



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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DOJ OIG Releases Report on the FBI's Strategy and Efforts to Disrupt Illegal Dark Web Activities

Department of Justice (DOJ) Inspector General Michael E. Horowitz announced today the release of a report examining the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) strategy and efforts to disrupt illegal dark web activities. The term "dark web" refers to a part of the Internet that cannot be accessed through standard web browsers but requires specific software, configurations, or authorization. Although many users access the dark web for legitimate purposes, because of the anonymity it provides it is also used for criminal activity, including the trafficking of drugs, firearms, weapons of mass destruction, child sexual abuse material, and malware, among other illicit goods and services.

The DOJ Office of the Inspector General (OIG) found that the FBI does not maintain a bureau-wide dark web strategy and instead relies on its operational units to execute individual dark web investigative, tool development, and acquisition strategies. We believe this decentralized effort could be enhanced by establishing a coordinated FBI-wide dark web approach that considers the enterprise level needs of FBI units operating on the dark web.

The OIG's specific findings in the report released today include:

- **Dark Web Strategy:** We found that four primary FBI operational units were executing individual dark web strategies containing varying degrees of comprehensiveness. While unit-level strategies are important, we concluded that the establishment of a coordinated FBI-wide dark web approach could add significant value by providing these individual units a complete picture of FBI capabilities that can be leveraged across mission areas. Further, the establishment of an FBI-wide approach can help clarify investigative responsibilities among these units, reduce potential redundancies, and create baseline data collection requirements that will enable these units to consistently demonstrate their dark web accomplishments.
 - **Tool Development & Acquisition Concerns:** From approximately 2012 through 2017, one FBI unit was largely responsible for the development and deployment of technology-based investigative solutions on the dark web. However, due to budget decreases and shifting priorities, this unit's dark web contributions have been diminished. As a result, FBI operational units now seek tools independently without a mechanism to share the product of their efforts. This has also resulted in inefficiencies because these operational units reallocated limited investigative resources to tool development. We believe that the establishment of a coordinated FBI-wide dark web approach could consolidate tool development to cost-effectively address the FBI's dark web needs.
 - **Dark Web Cryptocurrency Support:** We found that two FBI components provide operational support, including for dark web investigations, via separate Virtual Currency Teams. Rising costs and static funding resulted in disagreement between these two Virtual Currency Teams on the prioritization of resources and revealed concerns that they are conducting redundant work. We
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concluded that the FBI should complete an FBI-wide cryptocurrency support strategy in concert with its development of an FBI-wide dark web approach.

Finally, we also determined that the FBI could improve its efforts to target dark web vendors trafficking fentanyl and other opioids consistent with the priorities set by the Deputy Attorney General, and we identified concerns related to the FBI's deconfliction of dark web-related investigative data, and potential FBI improvements in the area of centralizing its dark web training materials.

Today's report makes 5 recommendations to the FBI to assist the FBI in improving its investigative and planning efforts related to the dark web. The FBI concurred with all 5 recommendations.

Report: To read the report, visit our website at: <https://oig.justice.gov/reports/audit-federal-bureau-investigations-strategy-and-efforts-disrupt-illegal-dark-web>.

Video: To watch a 2-minute video of Inspector General Horowitz discussing today's report, and to view a downloadable transcript, visit our website here: <https://oig.justice.gov/news/multimedia/video/message-inspector-general-audit-federal-bureau-investigations-strategy-and>

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