

1 SETH P. WAXMAN (admitted *pro hac vice*)

seth.waxman@wilmerhale.com

2 PATRICK J. CAROME (admitted *pro hac vice*)

patrick.carome@wilmerhale.com

3 WILMER CUTLER PICKERING

HALE AND DORR LLP

4 1875 Pennsylvania Avenue

5 Washington, D.C. 20006

Telephone: (202) 663-6800

6 Facsimile: (202) 663-6363

7 MARK D. FLANAGAN (CA SBN 130303)

mark.flanagan@wilmerhale.com

8 WILMER CUTLER PICKERING

9 HALE AND DORR LLP

10 950 Page Mill Road

Palo Alto, California 94304

11 Telephone: (650) 858-6000

12 Facsimile: (650) 858-6100

13 *Attorneys for Defendant*

TWITTER, INC.

14
15 **UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT**

16 **NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA, SAN FRANCISCO DIVISION**

17
18 TAMARA FIELDS, on behalf of herself, as a
19 representative of the ESTATE OF LLOYD
FIELDS, JR.,

20 Plaintiff,

21 v.

22 TWITTER, INC.,

23 Defendant.

Case No. 3:16-cv-00213-WHO

**DEFENDANT TWITTER, INC.'S
MOTION TO DISMISS**

Judge: Hon. William H. Orrick

[Fed. R. Civ. Proc. 12(b)(6)]

Hearing Date: April 20, 2016 at 2:00 p.m.
Courtroom 2, 17th Floor

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1 **NOTICE OF MOTION AND MOTION**

2 TO ALL PARTIES AND THEIR ATTORNEYS OF RECORD:

3 PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that on April 20, 2016 at 2:00 p.m., in Courtroom 2, 17th
4 Floor, United States District Court for the Northern District of California, Phillip Burton Federal
5 Building & United States Courthouse, 450 Golden Gate Avenue, San Francisco, California,
6 Defendant Twitter, Inc. (“Twitter” or “Defendant”) shall and hereby does move for an order
7 dismissing all of Plaintiff Tamara Fields’ (“Plaintiff”) claims in the present case. This motion is
8 supported by the following Memorandum of Points and Authorities and such other written or
9 oral argument as may be presented at or before the time this motion is taken under submission by
10 the Court.

11 **STATEMENT OF REQUESTED RELIEF**

12 Pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6), Defendant Twitter requests that the
13 Court dismiss with prejudice all of Plaintiff’s claims against Defendant in the present case.

14 **STATEMENT OF ISSUES TO BE DECIDED**

- 15 1. Whether 47 U.S.C. § 230 (“Section 230”), which broadly immunizes online
16 intermediaries from liability for harms allegedly resulting from third-party content, bars
17 this action, which seeks to hold Twitter liable under 18 U.S.C. § 2333(a) based on
18 allegations that Twitter failed to block or remove content that ISIS affiliates transmitted
19 via Twitter’s online communications platform.
- 20 2. Whether the Complaint fails to state a claim under the federal Terrorism Civil Remedy
21 provision, 18 U.S.C. § 2333(a), because:
- 22 a. The Complaint fails to allege facts that would establish that Twitter proximately
23 caused Mr. Fields’ death; and
- 24 b. The Complaint fails to allege facts that would establish that Twitter committed an
25 “act of international terrorism” within the meaning of that provision.
- 26
27
28

1 **MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES**

2 Lloyd Fields' death at the hands of former Jordanian police captain Abu Zaid is tragic,
3 and the attack that killed him and four others is appalling. The senseless violence of Abu Zaid's
4 shooting spree has been explained as an act of a "lone wolf" terrorist inspired by the Islamic
5 State of Iraq and Syria. But even accepting this explanation, there is no basis in law or fact for
6 holding Twitter liable for that heinous crime. Not even the thinnest of reeds connects Twitter to
7 this terrible event. Further, Twitter's alleged conduct is immune from liability under federal law.

8 The Complaint does not allege any direct connection between Twitter and either Abu
9 Zaid or the attack on the police compound in Jordan that killed Mr. Fields. Nor does it allege
10 that Twitter itself created any of the Tweets, messages, or other content that the Complaint
11 strains to link, even indirectly, to that attack. Instead, the Complaint seeks to hold Twitter
12 responsible on the ground that Twitter's ubiquitously available online communications platform,
13 which has hundreds of millions of users worldwide, allegedly was used by other terrorists
14 (though not Abu Zaid) to transmit information promoting their views and activities. According
15 to the Complaint, the federal Terrorism Civil Remedy provision, 18 U.S.C. § 2333(a), would
16 make Twitter liable for the highly speculative consequences of these messages—including,
17 apparently, Mr. Fields' death—because Twitter allegedly failed to block or remove some or all
18 of the messages from its platform.

19 Plaintiff's claims seek to hold Twitter liable for the content of messages posted to its
20 platform by third parties and are thus barred by Section 230 of the Telecommunications Act of
21 1996, 47 U.S.C. § 230 ("Section 230"). In enacting Section 230, Congress unequivocally
22 resolved the question whether computer service providers may be held liable for harms arising
23 from content created by third parties. Announcing the policy of the United States to preserve the
24 "free market that presently exists for the Internet . . . unfettered by Federal or State regulation,"
25 47 U.S.C. § 230(b)(2), Congress broadly immunized entities like Twitter against lawsuits that
26 seek to hold them liable for harmful or unlawful third-party content, including suits alleging that
27 such entities failed to block, remove, or alter such content, *id.* § 230(c)(1). In the two decades
28 since, courts in the Ninth Circuit and across the country have consistently recognized and

1 broadly construed Section 230’s protections. Indeed, in line with this uniform precedent, the
2 U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit recently affirmed the dismissal under
3 Rule 12(b)(6) of a complaint brought against Facebook based on allegations strikingly similar to
4 those alleged here. *See Klayman v. Zuckerberg*, 753 F.3d 1354 (D.C. Cir. 2014).

5 Plaintiff’s Complaint also must be dismissed for a second, independent reason: It fails to
6 state a claim for relief under the Terrorism Civil Remedy provision. That provision requires
7 Plaintiff to allege and prove (1) that she was injured “by reason of”—i.e., that her injury was
8 proximately caused by—(2) an “act of international terrorism” committed by Twitter. 18 U.S.C.
9 § 2333(a). The Complaint’s allegations satisfy neither requirement. *First*, the link the
10 Complaint attempts to draw between Twitter’s alleged conduct and the attack is, as a matter of
11 law, far too tenuous to establish that Twitter proximately caused Mr. Fields’ death. *Second*, the
12 Complaint’s allegations amount to nothing more than the claim that Twitter made its
13 communications platform available to everyone in the world with an Internet connection. As a
14 matter of law, that conduct cannot have constituted “an act of international terrorism” as defined
15 by the statute because it plainly does not “appear to [have been] intended” “to intimidate or
16 coerce a civilian population,” “to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or
17 coercion,” or “to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or
18 kidnapping,” *id.* § 2331(1)(B) (defining “international terrorism”).

19 For these reasons, the Complaint must be dismissed in its entirety with prejudice.

20 **FACTUAL BACKGROUND**

21 According to the Complaint,¹ on November 9, 2015, Plaintiff’s husband, Lloyd “Carl”
22 Fields, Jr., was killed by a “lone wolf” terrorist who attacked the police training center in
23 Amman, Jordan where Mr. Fields was working as a government contractor. Compl. ¶¶ 66, 67,
24 71, 73, 74. The man who killed Mr. Fields was a Jordanian police captain named Anwar Abu
25 Zaid. *Id.* ¶¶ 69, 71. Abu Zaid’s brother later told reporters that Abu Zaid had been inspired to

26
27 ¹ Twitter deems the allegations in the Complaint to be true solely for purposes of this motion.
28

1 carry out this heinous crime by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria’s (“ISIS”) “brutal execution of
2 Jordanian pilot Maaz al-Kassasbeh in February 2015.” *Id.* ¶ 77. The United States has
3 designated ISIS as a Foreign Terrorist Organization under Section 219 of the Immigration and
4 Nationality Act. *Id.* ¶ 15. In subsequent statements, ISIS “claimed responsibility for the attack”
5 on the police facility, which killed Mr. Fields, and described Abu Zaid as a “lone wolf.” *Id.*
6 ¶¶ 73, 74.

