarian organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, many of the United Nations' agencies, and the Palestine Red Crescent Society, which participates in the verified user option, continue to use X to share critical news and updates, the platform has become a hotbed of misinformation and terrorist propaganda. X not only has an obligation to abide by its own content moderation policies, but it has a public duty to ensure that violent images and propaganda from a terrorist organization are not spread on its platform. We look forward to reviewing your responsive materials to this letter no later than December 1.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,



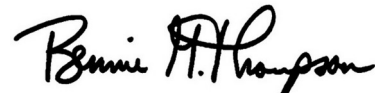
Dan Goldman
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



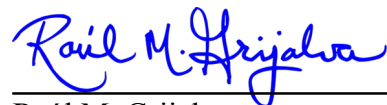
Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress



Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress



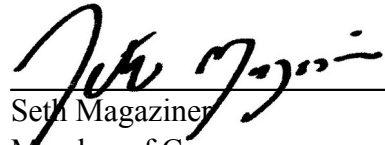
Mark Takano
Member of Congress



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



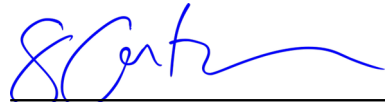
James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



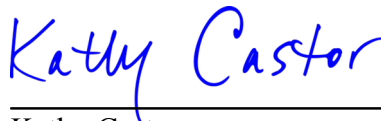
Seth Magaziner
Member of Congress



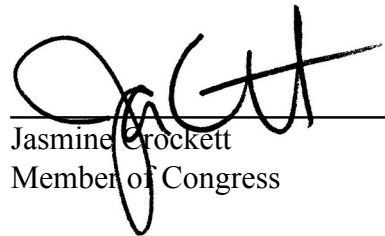
André Carson
Member of Congress



Sean Casten
Member of Congress



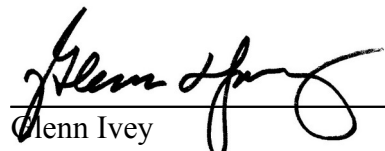
Kathy Castor
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Jasmine Crockett
Member of Congress



Josh Gottheimer
Member of Congress



Glenn Ivey
Member of Congress



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



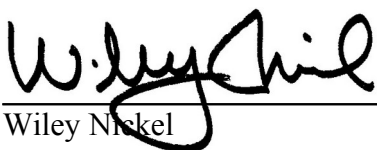
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Adam B. Schiff
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Brad Sherman
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Shri Thanedar
Member of Congress



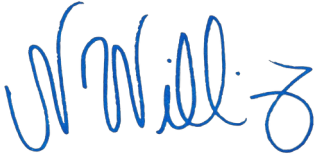
Dina Titus
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Lori Trahan
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Debbie Wasserman Schultz
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Nikema Williams
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