



Policy Advisory Opinion 2023-01

Regarding Meta's Policy Advisory Opinion Request: "Shaheed" and Designated Dangerous Individuals

Comments Submitted April 2023 by Tal-Or Cohen Montemayor on behalf of CyberWell Ltd. (CC)

Executive Summary

CyberWell identified and vetted 300 pieces of content on Facebook that our technology flagged as highly likely to be antisemitic. We determined that, not only is content containing the word *shaheed* + praise (praise, substantive support, or representation – PSR) of DOIs (Dangerous Organizations and Individuals) available on the platform despite violating Meta's current policy, but also the current DOI policy does not go far enough. The praising of individuals who commit violent acts against Jews but who are NOT associated with a recognized FTO (Foreign Terrorist Organization) can also be found on Facebook. We recommend that Meta maintain its current DOI policy, dedicate additional resources to enforcement, and we also offer several recommendations for policy improvements to better identify and remove content using *shaheed* to praise violent terrorist activity.

Introduction

As a nonprofit organization committed to eradicating online Jew-hatred through driving enforcement and improvement of community guidelines and safety policies, it is important for us to provide guidance on this subject, as the term *shaheed* is used on social media to glorify violence against Jews. By placing additional conditions for removal of posts containing the term *shaheed* when in violation of Meta's Dangerous Organizations and Individuals policy, we are concerned that violent and antisemitic hate speech will increase. Against the backdrop of the Supreme Court case in the US regarding upending Section 230 and roll out of the Digital Services Act in Europe, the policy changes proposed by Meta may further result in increased culpability and legal and financial repercussions.

Shaheed Context

The Arabic term *shaheed* literally means "witness". It is typically translated as "martyr" because often those who are called *shaheed* are individuals who are considered to have "testified" or "witnessed" their loyalty to Islam through their actions. Since the meaning of *shaheed* varies depending on the religious, cultural, and linguistic context and may also refer to additional actions, in this comment CyberWell refers to the term *shaheed* **ONLY** when used to glorify (PSR) the death of individuals who committed violent acts.

Furthermore, many Muslim traditions describe the reward awaiting a *shaheed*, including ascending directly to Paradise, all sins being forgiven, a crown of glory being placed on their heads, etc. It is thus **HIGHLY LIKELY that, when *shaheed* is used to refer to a terrorist who has died, it is being used as a PSR term to praise and glorify.**

CyberWell's Methodology

Our methodology is as follows: use of keywords -> applying specialized dictionary based in the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA definition -> two rounds of human review. Our professional analysts are trained in the fields of antisemitism, linguistics, and digital policy.

Taking into consideration the versatility of the term “shaheed”, CyberWell focused on the antisemitic context of the term according to the first example in the IHRA definition - Violence: Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion - with the following specifications when reviewing existing posts on Facebook:

- Publications in Arabic.
- Praising/encouraging violence or hatred against Jews.
- Dangerous organizations and Individuals - specifically entities that engage in serious offline harms against Jews in Israel and the West Bank.

To answer the question posed by Meta, CyberWell's antisemitism focused tech flagged over 400 publications containing the word *shaheed* as highly likely to include antisemitic material. We examined over 300 Facebook publications containing the term *shaheed* (with a focus on 2022-2023 and including a few outliers still live from as early as 2011) on its own and in different word combinations, such as:

"الشهيد" [*shaheed*]

"الشهيد" AND "البطل" [*shaheed* AND hero]

"الشهيد" AND "عز الدين القسام" / "حماس" [*shaheed* AND Izz al-Din al-Qassam / Hamas]

"الشهيد" AND "القائد" [*shaheed* AND commander]

"الشهيد" AND "يهود" [*shaheed* AND Jews]

Overview

The sample of data presented in this document is divided into three types. Specific examples and links to posts still online are in a separate document: Appendix of Harmful Live Content Containing Shaheed.

1. The term *shaheed* + reference to a designated Dangerous Organization or Individual. In this report we focused on the FTOs Hamas and Islamic Jihad and associated individuals.
2. The term *shaheed* + reference to terror organizations and individuals NOT designated as FTOs but which engage in serious offline harms ex: The Lion's Den.
3. The term *shaheed* + reference to Jews.