7 Defendant Twitter operates a global Internet platform for public self-expression and
8 conversation that is free-of-charge and open for virtually anyone to use. *See* Compl. ¶ 1. Users
9 with a Twitter account can send “Tweets”—messages of 140 characters or less, sometimes with
10 pictures or video—to anyone who has chosen to “follow” that user. *E.g., id.* ¶¶ 4, 19, 23, 27.
11 Those followers may, in turn, “retweet” those messages to their own followers. *E.g., id.* ¶ 20.
12 Users can include hashtagged keywords (#) in their Tweets to facilitate searching for messages
13 on the same topic. *E.g., id.* ¶¶ 35, 39, 41. These simple tools enable users to do everything from
14 track the Arab Spring in real time, to argue with fellow Giants fans about whether to pull a
15 struggling pitcher, to announce the birth of a child to family and friends. Each day, Twitter users
16 send and receive hundreds of millions of Tweets touching on every conceivable topic. *Id.* ¶ 61.

17 Twitter’s sole alleged connection to this controversy is that, among the hundreds of
18 millions of individuals around the world who disseminate information to one another via the
19 Twitter platform (*id.* ¶ 60), there are some people affiliated with, or supportive of, ISIS who
20 allegedly used the platform to transmit information for purposes of promoting ISIS’s terrorist
21 activities and agenda. In particular, the Complaint alleges that these users sent messages over
22 the Twitter platform to recruit terrorists (*id.* ¶¶ 16-24), raise funds (*id.* ¶¶ 25-29), and spread
23 propaganda (*id.* ¶¶ 30-42). The Complaint asserts, for example, that “in June 2014, ISIS fighters
24 tweeted guidelines in English targeting Westerners and instructing them on how to travel to the
25 Middle East to join its fight,” and that in September 2014, ISIS sent communications via the
26 Twitter platform to help it distribute “its notorious promotional training video, ‘Flames of War.’”
27 *Id.* ¶¶ 19, 21. Other content allegedly disseminated by ISIS (or persons affiliated with ISIS) via
28

1 the Twitter platform includes fundraising appeals (*id.* ¶¶ 27-29) and gruesome pictures and
2 videos of mass executions and beheadings (*id.* ¶¶ 30-40).

3 The Complaint makes no attempt to connect Twitter directly to Abu Zaid or his attack. It
4 does not allege that ISIS recruited Abu Zaid over the Twitter platform. Nor does it allege that
5 Abu Zaid or ISIS used the Twitter platform to plan, carry out, or raise money for the attack. It
6 does not even allege that Abu Zaid had a Twitter account or ever accessed the Twitter platform.
7 And although the Complaint devotes considerable attention to how *other* terrorists allegedly used
8 the Twitter platform, it never explains how that alleged use had even the remotest connection to
9 Abu Zaid’s “lone wolf” attack. The Complaint does not, for example, allege that ISIS helped
10 Abu Zaid plan the attack or that ISIS provided Abu Zaid with weapons or funds. Beyond the
11 speculation that Abu Zaid and ISIS may have shared the common objectives of inflicting harm
12 on Americans and establishing a transnational Islamic caliphate, the closest the Complaint comes
13 to even hinting at a connection between the two is the allegation that ISIS’s “brutal execution of
14 Jordanian pilot Maaz al-Kassasbeh in February 2015” may have inspired Abu Zaid to become a
15 “lone wolf” terrorist nine months later. *See* Compl. ¶¶ 12, 13, 72, 73, 74, 77.

16 The Complaint makes clear that the online content at the root of its claims was created
17 and developed entirely by third parties, specifically terrorists and their allies, and not by Twitter
18 or its employees. The Complaint nonetheless seeks to hold Twitter liable for the asserted (and
19 attenuated) consequences of these messages because Twitter allegedly “knowingly permitted”
20 ISIS to transmit them, Compl. ¶ 1, and because Twitter allegedly failed to take “meaningful
21 action to stop” ISIS by “censor[ing] user content,” “shut[ting] down . . . ISIS-linked account[s],”
22 or blocking ISIS-related accounts from “springing right back up,” *id.* ¶¶ 43, 61, 64.

23 The rules Twitter has prescribed to govern what information individuals may transmit
24 through its online platform have always banned content that encourages terrorism. Since
25 Twitter’s inception, its rules have prohibited “threats,” as well as use of the platform “for any
26 unlawful purposes or in furtherance of illegal activities.” *See* The Twitter Rules, *available at*

1 <https://support.twitter.com/articles/18311#> (last visited March 10, 2016).² For the sake of
2 clarity, the Rules now make the ban on terrorist content more explicit by expressly prohibiting
3 “threats of violence ... including threatening or promoting terrorism.” Compl. ¶ 65. The
4 Complaint alleges that Twitter enforced these rules primarily by reviewing and removing
5 content, and by blocking accounts, when notified of a violation of its rules, rather than by pre-
6 screening Tweets before they were sent or running background checks on users before they
7 opened an account. *Id.* ¶¶ 60-61. According to Plaintiff, this complaint-driven approach was not
8 good enough: Twitter should have “proactively” and preemptively “monitor[ed] [the] content”
9 of the hundreds of millions of Tweets that were sent via its platform each day. *Id.* ¶ 61.

10 Based on these allegations, the Complaint seeks treble money damages from Twitter
11 under the Terrorism Civil Remedy provision, 18 U.S.C. § 2333(a). Compl. 15. Count I asserts
12 that Twitter “purposefully, knowingly or with willful blindness” provided “services and support”
13 to ISIS, that those “services and support ... constitute material support to the preparation and
14 carrying out of acts of international terrorism,” that providing such material support “was a
15 proximate cause” of Mr. Fields’ death, that Twitter therefore violated 18 U.S.C. § 2339A, and
16 that “[b]y virtue of its violations of 18 U.S.C. § 2339A, [Twitter] is liable pursuant to 18 U.S.C.
17 § 2333 for any and all damages that Plaintiff has sustained.” *Id.* ¶¶ 80-82. Count II repeats the
18 same allegations with respect to 18 U.S.C. § 2339B, asserting that Twitter “purposefully,
19 knowingly or with willful blindness” provided material support to a Foreign Terrorist
20 Organization. *Id.* ¶¶ 84-86.

21 LEGAL STANDARDS ON A MOTION TO DISMISS

22 To survive a motion to dismiss under Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6), a complaint must “contain
23 sufficient factual matter, accepted as true, to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.”
24

25 ² The Twitter Rules are incorporated by reference into the Complaint because the Complaint
26 “necessarily relies upon” them, portions of the Rules are quoted in the Complaint (¶¶ 61, 65),
27 there is no basis to question the authenticity of the cited Rules, and the Rules are relevant. *See*
28 *Coto Settlement v. Eisenberg*, 593 F.3d 1031, 1038 (9th Cir. 2010). The court may therefore
consider any portion of the Rules in ruling on this motion to dismiss. *See id.*

1 *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (internal quotation marks omitted). A claim is
2 plausible on its face only if the “plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the
3 reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” *Id.* The court is
4 not “required to accept as true allegations that are merely conclusory, unwarranted deductions of
5 fact, or unreasonable inferences.” *Rieckborn v. Jefferies LLC*, 81 F. Supp. 3d 902, 913 (N.D.
6 Cal. 2015) (quoting *In re Gilead Scis. Sec. Litig.*, 536 F.3d 1049, 1055 (9th Cir. 2008)). Nor is
7 the court “bound to accept as true a legal conclusion couched as a factual allegation.”
8 *Chinatown Neighborhood Ass’n v. Harris*, 33 F. Supp. 3d 1085, 1093 (N.D. Cal. 2014) (quoting
9 *Papasan v. Allain*, 478 U.S. 265, 286 (1986)). “Threadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of
10 action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678.

