

**Prof. Jason Blazakis of Middlebury Institute, Director of Center on Terrorism, Extremism, and Counterterrorism**

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**JB:** If the US govt. was to put together a credible case somehow that Zarif's use of social media benefited Terrorism activities in terms of recruitment or financing, which terrorists have used social media crowd-funding sources to raise finances, perhaps you can make a creative argument to take down that content. But as far as I am aware, the US govt. has not put forth a formal request to take down his content. As it rides on Instagram and twitter. I don't know of a situation where they put forth an informal request related to Zarif's use of social media services.

**JB:** So I think it would take a decision by Congress to ...make a decision about the law as relates to Social media/ content provider services to designated entities because the law is unclear. There is a lot of ambiguity.

**JB:** Really Interesting question. In the case of Zarif, he's able to have 1 million followers...avail himself of US freedom of speech provisions under law to be able to communicate the Iranian regime message. The people of Iran... do not have that similar ability. As these companies think about what should they do about Zarif's accounts. I think they need to think about their own credibility in the context of what they allow for individuals like Zarif to have, but the Iranian population does not. So there is a potential hypocrisy here that exists...It's important as these companies think about reputational risk, Their own reputation of taking an even-handed approach as it relates to Iranian actors access to social media.

**JB:** If there is action taken against Zarif's accounts, I imagine it needs to be some kind of consistent application across platforms owned by that particular social media company. For instance, if it's Facebook, if they are making a determination for their subsidiary Instagram, you would think Facebook would apply the same standards as they apply towards their Instagram account of Zarif. One thing Silicon Valley has been correctly criticized for is uneven application of its own policies. They need to be more transparent about the decisions they make as it relates to taking down content

or being more concrete about why they allow for content to arrive on their platforms. I think that message holds true in the context of situations like Zarif and Iran but also terrorism use of social media fundamentally as well. There is uneven application there.