



Committee on
HOMELAND SECURITY
Chairman Peter T. King

Opening Statement

February 16, 2012

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**Statement of Chairman Patrick Meehan (R-PA)
Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence**

**"DHS Monitoring of Social Networking and Media: Enhancing
Intelligence Gathering and Enhancing Privacy"**

**February 16, 2012
Remarks as Prepared**

A growing theme among terrorist groups that wish to strike the homeland is their use of social media and networking to recruit, plan, or plot attacks against the homeland or U.S. interests.

In December, the Subcommittee on Counterterrorism & Intelligence held a hearing on terrorist use of social media and all agreed that terrorist groups use these tools to their advantage.

However, use of social media isn't confined to terrorists. It is also a criminal issue and represents an entirely new operating space, both for individuals sharing pictures with friends and family and terrorists, criminals, and other bad actors.

As a former U.S. Attorney, I understand the importance of following the leads wherever they take investigators. So if the leads are on social media or networks, they must be followed. Following leads means collecting intelligence because ultimately no terrorism or criminal investigation can be

effective without good intelligence. I understand and support intelligence collection within the rules of law.

In addition to following leads, social media provides a tool for the government to have situational awareness on breaking events – terrorist attacks and natural disasters – where the government is expected to disseminate information and provide a rapid response.

For example, if a tornado is headed toward a small town, Federal, state, and local law enforcement can collect information via Twitter or Facebook to respond effectively to the disaster and save lives.

Additionally, the government can use these tools to communicate with people about disasters to enhance situational awareness among the citizenry. In these cases, intelligence collection and dissemination is a “win-win” for government and the people.

A few weeks ago, it was reported that DHS had instituted a program to “produce short reports about threats and hazards.” However, in something that may cross the line, these reports also revealed that DHS had tasked analysts with collecting intelligence on media reports that reflect adversely on the U.S. Government and the Department of Homeland Security.

In one example, DHS used multiple social networking tools—including Facebook, Twitter, three different blogs, and reader comments in newspapers to capture resident’s reactions to a possible plan to bring Guantanamo detainees to a local prison in Standish, MI.

In my view, collecting, analyzing, and disseminating private citizens’ comments could have a chilling effect on individual privacy rights and people’s freedom of speech and dissent against their government.

If an individual willingly and publicly uses Facebook, Twitter, or the comments section of a newspaper website, they, in effect, forfeit their right to any expectation of privacy. However, other private individuals reading public Facebook status updates or Twitter feeds is different than the Department of Homeland Security reading them, analyzing them, and possibly disseminating them. My worry—and the worry of many Americans—is what else the government may be doing with the information collected. What safeguards are in place to ensure the online activity of innocent Americans is not being monitored and stored by their government?

I fully recognize these are very complex and nuanced issues. That is why we are holding today's hearing. I will continue to be engaged in this evolving issue as DHS looks to make use of all available tools to keep the homeland safe, while continuing to ensure and protect the liberty and privacy of all Americans.