11 Given “the extreme nature of the charge of terrorism,” satisfying these basic pleading
12 requirements is especially important in an action brought under the Terrorism Civil Remedy
13 provision. *In re Terrorist Attacks on Sept. 11, 2001 (Burnett v. Al Baraka Inv. & Dev. Corp.)*,
14 349 F. Supp. 2d 765, 831 (S.D.N.Y. 2005), *aff’d*, 714 F.3d 118 (2d Cir. 2013). Accordingly,
15 “‘fairness requires extra-careful scrutiny of Plaintiff[’s] allegations.’” *Id.*

16 ARGUMENT

17 Two independent legal grounds require dismissal of the Complaint under Federal Rule of
18 Civil Procedure 12(b)(6). *First*, Plaintiff’s claims fall within the heartland of the immunity
19 Congress granted Internet service providers in 47 U.S.C. § 230, for they seek to hold Twitter
20 liable solely because third parties allegedly disseminated harmful content over Twitter’s
21 platform. *Second*, the Complaint fails to plead facts sufficient to establish two essential elements
22 under the Terrorism Civil Remedy provision: (1) that Twitter’s own conduct proximately caused
23 Mr. Fields’ death; and (2) that such conduct constituted an “act of international terrorism.”

24 I. Section 230 Requires Dismissal Of Plaintiff’s Claims

25 Section 230 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, 47 U.S.C. § 230 (“Section 230”),
26 bars any cause of action that attempts to hold a provider of interactive computer services liable
27 for content created by a third party, or for the service provider’s decision to permit, remove, or
28 alter that content. Alleging that Twitter is liable for the attack that killed Mr. Fields because

1 Twitter allowed individuals affiliated with ISIS to disseminate extremist content through
2 Twitter's platform and failed to block or sufficiently censor that content, Plaintiff's claims seek
3 to do precisely that. For this reason, the Complaint must be dismissed in its entirety.

4 **A. Section 230 Immunizes Entities Like Twitter From Civil Liability For**
5 **Content Created By Third-Party Users**

6 Section 230's powerful protection is plain on the face of the statute. It commands that
7 "[n]o provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or
8 speaker of any information provided by another information content provider." 47 U.S.C.
9 § 230(c)(1). As the Ninth Circuit has explained, by its terms this provision "immunizes
10 providers of interactive computer services against liability arising from content created by third
11 parties." *Fair Hous. Council of San Fernando Valley v. Roommates.com, LLC*, 521 F.3d 1157,
12 1162 (9th Cir. 2008) (en banc); *accord Zeran v. Am. Online, Inc.*, 129 F.3d 327, 330 (4th Cir.
13 1997), *cert. denied*, 524 U.S. 937 (1998) ("§ 230 creates a federal immunity to any cause of
14 action that would make service providers liable for information originating with a third-party
15 user of the service.").

16 Of particular relevance here, because Section 230 prohibits claims that would treat
17 providers of interactive computer services as the "publisher" of third-party content, it bars any
18 lawsuit that turns on whether or to what extent a service provider exercised a traditional editorial
19 function with respect to the torrent of third-party information that courses through its networks,
20 including "reviewing, editing, and deciding whether to publish or to withdraw from publication"
21 any content created by users of its service. *Barnes v. Yahoo!, Inc.*, 570 F.3d 1096, 1102 (9th Cir.
22 2009). In other words, "any activity that can be boiled down to deciding whether to exclude
23 material that third parties seek to post online is perforce immune under section 230."
24 *Roommates.com*, 521 F.3d at 1170-1171. Whether that material is unlawfully discriminatory, *id.*
25 at 1173-74, false and defamatory, *Zeran*, 129 F.3d at 330, or an abhorrent and explicit
26 incitement to violence by a terrorist group, *Klayman v. Zuckerberg*, 753 F.3d 1354, 1356-1357
27 (D.C. Cir.), *cert. denied*, 135 S. Ct. 680 (2014), Section 230 immunity attaches "at the earliest
28 possible stage of the case," *Nemet Chevrolet, Ltd. v. Consumeraffairs.com, Inc.*, 591 F.3d 250,

1 255 (4th Cir. 2009). It “protect[s] websites not merely from ultimate liability, but [also] from
2 having to fight costly and protracted legal battles.” *Roommates.com*, 521 F.3d at 1175; *accord*
3 *Nemet Chevrolet*, 591 F.3d at 254 (Section 230 immunity “is an *immunity from suit* rather than a
4 mere defense to liability” (internal quotation marks omitted)).³

5 As the Ninth Circuit has repeatedly recognized, Section 230’s broad grant of immunity
6 serves two important policy goals. *First*, because imposing civil liability on service providers for
7 disseminating harmful third-party content would dramatically chill online expression, Congress
8 enacted Section 230 “to encourage the unfettered and unregulated development of free speech on
9 the Internet.” *Batzel v. Smith*, 333 F.3d 1018, 1027 (9th Cir. 2003); *see also Barnes*, 570 F.3d at
10 1099 (Section 230 is designed “to promote the free exchange of information and ideas over the
11 Internet” (internal quotation marks omitted)); *Zeran*, 129 F.3d at 331 (“The specter of tort
12 liability in an area of such prolific speech would have an obvious chilling effect.”); 47 U.S.C.
13 § 230(b)(2) (preserving the Internet’s “vibrant and competitive free market . . . unfettered by
14 Federal or State regulation” is “the policy of the United States”). When Section 230 was passed,
15 interactive computer services already had “millions of users,” making it “impossible for service
16 providers to screen each of their millions of postings for possible problems.” *Zeran*, 129 F.3d at
17 331. Fearing that service providers would “severely restrict the number and type of messages
18 posted” in the face of such staggering liability, “Congress considered the weight of the speech
19 interests implicated and chose to immunize service providers to avoid any such restrictive
20 effect,” *id.*; *see also Ben Ezra, Weinstein, & Co., Inc. v. Am. Online Inc.*, 206 F.3d 980, 985 n.3
21 (10th Cir. 2000), *cert. denied*, 531 U.S. 824 (2000) (recognizing same). This concern is even
22 more compelling today given the Internet’s exponential growth in the two decades since Section
23 230’s enactment, as well as the previously unimaginable quantity of user-created content that
24 more than a billion Internet users are sharing every minute through every manner of social-media

25 _____
26 ³ Although an affirmative defense, Section 230 immunity “support[s] a motion to dismiss”
27 where, as here, “the statute’s barrier to suit is evident from the face of the complaint.” *Klayman*,
28 753 F.3d at 1357; *see also Barnes*, 570 F.3d at 1105-1106 (affirming, in part, dismissal under
Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6) on Section 230 grounds).

1 platform. Indeed, Twitter users alone send hundreds of millions of Tweets each day. *See*
2 Compl. ¶ 61 (emphasis added). If a service provider like Twitter were potentially subject to
3 liability for every third-party communication, it would face enormous pressure to transform its
4 open platform into a tightly restricted and heavily censored one—or to shut down altogether.⁴

5 *Second*, in enacting Section 230, Congress sought to eliminate disincentives for service
6 providers to self-police their platforms for unlawful and offensive material, out of fear that such
7 action might itself subject them to liability. *Barnes*, 570 F.3d at 1099-1100; *Batzel*, 333 F.3d at
8 1028; *Zeran*, 129 F.3d at 331. “Without the immunity provided in Section 230(c),” interactive
9 computer services that “review material could be found liable for the statements of third parties,
10 yet providers and users that disavow any responsibility would be free from liability.” *Batzel*, 333
11 F.3d at 1029. Congress sought, in other words, “to spare interactive computer services th[e]
12 grim choice” between “taking responsibility for all messages and deleting no messages at all.”
13 *Roommates.com*, 521 F.3d at 1163. Section 230 thus forbids imposing liability for actions taken
14 by a service provider to restrict some, but not all, content. *See* 47 U.S.C. § 230(c). This
15 protection has proved increasingly critical as the number of individuals posting online, and the
16 quantity of content they share and exchange, continues to skyrocket. Indeed, because Twitter
17 cannot screen each of the hundreds of millions of messages sent over its platform each day,
18 Section 230 immunity is essential to Twitter’s practice of reviewing and removing at least some
19 third-party content that violates its prohibition against “threats of violence . . . including

20
21
22 ⁴ When Congress enacted Section 230, this notion—namely that a service provider acting as a
23 conduit for huge quantities of third-party speech should not be held liable for harms stemming
24 from that speech—was already well-established. Although more robust, Section 230 immunity
25 is much like the common-law privilege courts had long afforded telephone companies which, “as
26 far as [third-party] content is concerned, play[] only a passive role.” *Lunney v. Prodigy Servs.*
27 *Co.*, 723 N.E.2d 539, 541-542 (N.Y. 1999) (declining to retroactively apply Section 230, and
28 instead granting summary judgment to Internet service provider based on common-law
privilege); *see also Anderson v. New York Tel. Co.*, 320 N.E.2d 647 (N.Y. 1974) (no liability for
phone company that furnished service to someone who used the connection to play a defamatory
recording to all callers).

