

TikTok ‘aggressively’ taking down videos promoting Bin Laden ‘letter to America’

Publication Date: 2023-11-16

Author: Blake Montgomery

Section: Technology

Tags: TikTok, Osama bin Laden, X, Internet, news

Article URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/nov/16/tiktok-bin-laden-letter-to-america-videos-removal>



TikTok is “proactively and aggressively” taking down videos boosting a letter written by Osama bin Laden laying out his justification for the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the company said in a statement on Thursday. Videos referencing the 2002 letter, which was published on the Guardian’s website two decades ago, had spread across multiple social networks earlier in the week, though how widely was unclear. “Content promoting this letter clearly violates our rules on supporting any form of terrorism,” TikTok said in the statement. “We are proactively and aggressively removing this content and investigating how it got on to our platform.” Videos dissecting and responding to Bin Laden’s “Letter to America” had gained traction on TikTok in past days amid the Israel-Hamas conflict. The hashtag #lettertoamerica had accrued more than 10m views by Thursday before the company blocked searches for it. The clips crossed over to X, formerly Twitter, in a supercut tweeted by the writer Yashar Ali, who wrote that “thousands” of the videos had proliferated across TikTok. Ali’s tweet itself racked up more than 11,000 retweets and 23.8m views. “The TikToks are from people of all ages, races, ethnicities, and backgrounds. Many of them say that reading the letter has opened their eyes, and they’ll never see geopolitical matters the same way again,” wrote Ali. TikTok said in its statement that the number of videos publicizing the letter was lower than was made out to be. The Guardian could not independently verify how widely the videos had proliferated or been viewed. The company said: “The number of videos on TikTok is small and reports of it trending on our platform are inaccurate. This is not unique to TikTok and has appeared across multiple platforms and the media.” In response to the letter’s renewed spread, Guardian News and Media removed it on 15 November 2023, replacing it with the statement: “The transcript published on our website had been widely shared on social media without the full context. Therefore we decided to take it down and direct readers instead to the news article that originally contextualised it.” In a statement on Thursday, the White House said: “There is never a justification for spreading the repugnant, evil, and antisemitic lies that the leader of al Qaeda issued just after committing the worst terrorist attack in American history.”