Main Recommendations

- **Enforcement** - According to Meta's current policy, posts using the word *shaheed* to refer to individuals recognized under the DOI policy should be removed. However, despite Meta's claim that posts containing *shaheed* + DOIs are removed at a high rate, posts with this condition can still be found online. As demonstrated in CyberWell's dataset of publications designated as "Type 1", this existing policy is enforced ONLY IN PART. CyberWell therefore concludes that it is NOT advisable to deviate from the current policy by placing additional conditions for removal on this content.
- **Expansion** - Frequent turnover in actors and changes in power between organizations and rogue cells in areas of conflict create conditions in which individuals and organizations that engage in serious offline harm and violence are often not recognized as DOIs, leaving them outside of Meta's policy. Seeing the broad scope of publications using the word *shaheed* to praise terrorists and encourage violent attacks against Jews raises the importance of expanding Meta's policy and monitoring the usage of the word *shaheed* when referring to individuals who are not necessarily related to designated terror organizations.
- **Antisemitism** - The term *shaheed* not only violates the DOI policy, but also is often associated with other forms of hate content. Out of 68 publications using the word combination "*shaheed*" AND "Jews" – 16 posts, or 24%, were flagged as antisemitic by CyberWell.

Recommendations

- Continue Meta's current approach and remove content that uses *shaheed* to refer to recognized DOIs.
- Dedicate additional resources to enforcing the existing DOI policy.
- Create additional policies for the identification and removal of posts praising offline acts of violence committed by those not already associated with recognized FTOs.
- Flag hashtags referring to specific terror attacks, for instance: "عملية_القدس#" "البطل" AND "الشهيد"
- Monitor additional forms of the word *shaheed* including but not limited to:
 - شهداء - plural
 - شهدا – common misspelling of the plural form
- Flag posts with the combination of the words *shaheed* AND "Jews".

Appendix of Harmful Live Content Containing *Shaheed*

- Type 1 - The term *shaheed* + reference to a recognized DOI.
- Type 2 - The term *shaheed* + reference to organizations and individuals NOT designated as FTOs but which engage in serious offline harms.
- Type 3 - The term *shaheed* + reference to Jews.

Type 1: The term *shaheed* + reference to a recognized DOI

Examples represent and glorify Hamas and Islamic Jihad leaders and activists.

Example 1: Ahmad Yassin, a founder of Hamas (photo included in post)

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/178590195516314/posts/198097450232255/>

Relevant content: “[...] the dignified *shaheed* Sheikh the hero Ahmad Yassin [...]”

Example 2

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/100009901443748/posts/1897831560556874>

Relevant content: "the assassination of engineer Mohammad al-Zawari? [...] the assassination of the *shaheed* [...] The Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades announced mourning for the *istishhad* of the engineer of the Hamas drone project, and mourned, mourned, and glorified him [...].”

Example 3

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/100000256504993/posts/5320819658009184>

Relevant Content: “[...] mourned the *shaheeds* of our people in the Gaza Strip, headed by the leaders of the Islamic Jihad movement, the *shaheed* Taysir al-Jabari and the *shaheed* Khaled Mansour [...].”

Additional type 1 posts still online:

1. <https://www.facebook.com/100000256504993/posts/5994622367219075>
2. <https://www.facebook.com/100079059010698/posts/170696902242276>
3. <https://www.facebook.com/100063615734738/posts/577264324404087>
4. <https://www.facebook.com/100001839545844/posts/8485848104819757>
5. <https://www.facebook.com/1515688123/posts/10229368647750087>
6. <https://www.facebook.com/100002009270609/posts/5862129463863971>
7. <https://www.facebook.com/100001995197832/posts/5870666679676447>

Type 2: The term *shaheed* + reference to individuals NOT NECESSARILY belonging to a recognized FTO but who engage in serious offline harms.

Example 1: Muataz al-Khawaja (photo included in post)

On March 9th, 2023, Muataz al-Khawaja wounded three people in a shooting in Tel Aviv. Hamas claimed Muataz al-Khawaja as a member, but his membership is not verified.

Link:

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0eeziCah7aPMecdfo7Rw8tNBPsJFMb7A7AVmWerYSeJ224RNQJ1SywagyxCiXfVh3l&id=100071650284392

Relevant Content: “The hero *shaheed* Muataz al-Hawaja”.