1 threatening or promoting terrorism.” *See* Compl. ¶ 65; *see also id.* ¶ 64 (noting that each time
2 Twitter “shuts down an ISIS-linked account,” it faces another popping up in its place).

3 Given the expansive reach of Section 230’s text, as well the important interests at stake,
4 courts across the country “have treated § 230(c) immunity as quite robust.” *Carafano v.*
5 *Metrosplash.com, Inc.*, 339 F.3d 1119, 1123 (9th Cir. 2003); *see also, e.g., Jones v. Dirty World*
6 *Entm’t Recordings LLC*, 755 F.3d 398, 406 (6th Cir. 2014); *Johnson v. Arden*, 614 F.3d 785,
7 791-792 (8th Cir. 2010); *Doe v. MySpace, Inc.*, 528 F.3d 413, 418 (5th Cir. 2008); *Universal*
8 *Comm’n Sys., Inc. v. Lycos, Inc.*, 478 F.3d 413, 415 (1st Cir. 2007); *Almeida v. Amazon.com,*
9 *Inc.*, 456 F.3d 1316, 1321 (11th Cir. 2006); *Green v. Am. Online (AOL)*, 318 F.3d 465, 471 (3d
10 Cir. 2003); *Ben Ezra*, 206 F.3d at 984-986; *Zeran*, 129 F.3d at 330-331; *Shiamili v. Real Estate*
11 *Grp. of New York, Inc.*, 952 N.E.2d 1011, 1016 (N.Y. 2011); *Barrett v. Rosenthal*, 146 P.3d 510,
12 518 (Cal. 2006); *Doe v. Am. Online, Inc.*, 783 So. 2d 1010, 1013 (Fla. 2001).

13 Congress, for its part, has endorsed this approach more than once. In 2002, when
14 Congress established a new “kids.us” subdomain dedicated to content deemed safe for minors,
15 *see* 47 U.S.C. § 941, it expressly extended Section 230 immunity to providers of interactive
16 computer services operating in the new domain, *see id.* § 941(e)(1). Invoking the Fourth
17 Circuit’s decision in *Zeran* and the Tenth Circuit’s opinion in *Ben Ezra*, the committee report
18 recognized that “[t]he courts have correctly interpreted section 230(c),” and stated that “[t]he
19 Committee intends these interpretations of section 230(c) to be equally applicable to those
20 entities covered by [the new statute].” H.R. Rep. No. 107-449, at 13 (2002). More recently, in
21 the 2010 SPEECH Act, Congress again expanded the application of Section 230 immunity, this
22 time announcing that U.S. courts “shall not recognize or enforce a foreign judgment for
23 defamation” unless the judgment “would be consistent with section 230.” 28 U.S.C.
24 § 4102(c)(1); *see also Jones*, 755 F.3d at 408 (explaining that “[t]he protection provided by
25 § 230 has been understood to merit expansion”). In no uncertain terms, then, Congress has
26 declared that service providers like Twitter are protected against any cause of action arising from
27 third-party content, including in their exercise of traditional editorial functions, “such as deciding
28

1 whether to publish, withdraw, postpone, or alter content.” *Zeran*, 129 F.3d at 330. Section 230
2 thus applies with full force here.

3 **B. Section 230 Immunizes Twitter Against Plaintiff’s Claims**

4 Section 230 mandates dismissal when (1) the defendant is a “provider . . . of an
5 interactive computer service”; (2) the allegedly harmful content at issue was “provided by
6 another information content provider,” and not the defendant; and (3) the plaintiff is seeking to
7 hold the defendant liable as a “publisher or speaker” of that content. 47 U.S.C. § 230(c)(1); *see*
8 *also Klayman*, 753 F.3d at 1357; *Barnes*, 570 F.3d at 1100-1101. Each of these elements is
9 satisfied here.

10 **1. Twitter Is A Provider Of An Interactive Computer Service**

11 Under Section 230, an “interactive computer service” includes “any information service,
12 system, or access software provider that provides or enables computer access by multiple users
13 to a computer server.” 47 U.S.C. § 230(f)(2). Twitter’s open Internet platform plainly satisfies
14 this broad definition because users around the world access Twitter’s servers in order to send
15 messages and share information with others. *See* Compl. ¶ 1 (describing Twitter’s platform as a
16 “social network”); *Cont’l Advisors S.A. v. GSV Asset Mgmt., LLC*, No. 14-cv-05609-YGR, 2015
17 WL 7720752, at *2 (N.D. Cal. Nov. 30, 2015) (Twitter is “an online social network that
18 facilitates the transmission of 140-character limited ‘tweets’”). In fact, given Congress’s goal in
19 enacting Section 230—“to encourage the unfettered and unregulated development of free speech
20 on the Internet,” *Batzel*, 333 F.3d at 1027—Twitter is the very exemplar of an “interactive
21 computer service” that Congress sought to protect.

22 **2. The Allegedly Harmful Content Was Provided By A Third-Party 23 User, And Not By Twitter**

24 Section 230 defines an “information content provider” as “any person or entity that is
25 responsible, in whole or in part, for the creation or development” of the objectionable material at
26 issue. 47 U.S.C. § 230(f)(3). There is no allegation here that Twitter had any hand in the
27 “creation or development” of any of the ISIS-related content that forms the basis of Plaintiff’s
28 claims. To the contrary, the Complaint alleges that all of the objectionable material was created

1 and posted by third-party users—namely persons associated with, or inspired by, “the terrorist
2 group ISIS.” Compl. ¶ 1; *see also, e.g., id.* ¶¶ 2-5, 16, 25, 30. Because all of the allegedly
3 harmful content at issue was “provided by another information content provider,” 47 U.S.C.
4 § 230(c)(1), it falls squarely within the scope of Section 230 immunity.

5 This is true even though Twitter offers its users neutral tools to create, promote, and
6 discover online content. For example, Twitter users can include hashtagged keywords (#) in
7 their Tweets to promote their message to other users interested in the same topic, and to facilitate
8 searching for information on the keyword topic. *E.g.*, Compl. ¶¶ 35, 39, 41. “[P]roviding
9 *neutral* tools to carry out what may be unlawful or illicit searches,” however, does not overcome
10 Section 230 immunity. *Roommates.com*, 521 F.3d at 1169. Indeed, “absent substantial
11 affirmative conduct on the part of the website creator promoting the use of such tools for
12 unlawful purposes,” the provision of neutral tools “is fully protected by CDA immunity.” *Id.* at
13 1174 n.37; *see also Goddard v. Google, Inc.*, 640 F. Supp. 2d 1193, 1198 (N.D. Cal. 2009)
14 (“[T]he provision of neutral tools generally will not affect the availability of CDA immunity[.]”)

