



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on October 1, 2010

Congressman Calls Jihadist Websites Threat to American Lives

Just after lunch on Wednesday, September 29, a hearing convened in the Rayburn House Office Building. Brad Sherman (D-Calif.), Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade, called to order a meeting of academics and lawyers to discuss the advisability of a congressional clampdown on "jihadist websites."

According to testimony presented at the hearing, the Internet presence of these Mullahs is expanding exponentially and the accessibility of their digital diatribes will likely spray lighter fluid on the flames of terror. If we are to protect the world from the imminent threat posed to global security by jihadists and influential imams, then the government of the United States must make an emergency intervention and shut down these sites.



In a statement made at the hearing, Representative Sherman supported pulling the plug on many of these nefarious networks. "Being polite is good as long as it doesn't cost American lives," the congressman said. Curiously, Sherman did not follow this platitude with verifiable evidence of the danger posed to these websites to the lives of Americans.

Gregory S. McNeal, an associate professor of law at Pepperdine University, was among the experts whose testimony was sought by Sherman. He lamented that the permanent shuttering of these purportedly dangerous websites is stymied by the conflict between law enforcement (pro-blackout) and intelligence agencies, who are thought to benefit from the content of sermons, advice, and tactical directions reportedly posted by Islamic organizations such as al-Qaeda.

To accomplish the goals of the Sherman Plan without hamstringing intelligence officers, Professor McNeal proposed a three-pronged strategy. First, monitor the websites in question for any potentially threatening posts. Second, immediately remove the offensive websites. And, third, counterbalance all the dangerous chatter heard on these websites with more compelling and convincing Western ideology.

McNeal implied that the second of these prongs is the most urgent and the most effective to the ultimate success of the mission. In his lengthy testimony, McNeal claimed that in real numbers, there are only about a dozen jihadist websites that are infecting the thousands of others, most of which merely echo the party line communicated originally in those former sites. If those relatively few sites are eliminated, therefore, the rest will wither and die from lack of sustenance from the congressionally deracinated roots of evil.



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Next up in the expert parade was Mansour al-Hadj, listed as the Director of the Reform in the Arab and Muslim World Project of The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), a D.C.-based group that monitors the Middle Eastern press. While those sound like impressive and unbiased credentials, MEMRI has been the target of noteworthy criticism. Several mainstream media outlets, CNN's Arabic department, for example, have claimed that the transcript of the April 13, 2007 show provided by MEMRI contains several blatant errors in translation. Also, the Middle East editor for Britain's *Guardian* newspaper is reported to have said, "My problem with Memri [sic] is that it poses as a research institute when it's basically a propaganda operation," whose true purpose is to "further the political agenda of Israel." Predictably, none of this controversy was addressed by any of the congressmen present at the subcommittee hearing.

Al-Hadj, despite the cracks in the foundation of his credibility, was allowed to testify that websites maintained by jihadists played pivotal roles in many of the recent acts of terrorism attempted and perpetrated on American soil. Specifically, al-Hadj pointed to the influence asserted on Major Nidal Hasan (the accused killer of 32 people at Ft. Hood, Texas in November 2009) by Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-born and Yemeni-based cleric. Al-Awlaki is supposedly a very web-savvy preacher of jihad whose ability to mesmerize and proselytize is believed to have touched Umar Abdulmutallab, the young Nigerian accused of trying to bring down a jetliner over Detroit last Christmas Day.

In an inexplicable (and likely unwitting) admission against interest, al-Hadj reported that in 2007 a couple of congressmen requested that American-based Internet service providers (ISPs) remove all websites that promote jihad against America. According to al-Hadj's testimony, 32 of the 50 ISPs contacted by the congressmen acceded to their request and deleted all information stored on their servers by the suspected allies of terror.

That was three years ago. If cutting off these outfits' on-ramp to the information superhighway is the key to saving the lives of Americans, why has the number of lives lost in the name of the "Global War on Terror" steadily increased since that date?

In one of the few moments of lucidity and logic caught on camera in the hearing room, Christopher Boucek, an associate of the Middle East Program of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, cogently informed the members of the committee: "Shutting down the websites will not completely lead to shutting down the sentiments behind them."

Although certainly succinct and true, Boucek's statement begs the question: May the U.S. government rightly legislate with the intent to adjust sentiments to a more pro-Establishment way of thinking? Is there a word in the Constitution empowering Congress to "monitor" websites, "shut down" websites, or do anything of the sort? The short answer is no, but that is unlikely to discourage further attempts by this and subsequent (and previous) administrations to do so, all in the name of saving lives.

A final thought. How many Americans would still be alive today if Congress (and the President) would have simply ignored the jihadist websites and conformed to the restraints on power as set out by the Constitution and not committed thousands upon thousands of American troops to a bifurcated, albeit undeclared, War on Terror. A war which, to date, has not eliminated the threat from "radical Islam," but has seen the death of over [5,000](#) American soldiers.

Photo: Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai greets Rep. Brad Sherman, D-Calif., as he arrives for a luncheon with the House International Relations Committee, Feb. 26, 2003: AP Images



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