Example 2: Khairy Alqam

On Jan 27th, 2023, Khairy Alqam shot and murdered 7 people exiting a synagogue in Neve Yaakov. The terror organization the Lion's Den took responsibility for the attack.

The hashtag refers to terror attacks in Jerusalem [#operation_al-quds]

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/100046585731709/posts/759871472242370>

Relevant Content: "Two weeks after the heroic operation of the *shaheed* Khairy Alqam, the *shaheed* Hussein Qaraqe (31 years old) carries out a new commando operation in the eternal Palestinian capital, Jerusalem [...] #عملية_القدس"

Example 3: Udai al-Tamimi

On Oct 8th, 2023, Udai al-Tamimi murdered a Jewish Israeli soldier and then carried out another shooting attack ten days later.

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/100006548053704/posts/3515849391976628>

Relevant Content: "The *istishhad* of Udai al-Tamimi [,] the Palestinian young man who carried out the heroic Shuafat attack [...] #Shaheed_Uday_al-Tamimi"

Additional type 2 posts still online:

1. https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid02VjZH17rmXaQSJbUxHSJfRvWHR6Q6c5KiRA7L6GCmc4VNoAFTuGyWr6M9uHVguEsxl&id=100004441452062
2. <https://www.facebook.com/mutasemalkhawaja/posts/pfbid02FzDP9SYDW5r8HZTiWefQS7YCANv8LuyCfmyjp4Wifzd3YC8DacGNB927GVjVFQAbI>
3. <https://www.facebook.com/100088954804120/posts/128009450174215>
4. <https://www.facebook.com/100071914053983/posts/215038874236580>
5. <https://www.facebook.com/100009035544665/posts/3141199816191172>
6. <https://www.facebook.com/maha.jaghel/posts/pfbid02JjDxWXS5CyyPzCeHX2q5AakumB3rq1uF6w5NYnomhCVGkDPiPgFDujL5ZBF4AFjGI>
7. https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid02PT1mCcZ4dUFwcuGJ9AVbPVnTrSEVzDRnxbL9ezHX9pTnPXybwsp37Zgf3NvdA76nl&id=100015206250973

Type 3: The term *shaheed* + reference to Jews

The term *shaheed* and the antisemitic tropes in the following examples are not directly connected to each other. However, we see from the data that when posts contain **both** *shaheed* **and** reference to Jews, they often include religious hate speech and antisemitic discourse, such as accusing Jews of killing the prophet Muhammad, the conspiracy of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, and Jews being evil and planning world domination.

Example 1

This antisemitic story originates in Sirat al-Nabi, and in this post is presented as a fact.

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/100004970314451/posts/2356728461169475>

Relevant Content: "[...] Did the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, die, or was he killed as *shaheed*? In fact, the Prophet, may God's prayers and peace be upon him, was poisoned, that is, he was killed. Who killed him: a Jewish woman."

Example 2

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/100009410962393/posts/3458987404424924>

Relevant Content: “the *shaheed* president Mursi [...] they allied, finally, with American imperialism, Christian Zionism and Jewish Zionism to destroy and divide Iraq [...]”.

Example 3

This conspiracy theory claims that Jews control Al-Jazeera. Jews controlling the media is a classic antisemitic trope (IHRA type 2).

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/187141311912868/posts/1032942353999422>

Relevant Content: “Scholars **warning of Al-Jazeera Jewish channel** #Al-Jazeera_is evil [...] this is dangerous listening to and watching Al-Jazeera [...] attacking churches that do not say that Ghufuran [Ghufuran Warasneh] is a *shaheeda*? Or is it severe for the Muslim and merciful for the infidel?”

Additional type 3 posts still online:

1. <https://www.facebook.com/100045666786047/posts/639272904271597>
2. <https://www.facebook.com/100002439108131/posts/1054302625477941>
3. <https://www.facebook.com/100046225835312/posts/767287631488758>
4. <https://www.facebook.com/100007302854018/posts/3236555469931183>
5. <https://www.facebook.com/100009942106458/posts/1796295410711845>
6. <https://www.facebook.com/100077876334494/posts/163386309600579>
7. <https://www.facebook.com/100003495446314/posts/4813578245435309>