15 Section 230 immunity also attaches whether or not Twitter knew of the objectionable
16 content at issue. To be sure, the Complaint nowhere alleges that Twitter employees knew of any
17 *specific* unlawful account or message and yet failed to block it. But even if it did, such an
18 allegation would be irrelevant. “It is, by now, well established that notice of the unlawful nature
19 of the information provided is not enough to make it the service provider’s own speech.”
20 *Universal Comm’n Sys., Inc. v. Lycos, Inc.*, 478 F.3d 413, 420 (1st Cir. 2007). After all, notice-
21 based liability “would defeat the dual purposes advanced by § 230 of the CDA,” *Zeran*, 129 F.3d
22 at 333, “discourag[ing] active monitoring of Internet postings,” and “allow[ing] complaining
23 parties to impose substantial burdens on the freedom of Internet speech by lodging complaints
24 whenever they were displeased by an online posting,” *Barrett v. Rosenthal*, 146 P.3d 510, 525
25 (Cal. 2006). Section 230’s protections thus apply “even after notice of the potentially unlawful
26 nature of the third-party content.” *Lycos*, 478 F.3d at 420; *accord Roommates.com*, 521 F.3d at
27 1169 n.24 (although Section 230 does not immunize a service provider’s own “acts that are
28

1 unlawful,” it does protect against lawsuits based on “passive acquiescence in the misconduct of
2 [third-party] users”).

3 **3. Plaintiff Seeks To Hold Twitter Liable As The Publisher Or Speaker**
4 **Of Allegedly Harmful Content**

5 Finally, Plaintiff’s claims attempt to hold Twitter liable as the “publisher or speaker” of
6 the content allegedly created by ISIS and its followers. The Complaint explicitly alleges that
7 Twitter is liable for the attack that killed Plaintiff’s husband because Twitter “knowingly
8 *permitted*” ISIS to use its platform to spread propaganda, raise funds, and recruit followers,
9 Compl. ¶ 1 (emphasis added), and because Twitter failed to take “meaningful action to stop it”
10 by “censor[ing] user content,” “shut[ting] down . . . ISIS-linked account[s],” or blocking ISIS-
11 related accounts from “springing right back up,” *id.* ¶¶ 43, 61, 64. This is “precisely the kind of
12 activity for which Congress intended to grant absolution with the passage of section 230.”
13 *Roommates.com*, 521 F.3d at 1171-1172 (rejecting effort to hold service provider liable for
14 “failing to detect and remove” unlawful content).

15 As the D.C. Circuit recently recognized in a closely analogous case, “the very essence of
16 publishing is making the decision whether to print or retract a given piece of content.” *Klayman*,
17 753 F.3d at 1359. Relying on Section 230, the D.C. Circuit thus rejected a plaintiff’s attempt to
18 hold social-networking website Facebook liable for “allowing . . . Third Intifada pages”—which
19 “called for Muslims to rise up and kill the Jewish people”—“to exist on its website,” *id.* at 1355,
20 1359, and for “‘refus[ing]’ to ‘take down the page[s],’” *id.* at 1358 (quoting complaint). Every
21 other court of appeals to weigh in, including the Ninth Circuit, has likewise rejected attempts to
22 hold service providers liable for deciding whether or how to engage in such publishing conduct.
23 *See Barnes*, 570 F.3d at 1103 (“removing content is something publishers do, and to impose
24 liability on the basis of such conduct necessarily involves treating the liable party as a publisher
25 of the content it failed to remove”); *Jones*, 755 F.3d at 416 (service provider’s “decision not to
26 remove” content is a traditional editorial function protected by Section 230); *MySpace*, 528 F.3d
27 at 420 (Section 230 insulates service providers’ “decisions relating to the monitoring, screening,
28 and deletion of content” (internal quotation marks omitted)); *Zeran*, 129 F.3d at 328 (CDA

1 immunity applies even if service provider “unreasonably delayed in removing defamatory
2 messages posted by an unidentified third party, refused to post retractions of those messages, and
3 failed to screen for similar postings thereafter”).

4 The result should be no different here. As the Ninth Circuit has explained, regardless of
5 how a litigant may label a claim or attempt to recast a complaint’s allegations, “what matters is
6 whether the cause of action inherently requires the court to treat the defendant as the ‘publisher
7 or speaker’ of content provided by another.” *Barnes*, 570 F.3d at 1101-1102; *see also id.* at
8 1102-1103 (“a plaintiff cannot sue someone for publishing third-party content simply by
9 changing the name of the theory” or by placing a different label on “an action that is
10 quintessentially that of a publisher”). Here, then, Plaintiff cannot skirt the CDA’s protections by
11 invoking a novel cause of action or styling Twitter’s editorial conduct as “material support” for
12 terrorists or terrorism. Compl. ¶¶ 80, 84. Courts have consistently rejected such efforts to
13 artfully plead around Section 230, *see, e.g., Barnes*, 570 F.3d at 1102-1103; *MySpace*, 528 F.3d
14 at 419-420; *Goddard v. Google, Inc.*, No. C 08-2738JF(PVT), 2008 WL 5245490, at *4-5 (N.D.
15 Cal. Dec. 17, 2008), and in any event, the face of the Complaint forecloses that approach in this
16 case. By its terms, the Complaint seeks to hold Twitter liable for the attack that killed Plaintiff’s
17 husband on the grounds that Twitter “knowingly permitted” ISIS to transmit extremist material
18 through Twitter’s platform, and failed to “actively monitor” users’ speech, adequately “censor
19 user content,” and appropriately “shut down clear incitements to violence.” Compl. ¶¶ 1, 55, 61;
20 *see also id.* ¶ 64 (“Even when Twitter shuts down an ISIS-linked account, it does nothing to stop
21 it from springing right back up.”). Whatever theory or label Plaintiff invokes, “such conduct is
22 *publishing conduct*,” and “[S]ection 230 protects from liability ‘any activity that can be boiled
23 down to deciding whether to exclude material that third parties seek to post online.” *Barnes*, 570
24 F.3d at 1103 (quoting *Roommates.com*, 521 F.3d at 1170-1171).

25 **C. Section 230’s Exception For Federal Criminal Prosecutions Is Inapplicable**
26 **Here**

27 Plaintiff may try to evade Section 230’s broad immunity by attempting to shoehorn this
28 civil suit into the statute’s exception for “enforcement” of “any ... Federal criminal statute.” 47

1 U.S.C. § 230(e)(1). Entitled “No effect on criminal law,” that exception provides as follows:

2 Nothing in [Section 230] shall be construed to impair the enforcement of section
3 223 or 231 of this title, chapter 71 (relating to obscenity) or 110 (relating to sexual
4 exploitation of children) of Title 18, or any other Federal criminal statute.

5 *Id.* Plaintiff may try to argue that her civil claims brought under 18 U.S.C. § 2333(a) fall within
6 this exception because they purport to be based on alleged violations of two provisions of Title
7 18, namely sections 2339A and 2339B. *See* Compl. ¶¶ 82, 86. But there would be no merit to
8 any such argument. As courts deciding this issue have uniformly recognized, the plain language
9 of Section 230’s criminal-law exception, as well as the unequivocal policy goals set forth in the
10 preamble to Section 230, make clear that subsection 230(e)(1) creates only a narrow exception
11 for the prosecution of federal crimes by government authorities, not a gaping loophole for private
12 civil actions.

13 By its terms, subsection 230(e)(1) is limited to the *enforcement* of federal *criminal* law.
14 The very use of the word “criminal” demonstrates that the provision exempts only criminal
15 prosecutions, and not private civil claims. As courts have explained in rejecting similar attempts
16 to bypass Section 230 immunity, the definition of “criminal” “specifically excludes and is
17 distinguished from civil claims.” *Doe v. Bates*, No. 5:05-CV-91-DF-CMC, 2006 WL 3813758,
18 at *21 (E.D. Tex. Dec. 27, 2006) (citing *Black’s Law Dictionary* 262, 302 (8th ed. 2004);
19 *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* 430 (4th ed. 2000)). While “criminal
20 law” concerns ““offenses against the community at large,” “[c]ivil law is [t]he law of civil or
21 private rights, *as opposed to criminal law* or administrative law.”” *M.A. ex rel. P.K. v. Vill.*
22 *Voice Media Holdings, LLC*, 809 F. Supp. 2d 1041, 1055 (E.D. Mo. 2011) (quoting *Black’s Law*
23 *Dictionary* 280, 431 (9th ed. 2009) (emphasis added)); *see also Doe ex rel. Roe v.*
24 *Backpage.com, LLC*, 104 F. Supp. 3d 149, 159 (D. Mass. 2015) (“The term ‘criminal’ is defined
25 as [c]onnected with the administration of penal justice.” (quoting *Bates*, 2006 WL 3813758, at
26 *21)). Thus, the plain meaning of an exception for enforcement of “criminal” laws does not
27 encompass civil claims.
28

