

Facebook deleted accounts at the behest of US, Israeli and German governments

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Facebook has admitted to deleting the accounts of Palestinian activists and journalists at the behest of the Israeli government as well as the accounts used by the former leader of Chechnya at the command of Washington in an active campaign of international political censorship.

The social media company, which has more than 2 billion active users worldwide, has also been systematically removing hate speech and other “illegal” content from its platform in Germany.

Facebook, which has nearly 4 million active users in Israel, has been engaged in a “censorship rampage” against activists and journalists who oppose the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory according to the *Intercept’s* Glenn Greenwald.

The current campaign of censorship against Palestinians began after high-level meetings in September 2016 between Facebook representatives and Israeli officials including Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked of the far-right, pro-settlement Jewish Home party. Shaked once notoriously referred to Palestinian children as “little snakes.”

After the meetings with Facebook, Shaked publicly bragged that the company had granted 95 percent of more than 150 requests by Tel Aviv for removal of content during a four-month period that the Israeli government declared “incitement.”

Following the Israel-Facebook summit, ten administrators for the Arabic- and English-language Facebook pages for the Palestinian Information Center, with more than two million followers, had their accounts suspended, seven permanently. Facebook also briefly took down the page run by Fatah, the largest faction of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, when it posted a picture of Yasser Arafat holding a rifle.

Most recently the former head of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, had both his Facebook and Instagram accounts deleted at the behest of the US last month. According to Facebook, it had deleted the two accounts, which had approximately 4 million followers, after the Trump administration had placed Kadyrov on a financial sanctions list.

The move against Kadyrov sets the precedent that allows the US government to silence the social media accounts of any foreign politician or official who may voice opposition to US interests by placing them on a sanctions list.

Along the same lines as the US and Israeli government’s censorship campaigns, the German government adopted a new law in October that bans “hate speech” and other “illegal” content on social media outlets by threatening the companies with a possible \$56 million fine if they do not quickly remove offending posts.

Coinciding with the new law, Facebook opened a “deletion center” in Essen, Germany employing 500 censors to sort through posts and delete comments, videos and photos that violate the company’s rules. The first such deletion center in Germany was opened in Berlin and now employs 700 people.

Richard Allan, Facebook’s European Vice President for Public Policy, reported last year that 15,000 posts had been deleted in a single month for violating Germany’s hate speech laws.

In what was reported to be the first use of the new social media hate speech ban, Beatrix von Storch, the deputy parliamentary leader for the right-wing extremists Alternative for Germany, had her Twitter and Facebook pages blocked after she posted a racist comment disparaging Muslim man. The offending post was promptly deleted by the social media companies’

censors.

While Facebook's campaign is justified publicly by targeting right-wing extremists and autocrats, the real aim is to use these powers against anyone who is branded an "extremist," in particular political opponents of the financial oligarchy. Facebook's censorship campaign, carried out in coordination with Western governments, is of a piece with Google's efforts to block access to left-wing and antiwar web sites by demoting their pages in search results, resulting in traffic drops by as much as 75 percent.



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