

Internet censorship and government war plans

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The meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in New York is taking place under the shadow of the accelerating drive of the major powers, spearheaded by the United States, toward World War III. This found its most noxious expression in the fascistic speech delivered to the assembly on Tuesday by Donald Trump, in which the US president threatened to “destroy North Korea” and attack Iran and Venezuela.

Trump devoted a significant portion of his tirade to a denunciation of socialism and communism, reflecting the fear within the US ruling elite of the growth of social opposition and rise of anti-capitalist and socialist sentiment in the working class.

Another major focus of the assembly is the mounting campaign of the US and European governments to crack down on the exchange of information and views on the Internet. British Prime Minister Theresa May, French President Emmanuel Macron and Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni all used the pretext of fighting terrorism and “fake news” to call for more drastic measures by the major technology firms to censor the Internet, which Gentiloni called a “battlefield for hearts and minds.”

This attack on free speech is a central part of the response of the crisis-ridden capitalist ruling elites to the growth of global geo-political tensions and economic instability, and the political radicalization of broad masses of workers and youth.

In the US, the drive for Internet censorship has been spearheaded by the so-called “liberal” wing of the political establishment, concentrated in the Democratic Party, whose chief media organ is the *New York Times*. On the eve of the UN assembly, the *Times* published an unambiguous brief for censorship of the Internet in the form of an op-ed column by the ambassador to the UN under Barack Obama, Samantha Power.

Under the headline “Why Foreign Propaganda Is More Dangerous Now,” and on the pretext of combating

Russian disinformation and subversion, Power calls for the use of “professional gatekeepers” to police public discourse on the Internet.

Power, a leading proponent of “human rights” imperialism, looks back nostalgically at the Cold War as a golden age of news dissemination, when “most Americans received their news and information via mediated platforms.” She continues: “Reporters and editors serving in the role of professional gatekeepers had almost full control over what appeared in the media. A foreign adversary seeking to reach American audiences did not have great options for bypassing these umpires, and Russian disinformation rarely penetrated.”

It is worth considering who is writing these lines. First as a key policy advisor to Obama, then as Washington’s representative to the United Nations, Power was a leading architect of the disastrous US-led destabilization operation in Libya that shattered that country’s society. She is a key propagandist of the American-instigated civil war in Syria, which has led to hundreds of thousands of deaths and the greatest refugee crisis since the Second World War.

Power longs for the time when, as was the case during the Korean War and the earlier part of the Vietnam War, the monopoly of the major broadcasters over public discourse could be used to keep the criminal policies of US imperialism under wraps.

She is bitter and resentful over the fact that, despite the best efforts of the corporate-controlled media to sell US operations in the Middle East to the public as anti-terrorist and humanitarian efforts, organizations such as Wikileaks and journalists such as Seymour Hersh have exposed the fact that the United States has cultivated alliances with forces linked to Al Qaeda and ISIS to pursue regime-change in Libya and Syria, totally undercutting the narrative of the “war on terror” that has been used to justify US imperialist policy since 2001.

If Power had her way, Chelsea Manning's exposure of the murder of journalists and Iraqi civilians by the US military and Edward Snowden's exposure illegal dragnet surveillance by the NSA would be branded as "fake news" and blocked by technology giants such as Google, Apple and Facebook.

In her *Times* column, she mourns the passing of the overarching—and thoroughly repressive—anti-communist ideological framework of the Cold War period, writing: "During the Cold War, the larger struggle against communism created a mainstream consensus about what America stood for and against. Today, our society appears to be defined by a particularly vicious form of 'partyism' affecting Democrats and Republicans alike."

Power presents the rise of the Internet, and consequent weakening of control over the flow of information and opinion by state-sanctioned and allied corporate media outlets such as the *Times*, as an altogether dangerous and negative development. Under conditions where the establishment media is increasingly discredited—"60 percent believe news stories today are 'often inaccurate,' according to Gallup"—Power notes, the fact that "two thirds of Americans are getting at least some of their news through social media" is a matter of the gravest concern.

The "growing reliance on new media—and the absence of real umpires," she writes, have opened up the US to disinformation and subversion at the hands of a demonic Russia, with its all-powerful media outlets RT and Sputnik, and its "trolls, bots and thousands of fake Twitter and Facebook accounts that amplified damaging stories on Hillary Clinton."

Here we see the coming together of the hysterical, neo-McCarthyite campaign against Russia that has been used by the intelligence agencies, the Democratic Party and their media allies to attempt to whip up a war fever and pressure Trump to take a more bellicose posture toward Moscow with a growing attack on public access to anti-war, progressive and socialist web sites.

Power's demands for state-sponsored censorship have already been put into practice by Internet giant Google. In the name of combating "fake news" and promoting "authoritative content" over "alternative viewpoints," Google has implemented changes to its search engine that have slashed traffic to leading left-wing and alternative news web sites by 55 percent. The central target of this attack is the *World Socialist Web Site*, whose Google referrals have fallen by 75 percent.

By "gatekeepers," Power means the thoroughly vetted and subservient editorial boards of newspapers such as the

Times, which dutifully hide from the American people whatever the CIA and State Department do not want them to know, while dispensing state lies and propaganda in the guise of "news."

In 2010, then-*New York Times* Executive Editor Bill Keller spelled out the policy of such "mediated" news outlets with unusual bluntness when he declared that "transparency is not an absolute good." He added, "Freedom of the press includes freedom not to publish, and that is a freedom we exercise with some regularity."

More than a quarter century after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, all factions of the US ruling elite are haunted by the realization that socialist politics are, as Hillary Clinton put it in her recently published book, tapping "into powerful emotional currents" within the population. The fact that in the 2016 Democratic primaries, 12 million Americans, mostly young people and workers, voted for a candidate, Bernie Sanders, who called himself a socialist, shocked and unnerved the ruling class.

Unable to advance any policies to address the social grievances of working people or turn away from its foreign agenda of militarism and war, the ruling elite responds to the growth of opposition by recourse to police methods. The escalating corporate-state attack on freedom of speech on the Internet makes all the more urgent the campaign of the *World Socialist Web Site* against Google censorship. We call on all of our readers and supporters to sign our petition demanding an end to the censorship, send statements of support for our campaign, and actively work to distribute WSWS articles as widely as possible via Facebook and other social media outlets.



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