1 Congress’s use of the word “enforcement” likewise indicates that subsection 230(e)(1)
2 applies to criminal prosecutions only. Beyond the common-sense understanding that
3 “enforcement” in the context of “criminal law” refers to government action by law *enforcement*
4 officials, Congress consistently used the term “enforcement” throughout Section 230 to refer to
5 government action—not to the claims of private litigants. Section 230’s preamble states that it is
6 the “policy of the United States” to “ensure vigorous *enforcement* of Federal criminal laws to
7 *deter and punish* trafficking in obscenity, stalking, and harassment by means of computer.”
8 47 U.S.C. § 230(b)(5) (emphasis added). This usage of “enforcement” in conjunction with
9 “Federal criminal laws,” “deter,” and “punish” plainly connotes criminal prosecutions and
10 penalties. Similarly, subsection 230(e)(3) uses the word “enforcing” to refer solely to
11 governmental action, providing that the substantive immunities of Section 230 do not “prevent
12 any *State* from *enforcing* any State law that is consistent with” Section 230. (emphasis added).

13 Section 230’s structure further reinforces the conclusion that subsection 230(e)(1) is
14 limited to criminal prosecutions. The contrary reading—that subsection 230(e)(1) also
15 encompasses private civil claims that somehow derive from federal criminal statutes—would
16 render superfluous Section 230’s separate exception for the Electronic Communications Privacy
17 Act (“ECPA”). ECPA establishes both crimes, *e.g.*, 18 U.S.C. § 2511, and private civil remedies
18 for violations of ECPA, *see* 18 U.S.C. §§ 2520, 2707. And Section 230’s ECPA exception
19 reaches both types of claims, permitting criminal prosecutions *and* private civil causes of action
20 pursuant to ECPA. *See id.* § 230(e)(4). If subsection 230(e)(1) already encompassed civil
21 claims predicated on federal criminal statutes, the ECPA exception would be entirely redundant.
22 Because one provision of a statute should not be interpreted in a way that renders another
23 provision superfluous, *see Freytag v. C.I.R.*, 501 U.S. 868, 877 (1991), the (e)(1) exception must
24 be read as limited to federal criminal prosecutions, leaving the (e)(4) exception to have practical
25 effect for *civil* ECPA claims.

26 Finally, limiting subsection 230(e)(1) to criminal prosecutions comports with Section
27 230’s critical policy goals. As the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas explained
28 in *Bates*, construing the exception to permit civil actions predicated on federal criminal statutes

1 would usher in the “obvious chilling effect” Congress sought to avoid in establishing Section
2 230 immunity in the first place. 2006 WL 3813758, at *4 (quoting *Zeran*, 129 F.3d at 331). If
3 private civil actions were permitted, “the incentive to bring a civil claim for the settlement value
4 could be immense, even if a plaintiff’s claim w[ere] without merit,” because “the service
5 provider would face intense public scrutiny and substantial expense.” *Backpage.com*,
6 104 F. Supp. 3d at 160 (quoting *Bates*, 2006 WL 3813758, at *22). The Supreme Court
7 recognized this reality more than a half century ago in *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan*. Under
8 civil liability regimes, the Court explained, “[t]he fear of damage awards . . . may be markedly
9 more inhibiting than the fear of prosecution under a criminal statute.” 376 U.S. 254, 277 (1964).
10 While an individual or a company charged with a crime “enjoys ordinary criminal-law
11 safeguards such as the requirements of an indictment and of proof beyond a reasonable doubt,”
12 such “safeguards are not available to the defendant in a civil action.” *Id.* Judgments awarded in
13 civil actions may also be dramatically greater than any applicable criminal fine. *Id.* And
14 because double-jeopardy protections do not apply to civil suits, service providers may face
15 multiple rounds of litigations, along with multiple judgment awards, for the same publication.
16 *Id.* at 278. Whether or not a publisher “can survive a succession of such judgments,” the Court
17 warned, “the pall of fear and timidity imposed upon those who would give voice to public
18 criticism is an atmosphere in which the First Amendment freedoms cannot survive.” *Id.*
19 Congress understood as much when it enacted Section 230, declaring in the statute’s preamble
20 that it is “the policy of the United States” to preserve the Internet’s “vibrant and competitive free
21 market . . . unfettered by Federal or State regulation.” See 47 U.S.C. § 230(b)(2). And Congress
22 carefully crafted subsection 230(e)(1) with this lesson in mind, providing only a narrow
23 exception for federal criminal prosecutions.⁵

24 ⁵ Beyond robust procedural protections, the “filter of prosecutorial discretion” provides an
25 additional safeguard in a criminal prosecution that is missing in a civil suit. *Backpage.com*, 104
26 F. Supp. 3d at 161. Federal prosecutors have a duty “to support th[e] Constitution,” requiring
27 that they bear in mind the First Amendment interests at stake in any prosecution of an Internet
28 service provider. See U.S. Const. art. VI. Private litigants, by contrast, are often motivated by
the prospect of a lucrative judgment or settlement, and are thus more likely to be indifferent to

1 Given subsection 230(e)(1)'s clear language and Section 230's speech-protective
2 purpose, it is unsurprising that every court to decide the question has concluded that Section
3 230's criminal-law exception does not encompass private civil suits that purport to be based on
4 federal criminal statutes. *See Backpage.com*, 104 F. Supp. 3d at 160 (“Congress decided not to
5 allow private litigants to bring civil claims based on their own beliefs that a service provider’s
6 actions violated the criminal laws.”); *Hinton v. Amazon.com.dedc, LLC*, 72 F. Supp. 3d 685, 691
7 (S.D. Miss. 2014) (same); *Obado v. Magedson*, No. CIV. 13-2382 JAP, 2014 WL 3778261, at
8 *8 (D.N.J. July 31, 2014) *aff’d*, 612 F. App’x 90 (3d Cir. 2015) (same); *Vill. Voice Media*
9 *Holdings*, 809 F. Supp. 2d at 1055 (same); *Dart v. Craigslist, Inc.*, 665 F. Supp. 2d 961, 965 n.6
10 (N.D. Ill. 2009) (same); *Bates*, 2006 WL 3813758, at *22 (same); *GoDaddy.com, LLC v. Toups*,
11 429 S.W.3d 752, 760 (Tex. App. 2014) (same). There is no basis for this Court to deviate from
12 the overwhelming weight of this authority. Because Plaintiff’s claims do not fall within any
13 other exception, Section 230 requires that the Complaint be dismissed in its entirety.

14 **II. The Complaint Fails To State A Claim Under The Terrorism Civil Remedy** 15 **Provision**

16 The Complaint also must be dismissed for a second reason: It fails to state a claim for
17 relief under the Terrorism Civil Remedy provision, which is the sole legal basis for both counts
18 of the Complaint. This provision creates a private cause of action for “[a]ny national of the
19 United States injured in his or her person, property, or business by reason of an act of
20 international terrorism.” 18 U.S.C. § 2333(a). By its plain terms, this provision requires a
21 plaintiff to plead and prove (1) that he or she was injured “by reason of”—i.e., that the injury
22 was proximately caused by—(2) an “act of international terrorism” committed by the defendant.
23 Because the Complaint fails to allege facts sufficient to plausibly establish either of these two
24 essential elements, it must be dismissed.

25 the First Amendment implications of their lawsuit. The absence of prosecutorial discretion is
26 thus another reason “Congress decided not to allow private litigants to bring civil claims based
27 on their own beliefs that a service provider’s actions violated the criminal laws.”
28 *Backpage.com*, 104 F. Supp. 3d at 160.

