

Twitter warns users: We're watching you

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In an overt act of political intimidation, the social media platform Twitter emailed hundreds of thousands of users Saturday informing them that they had shared or followed “Russian propaganda.”

Twitter made these claims without substantiation, refusing to tell its users exactly what content they shared or viewed that fell afoul of the US government and its social media enforcers. Among the recipients of the email was the Senate’s second-highest ranking Republican, John Cornyn.

“As part of our recent work to understand Russian-linked activities on Twitter during the 2016 U.S. presidential election,” read the email sent out by Twitter, “we identified and suspended a number of accounts that were potentially connected to a propaganda effort by a Russian government-linked organization known as the Internet Research Agency.”

Taking the guise of a friendly warning, Twitter continued, “Consistent with our commitment to transparency, we are emailing you because we have reason to believe that you either followed one of these accounts or retweeted or liked content from these accounts during the election period.”

In other words, Twitter is warning its users that it knows exactly what they are viewing and sharing on social media, implying that if they post something that falls afoul of the US government, they may be subject to investigation or prosecution.

Twitter’s action is the latest step in a campaign led by the Democratic Party, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the leading intelligence agencies to argue that the growth of social opposition that expressed itself in broad popular hostility to the Clinton campaign during the 2016 election is the result of “Russian propaganda” aimed at “sowing divisions” in American society.

Lawmakers, including Mark Warner, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, and

Adam Schiff, the ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, have demanded that the major technology companies draw up lists of accounts and individuals that disseminated what they called “Russian Propaganda.” The technology companies have complied.

Twitter’s action comes amid a massive escalation of the drive by social media companies to censor the Internet. Last week, representatives from Facebook, Twitter and Google’s YouTube testified before the Senate Commerce committee on their efforts to combat “extremist” content.

Monika Bickert, head of Global Policy Management at Facebook, told lawmakers that the social media company has hired 10,000 people for its “security” department to review, block and take down content, and that this number will be doubled over the next year. Google, for its part, plans to bring the number of content moderators it employs to 10,000 this year.

Twitter’s email blast to users followed the January 12 announcement by Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg that it plans to dramatically reduce the amount of independent news that appears on users’ news feeds.

On Friday, Zuckerberg clarified that while the total amount of news that users see would fall only slightly, the great majority of news content on users’ feeds would now come from “authoritative” and “trustworthy” news sources, instead of those that promote “polarization.”

In an indication of what this will mean in practice, the stock value of the *New York Times* shot up by nine percent that day, in the expectation that its postings would displace content from independent media organizations.

The growing drive to censor political speech on the Internet comes amid growing preparations by the Trump administration and the military for the eruption of major state-on-state military conflict.

The National Defense Strategy, published Friday by the Pentagon, stresses the need for the US government to combat “political subversion” in preparation for “Inter-state strategic competition.”

“It is now undeniable that the homeland is no longer a sanctuary. America is a target,” the document states, for “political and information subversion” on the part of “revisionist powers” such as Russia and China.

The document argues for the formation of what can only be termed a totalitarian regime, waging total war. It writes, “A long-term strategic competition requires the seamless integration of multiple elements of national power—diplomacy, information, economics, finance, intelligence, law enforcement, and military.”

The ever-tighter censorship and monitoring of social media and other online communications is a major component of this strategy, which aims to lay the ground for major conflict, potentially involving millions of deaths, by effectively eliminating the freedom of expression.

Twitter’s email blast took place the same week as the *World Socialist Web Site* hosted its live webinar, “Organizing Resistance to Internet Censorship,” featuring WSWS chairperson David North and journalist Chris Hedges, in which North proposed a coalition of socialist and anti-war web sites to oppose internet censorship.



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