

Microsoft exec: No silver bullet to fight terror on internet (Update)

May 11 2016, by By Michael Astor



Microsoft Vice President and Deputy General Counsel Steven Crown speaks during a Security Council meeting on terrorism, Wednesday May 11, 2016 at U. N. headquarters. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)

A Microsoft executive told the U.N. Security Council on Wednesday that "there is no silver bullet that will stop terrorist use of the Internet."

Steven A. Crown, vice president and deputy general of Microsoft, said

technology companies, states and nongovernmental organizations must work together to "address terrorist use of the internet, including creation and use of counter-narratives," in a manner that respects privacy and free speech.

"For the internet industry, the scale of the terrorist challenge is daunting," Crown said. "We know that there are tens of thousands terrorist internet accounts that refuse to die. As one is taken down, another quickly springs up in its place."

Crown made his remarks at an open session of the 'Security Council aimed at countering the narratives of terrorism. His appearance marked the first time a representative of a technology company has addressed the U.N.'s most powerful body.

The Security Council is seeking to develop a comprehensive international framework by April 30, 2017 to counter the use of narratives by the Islamic State group, Al-Qaida and other extremist groups who use the internet as a recruiting tool.

In a statement approved Wednesday, council members stressed that "terrorism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality or civilization" and that "terrorism can only be defeated by a sustained and comprehensive approach."



Spain's Deputy Foreign Minister Ignacio Ybanez, second from left, listens as Mohi El-Din Afifi, far right, Secretary-General of Al-Azhar Islamic Research Academy, speaks during a Security Council meeting on terrorism, Wednesday, May 11, 2016, at U. N. headquarters. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)

The council said it was concerned by the ability of extremist groups to "craft distorted narratives that are based on the misinterpretation and misrepresentation of religion to justify violence" and disseminating it through the internet and social media.

Mohi El-Din Afifi, secretary-general of Al-Azhar Islamic Research Academy told the council that his organization was working to correct this by offering training courses for Imams and speakers from around the world to denounce extremism and respect the pluralism of religions. He said they also maintained a digital observatory to detect what the Islamic State group publishes in order to refute their teachings.

"We have seen deviated ideologies and concepts that are contrary to the religion (Islam) and these have been spread through social networks," Afifi said. "And if this becomes a threat of violence then it becomes terrorism."



Spain's Deputy Foreign Minister Ignacio Ybanez, left, listens as Mohi El-Din Afifi, right, Secretary-General of Al-Azhar Islamic Research Academy, speaks during a Security Council meeting on terrorism, Wednesday May 11, 2016 at U. N. headquarters. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)

U.S. Ambassador Samantha Power said that while it was critical to combat extremism, it was also important to protect free speech.

"As we consider the task of countering violent ideologies we all must recognize that the common goal of countering terrorist ideology should never be used as an excuse to suppress political dissent," Power said.

"Legal action is a critical tool in the campaign against ISIL but it must not be wielded like a cudgel against those who voice unpopular speech or criticize authorities. Such behavior doesn't prevent violent extremism, it fuels it."

Power added that as a tool, the internet can cut both ways.

"The internet itself is not a threat though it can host ISIL lies and propaganda, it also makes possible the flow of counter narratives, the exchange of new ideas and the voices of tolerance who vastly outnumber the exceptions," Power said, referring to the Islamic State group by another acronym.



Japan's Deputy Foreign Minister Shinsuke Sugiyama, right, listens during a Security Council meeting on terrorism, Wednesday May 11, 2016 at U. N. headquarters. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)



Britain's U.N. Ambassador Matthew Rycroft, left, and United States U.N. Ambassador Samantha Power, right, confer during a Security Council meeting on terrorism, Wednesday May 11, 2016 at U. N. headquarters. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)



France U.N. Ambassador Francois Delattre speaks during a Security Council meeting on terrorism, Wednesday May 11, 2016 at U. N. headquarters. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)



Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vitaly Churkin reads a document during a Security Council meeting on terrorism, Wednesday May 11, 2016 at U. N. headquarters. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)



Participants in a Security Council meeting on terrorism, stand in a moment of silence for victims of terrorism world-wide, Wednesday May 11, 2016 at U. N. headquarters. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)



Syria's U.N. Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari listens during a Security Council meeting on terrorism, Wednesday May 11, 2016 at U. N. headquarters. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)



U.N. Deputy Secretary-General, Jan Eliasson, speaks during a Security Council meeting on terrorism, Wednesday May 11, 2016 at U. N. headquarters. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)



Microsoft Vice President and Deputy General Counsel Steven Crown listens during a Security Council meeting on terrorism, Wednesday May 11, 2016 at U. N. headquarters. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)



Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry speaks during a Security Council meeting on terrorism, Wednesday May 11, 2016 at U. N. headquarters. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)

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