1 **A. The Complaint Fails To Allege Facts Plausibly Establishing That Twitter**
2 **Proximately Caused Mr. Fields' Death**

3 The Terrorism Civil Remedy provision's "by reason of" language ... restricts the
4 imposition of ... liability [under the statute] to situations where plaintiffs plausibly allege that
5 defendant's actions proximately caused their injuries." *In re Terrorist Attacks on Sept. 11, 2001*,
6 (*O'Neill v. Al Rajhi Bank*), 714 F.3d 118, 123-124 (2d Cir. 2013) (affirming a Rule 12(b)(6)
7 dismissal for failure to plausibly allege proximate cause); *Rothstein v. UBS AG*, 708 F.3d 82, 95-
8 97 (2d Cir. 2013) (same). Congress borrowed this proximate-cause requirement from the civil
9 remedy provisions of the federal antitrust and anti-racketeering laws, which likewise require a
10 plaintiff to show that her injury was caused "by reason of" the unlawful predicate act the
11 defendant allegedly committed. *See Rothstein*, 708 F.3d at 95. To satisfy that requirement, a
12 plaintiff must show "some *direct relation* between the injury asserted and the injurious conduct
13 alleged." *Holmes v. Securities Investor Protection Corp.*, 503 U.S. 258, 268 (1992) (emphasis
14 added) (discussing "by reason of" requirement in the context of a civil RICO claim). The
15 "central question" in evaluating proximate cause, in other words, is "whether the alleged
16 violation *led directly* to the plaintiff's injuries." *Anza v. Ideal Steel Supply Corp.*, 547 U.S. 451,
17 461 (2006) (emphasis added) (same). A "theory of causation" that "stretche[s] the causal chain"
18 linking defendant's alleged conduct to plaintiff's injury "well beyond the first step" cannot
19 satisfy this "direct relationship requirement." *Hemi Group, LLC v. City of New York, N.Y.*, 559
20 U.S. 1, 10-11 (2010) (same).⁶

21 _____
22 ⁶ Although the Seventh Circuit has held that "the requirement of proving causation is relaxed"
23 under the Terrorism Civil Remedy provision, *Boim v. Holy Land Foundation for Relief and*
24 *Development*, 549 F.3d 685, 697 (7th Cir. 2008) (en banc), that construction ignored the
25 language Congress chose in crafting the statute. As the Second Circuit later explained in
26 *Rothstein*, by the time Congress enacted the Terrorism Civil Remedy provision, its "by reason
27 of" language already had a "well-understood meaning"—and that meaning does not "permit
28 recovery on a showing of less than proximate cause, as the term is ordinarily used." 708 F.3d at
95; *see also Holmes*, 503 U.S. at 267 (explaining that the Supreme Court and "many lower
federal courts ... before [it]" had long construed "by reason of" to require proof of proximate
cause).

1 The Complaint’s allegations fall far short of this requirement. Mr. Fields’ death is
2 heartrending, and the attack that killed him is appalling. But nothing that Twitter allegedly did
3 can plausibly be said to have “led directly” to that horrible crime. The Complaint’s “conclusory”
4 assertion that Twitter’s alleged “provision of material support to ISIS was a proximate cause of
5 the injury inflicted on Plaintiff” (¶¶ 81, 85) is “not entitled to be assumed true,” and so cannot
6 establish a plausible claim for relief. *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 681 (2009); *see also Bell*
7 *Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 545 (2007) (“a formulaic recitation of a cause of action’s
8 elements will not do”). And the Complaint’s “factual content” posits a causal chain that is far
9 too attenuated to satisfy the statute’s direct-relationship requirement. *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678.

10 The Complaint does not allege that ISIS recruited Mr. Fields’ attacker, Abu Zaid, through
11 communications via Twitter’s platform. Nor does it allege that Abu Zaid or ISIS used the
12 Twitter platform to plan, carry out, or raise money for that attack. It does not even allege that
13 Abu Zaid had a Twitter account or ever accessed the Twitter platform. And certainly the
14 Complaint does not say that Twitter knew of any Tweets or other messages that were in any way
15 connected to the attack and declined to remove or block them.

16 Moreover, the Complaint barely connects Abu Zaid to ISIS. Although ISIS allegedly
17 claimed credit for the attack, even that statement described Abu Zaid as a “lone wolf”—i.e., a
18 terrorist who acted independently. Compl. ¶ 73; *see also id.* ¶ 74. The Complaint does not
19 allege that ISIS helped Abu Zaid plan the attack or that ISIS provided Abu Zaid with weapons or
20 funds. The sole link drawn between Abu Zaid and ISIS is the assertion that Abu Zaid’s brother
21 “told reporters that Abu Zaid had been very moved by ISIS’s brutal execution of Jordanian pilot
22 Maaz al-Kassasbeh in February 2015.” *Id.* ¶ 77.

23 Rather than allege any facts that would connect Twitter directly to the attack, the
24 Complaint piles speculation upon speculation: (1) Twitter allegedly committed an “act of
25 international terrorism” because Twitter allegedly “knowingly permitted” ISIS to post content on
26 Twitter’s platform (Compl. ¶¶ 1, 9), and because Twitter allegedly failed to take “meaningful
27 action to stop” ISIS by “censor[ing] user content,” “shut[ting] down . . . ISIS-linked account[s],”
28 or blocking ISIS-related accounts from “springing right back up” (*id.* ¶¶ 43, 61, 64). (2) These

1 failures allegedly permitted ISIS to send, via Twitter’s platform, messages designed to recruit
2 new members (*id.* ¶¶ 16-24), raise money (*id.* ¶¶ 25-29), and spread propaganda (*id.* ¶¶ 30-42).
3 (3) Recipients of those messages allegedly responded by joining ISIS and contributing funds. *Id.*
4 ¶¶ 23, 24, 27, 29. (4) These recruits, funds, and publicity allegedly helped ISIS grow into a
5 larger terrorist organization. *Id.* ¶¶ 1-2. (5) Having grown, ISIS brutally executed Jordanian
6 pilot Maaz al-Kassasbeh in February 2015. *Id.* ¶ 77. (6) And that execution allegedly inspired
7 Abu Zaid to become a “lone wolf” terrorist and to carry out the attack that killed Mr. Fields. *Id.*
8 ¶¶ 71, 73, 74, 77.

9 This theory of causation is breathtakingly broad and remarkably attenuated. It would
10 potentially expose every Internet service provider to liability for horrible crimes committed
11 anywhere in the world, not only by their users but even by individuals who were loosely
12 affiliated with or even just inspired by those users. A theory that “stretche[s] the causal chain”
13 this far “beyond the first step” plainly cannot satisfy the statute’s “direct relationship
14 requirement.” *Hemi Group*, 559 U.S. at 10-11. The Complaint must therefore be dismissed for
15 failure to plead facts sufficient to plausibly establish that Twitter proximately caused Plaintiff’s
16 injury.

17 **B. The Complaint Fails To Allege Facts Plausibly Establishing That Twitter**
18 **Committed An “Act Of International Terrorism”**

19 Even if the Complaint somehow satisfied the Terrorism Civil Remedy provision’s
20 proximate cause requirement, it would still have to be dismissed for failing to state a claim under
21 the statute because the Complaint’s “factual content” does not “plausibly suggest” that Twitter
22 committed an “act of international terrorism.” *See Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 683. The Terrorism Civil
23 Remedy provision requires Plaintiff to demonstrate that Twitter’s own conduct amounted to an
24 “act of international terrorism.” 18 U.S.C. § 2333(a).⁷ “International terrorism” is a defined
25 term within chapter 113B of Title 18. *See* 18 U.S.C. § 2331(1); *see also Boim v. Holy Land*

26 _____
27 ⁷ *See also Rothstein*, 708 F.3d at 97-98 (the Terrorism Civil Remedy provision creates only
28 primary, not secondary, liability); *Boim*, 549 F.3d at 688-690 (same).

