



Trump's renaming of Facebook, Google-backed extremist countering program targets Islam

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February 2, 2017

Donald Trump's administration is to rename the generic 'Countering Violent Extremism' (CVE) program to 'Countering Islamic Extremism' in a plan which no longer focuses on all terrorist groups.

The reports – coming from five people briefed on the matter – arrives just days following a white supremacist terror attack on a Muslim community in Quebec, Canada. While threats from Islamic extremists remains high, the recent attack in Canada proves it's as important as ever to combat terrorism in all its forms.

CVE, as it's currently known, is a "three-pronged" initiative to counter radicalism through disrupting online and offline propaganda. This involves community engagements, better training, and providing counter-narratives which highlights the reality that "violent extremism is a dead end."

The growth of the internet and social networks has provided a far-reaching platform for terrorists looking to spread their poisonous message. For a program like CVE to be effective, partnerships with technology companies have to be formed to discover where extremists seek new recruits and provide a counter-message before it's too late.

Facebook and Google are both part of the program although the companies haven't disclosed to what extent. The name change, which targets a specific community, will prove to be controversial and could damage the reputation of members. We've reached out to both companies for a comment on their position.

A source for Reuters reported the origins of the name change: "Some Republicans in Congress have long assailed the program as politically correct and ineffective, asserting that singling out and using the term 'radical Islam' as the trigger for many violent attacks would help focus deterrence efforts."

In a story earlier this week about Viber offering free calls to refugees affected by Donald Trump's executive order banning immigration, we highlighted a report from the CATO Institute (PDF) which observes no American citizens have been killed on US soil from the Muslim-majority countries on the ban list.

The latest move will further the idea the new government is targeting Islam and not just extremists with measures that have no foundation to warrant them. There are concerns this continued discrimination will drive individuals rejected from their communities into the arms of extremist groups – who have been open with their desire to capitalise on Trump's policies.

Following the immigration ban, hundreds of US diplomats signed a statement which reads: “The net result will not be a drop in terror attacks in the United States, rather it will be a drop in international good will toward Americans.”