

FBI Contractor Created Fake Online IDs to Join Chatrooms Run by Groups Organizing Against Vaccine Mandates

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An [FBI surveillance contractor](#) infiltrated the chatrooms of two airline industry groups opposed to vaccine mandates to collect intelligence on the groups' organizing activities, investigative journalist Lee Fang reported.

The contractor, [Flashpoint](#), which in the past infiltrated Islamic terror groups, now focuses on "anti-vaccine" groups and other domestic political organizations, according to Fang.

In a webinar presentation for clients last year, which Fang analyzed on his [Substack](#), Flashpoint analyst Vlad Cuiujuclu demonstrated his company's methods for identifying and entering encrypted [Telegram](#) chat groups.

He explained how the company attempted to join chatrooms of transportation workers resisting the [COVID-19](#) vaccine mandates.

Fang described the presentation:

"In this case, we're searching for a closed channel of U.S. Freedom Flyers,' said Cuiujuclu. 'It's basically a group that opposed vaccination and masks.'

"As he clicked through a database, Cuiujuclu showed a chat group on Telegram sponsored by [Airline Professionals For Justice](#), another group formed by airline industry workers opposed to the mandate. The forum, he added, provided useful insights, including Zoom links for meetings of the grassroots organization.

"Private chats,' said Cuiujuclu, 'require for you to have an invite link,' which he noted can often either be found by scrolling through public forums or by 'engag[ing] the admin of that channel.'"

Flashpoint also offers clients artificial intelligence and internet scraping tools.

According to Fang, the firm is a leader in the “[threat intelligence industry](#),” a growing number of security and surveillance firms that create fake online identities to infiltrate Discord chats, WhatsApp groups, Reddit forums and dark web message boards to gather information for clients, including corporations and the FBI, to monitor potential threats.

Joshua Yoder, president of [US Freedom Flyers](#), said he is aware that Flashpoint infiltrated private chat groups associated with his organization.

Yoder told [The Defender](#):

“Tradecraft and other strategies are often used to gain inside knowledge of conservative organizations with the intent to disrupt, mislead and otherwise thwart effective campaigns.

“Infiltration is a tactic used by the deep state to prevent the truth from being told by attempting to destroy the advancement of the message. The team at US Freedom Flyers has been successful in recognizing these attacks and we have taken decisive actions to protect the organization and our members.”

[Aviation industry](#) workers were some of the most vocal and organized against [COVID-19 vaccine mandates](#).

They wrote an [open letter](#) to the aviation industry signed by thousands of organizations, physicians and pilots. They also organized research on the [risks of vaccines for pilots](#), spoke publicly about the “[culture of fear and intimidation](#)” around the mandates in the industry, and filed [multiple lawsuits](#) in Canada, the Netherlands, and the U.S.

US Freedom Flyers brought a [lawsuit against Atlas Air](#), one of the largest air cargo carriers in the aviation industry, in May 2022.

Fang told The Defender the targeting of American citizens resisting the vaccine mandates fits into a long history of surveillance being used to subvert democracy. He said:

“There is a long sordid history of informants and surveillance contractors working to undermine democratic engagement in this country.

“The push against regular citizens opposed to COVID-19 vaccine mandates has come in many forms: censorship, demonization and in this case, surveillance.”

The growing market for spying on domestic dissent

Flashpoint advertises its surveillance success on its website, providing examples of its work undermining environmental activism, G20 protests and protests against the aviation industry.

The webpages describing these activities were taken down after Fang published his investigation, but they can be found on the [Wayback Machine](#) internet archive.

For example, [Flashpoint described](#) its capacity to monitor activists organizing against pollution and the aviation industry. The website said:

“By monitoring the situation and assessing tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP’s), Flashpoint was able to assess the impact of upcoming protests, and determine that these groups would likely continue to protest and attempt to impede airport construction and expansion projects through direct action. ...

“Based on this information, Flashpoint customers were able to take actions to help control the impact to business operations, and to ensure the safety of their employees and facilities as well as the safety of those protesting.”

Flashpoint was founded by Evan Kohlmann, former NBC News contributor who investigated Islamic terror groups and whom [The Intercept](#) described as “the U.S. government’s go-to expert witness in terrorism prosecutions.”

[Jack Poulson of Tech Inquiry](#), a group that researches the surveillance industry, told Fang that “Flashpoint has been selling its chatroom infiltration services to companies and governments for years.”

But, he said, it has shifted its focus from “surveilling Muslims after September 11” and “followed the money into both the Pentagon’s information warfare programs and the business of monitoring domestic protest groups.”

Last year, [Flashpoint acquired Echosec Systems](#), another intelligence contractor, and last month it formalized a [partnership with Google Cloud](#).

These acquisitions come in addition to “a steady stream of contracts to Flashpoint in recent years from the FBI, the Department of Defense, Treasury Department, and Department of Homeland Security, among other agencies,” Fang wrote.

Fang also spoke to [Jay Bhattacharya, M.D., Ph.D.](#), professor of medicine at Stanford University, research associate at the National Bureau of Economics Research and one of the authors of the [Great Barrington Declaration](#).

Bhattacharya said:

“This kind of domestic spying violates the implicit protection Americans have in these kinds of settings.

“This isn’t terrorism, this doesn’t have anything to do with national security.

“This is a private set of employees, workers who are trying to maintain their jobs in the face of unscientific demands for COVID vaccinations.”

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