1 *Foundation for Relief and Development*, 549 F.3d 685, 690 (7th Cir. 2008) (en banc) (the
2 “statutory definition of ‘international terrorism’” is the “first link in the chain” of “explicit
3 statutory incorporations” that delineates the plaintiff’s burden). Under that definition, Plaintiff
4 must allege facts establishing three separate elements. *First*, Twitter’s conduct must “involve
5 violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United
6 States or of any State.” 18 U.S.C. § 2331(1)(A). *Second*, Twitter’s conduct must “appear to be
7 intended” to achieve a terrorism purpose—i.e., “to intimidate or coerce a civilian population,”
8 “to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion,” or “to affect the conduct
9 of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping.” *Id.* § 2331(1)(B). *Third*,
10 Twitter’s conduct must have an international nexus. *Id.* § 2331(1)(C). Plaintiff’s theory is
11 apparently that making available a service that is used by a terrorist organization always
12 constitutes providing “material support” to that organization, and that such “material support” is
13 always “dangerous to human life,” regardless of the nature of the service or how far removed it
14 may be from actual terrorist acts. Even if Plaintiff’s theory were correct and the Complaint
15 could therefore satisfy the first and third elements, the Complaint clearly does not allege facts
16 sufficient to plausibly satisfy the second element: even as alleged, Twitter’s conduct does not
17 objectively “appear to [have been] intended” to achieve a terrorism purpose.

18 The Terrorism Civil Remedy provision’s objective intent requirement is essential “to
19 distinguish terrorist acts from other violent crimes.” *Boim*, 549 F.3d at 694. It measures
20 “external appearance rather than subjective intent.” *Id.* The question is thus whether the
21 “allegation[s] [in the Complaint] would ... lead an objective observer to conclude [Twitter]
22 intended to [‘intimidate or coerce a civilian population,’ ‘to influence the policy of a government
23 by intimidation or coercion,’ or ‘to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction,
24 assassination, or kidnapping’].” *Stansell v. BGP, Inc.*, 2011 WL 1296881, *9 (M.D. Fla. Mar.,
25 31, 2011).

26 Courts have concluded that such intent is lacking where, as here, a defendant openly
27 offers a general service to all-comers. In *Boim*, for example, the Seventh Circuit observed that
28 the Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders, and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for

1 Palestine Refugees in the Near East “provide [medical and refugee] assistance without regard to
2 the circumstances giving rise to the need for it.” *Boim*, 549 F.3d at 699. Although those
3 organizations “might know in advance” that while aiding all in need they will “provid[e] ...
4 assistance to [individual] terrorists,” an objective observer would conclude that providing such
5 aid was intended to achieve a humanitarian, not a terrorism purpose. *Id.* Likewise, in *Burnett v.*
6 *Al Baraka Investment & Development Corporation*, the court dismissed the complaint under
7 Rule 12(b)(6) because the complaint relied on the mistaken “proposition that a bank is liable for
8 injuries done with money that passes through its hands in the form of deposits, withdrawals,
9 check clearing services, or any other routine banking service.” *In re Terrorist Attacks on Sept.*
10 *11, 2001 (Burnett v. Al Baraka Inv. & Dev. Corp.)*, 349 F. Supp. 2d 765, 832 (S.D.N.Y. 2005)
11 (quotation marks omitted), *aff’d*, 714 F.3d 118 (2d Cir. 2013). An objective observer of these
12 service providers would conclude that their sole aim is to offer beneficial services to the public
13 at-large, not that they intend to promote terrorism.⁸

14 That reasoning fully applies here. Like the aid organizations discussed in *Boim* or the
15 bank in *Burnett*, Twitter opens its service to virtually everyone. The neutral tools allegedly used
16 by persons affiliated with ISIS were available to anyone with a Twitter account. *E.g.*, Compl. ¶ 3
17 (posting Tweets to followers); *id.* ¶ 42 (using hashtags). The Complaint nowhere asserts that
18 Twitter provided a specialized service specifically to ISIS. An objective observer confronted
19 with these allegations would conclude that Twitter’s aim has been exactly what Twitter founder
20 Biz Stone described: “creat[ion] [of] a platform that allows for freedom of expression for
21 hundreds of millions of people around the world.” *Id.* ¶ 60. No reasonable observer could
22

23 ⁸ Even where the alleged “material support” was targeted specifically to a terrorist organization,
24 rather than incidentally made available to that organization in the course of providing an
25 undifferentiated service to many millions of users (as in the present case), courts have concluded
26 that the requisite terrorism intent is lacking when the context “would ... lead an objective
27 observer to conclude” that the defendant sought to achieve some other objective. *Stansell*, 2011
28 WL 1296881, *9 (granting Rule 12(b)(6) dismissal to defendants who allegedly paid more than
800 million Colombian pesos to a designated terrorist organization not to promote terrorism, but
so that they could “conduct [their] oil exploration activities without fear of terrorist acts”).

1 conclude that Twitter’s worldwide deployment and operation of its communications platform
2 was intended “to intimidate or coerce a civilian population,” “to influence the policy of a
3 government by intimidation or coercion,” or “to affect the conduct of a government by mass
4 destruction, assassination, or kidnapping.” 18 U.S.C. § 2331(1)(B). The facts pled in the
5 Complaint are thus insufficient to plausibly establish that Twitter committed “an act of
6 international terrorism,” and the Complaint must accordingly be dismissed.

7 **CONCLUSION**

8 For the foregoing reasons, the Complaint should be dismissed with prejudice in its
9 entirety.

10 Dated: March 10, 2016

11 Respectfully submitted,

12 /s/ Seth P. Waxman

13 SETH P. WAXMAN (admitted *pro hac vice*)

14 seth.waxman@wilmerhale.com

15 PATRICK J. CAROME (admitted *pro hac vice*)

16 patrick.carome@wilmerhale.com

17 WILMER CUTLER PICKERING

18 HALE AND DORR LLP

19 1875 Pennsylvania Avenue

20 Washington, D.C. 20006

21 Telephone: (202) 663-6800

22 Facsimile: (202) 663-6363

23 MARK D. FLANAGAN (CA SBN 130303)

24 mark.flanagan@wilmerhale.com

25 WILMER CUTLER PICKERING

26 HALE AND DORR LLP

27 950 Page Mill Road

28 Palo Alto, California 94304

Telephone: (650) 858-6000

Facsimile: (650) 858-6100

Attorneys for Defendant
TWITTER, INC.

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on March 10, 2016, I electronically filed the above document with the Clerk of the Court using CM/ECF which will send electronic notification of such filing to all registered counsel.

By: /s/ Seth P. Waxman
Seth P. Waxman

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1 SETH P. WAXMAN (admitted *pro hac vice*)
seth.waxman@wilmerhale.com
2 PATRICK J. CAROME (admitted *pro hac vice*)
patrick.carome@wilmerhale.com
3 WILMER CUTLER PICKERING
4 HALE AND DORR LLP
1875 Pennsylvania Avenue
5 Washington, D.C. 20006
Telephone: (202) 663-6800
6 Facsimile: (202) 663-6363

MARK D. FLANAGAN (CA SBN 130303)
mark.flanagan@wilmerhale.com
WILMER CUTLER PICKERING
HALE AND DORR LLP
950 Page Mill Road
Palo Alto, California 94304
Telephone: (650) 858-6000
Facsimile: (650) 858-6100

7 *Attorneys for Defendant*
8 **TWITTER, INC.**

9
10 **UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT**
11 **NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA, SAN FRANCISCO DIVISION**

12 TAMARA FIELDS, on behalf of herself, as a
13 representative of the ESTATE OF LLOYD
14 FIELDS, JR.,

15 Plaintiff,

16 v.

17 TWITTER, INC.,

18 Defendant.
19

Case No. 3:16-cv-00213-WHO

**[PROPOSED] ORDER GRANTING
MOTION TO DISMISS**

Date: April 20, 2016

Time: 2:00 p.m.

Courtroom: 2, 17th Floor

Judge: Hon. William H. Orrick

20
21 Before this Court is Defendant Twitter, Inc.’s Motion to Dismiss Plaintiff’s Complaint
22 pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6). On considering the briefs filed in support
23 and opposition thereto, and all other papers on file herein, Defendant’s Motion is hereby
24 GRANTED and Plaintiff’s Complaint is DISMISSED in its entirety WITH PREJUDICE.

25 **IT IS SO ORDERED.**

26 Dated: _____

27 _____
WILLIAM H. ORRICK
28 United States District Judge