

Democrats demand Facebook and Twitter release information on campaign over spying on Trump

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In a letter Tuesday addressed to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey, Democrats Dianne Feinstein, the vice chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, and Adam Schiff, the ranking member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, demanded that the companies hand over information on accounts spreading the hashtag #ReleaseTheMemo.

Coming just days after Twitter emailed hundreds of thousands of users warning them that they had liked, shared, or followed “Russian propaganda,” the letter is another step in the efforts by the Democratic Party, working with the major social media companies, to paint all social and political conflict in the United States as a product of Russian interference.

Schiff and Feinstein write that they are seeking the companies’ assistance “in our efforts to counter Russia’s continuing efforts to manipulate public opinion and undermine American democracy and the rule of law.”

The Democrats’ demands center around a letter authored by Republican Representative Devin Nunes, which alleges that the FBI carried out a FISA warrantless wiretap of the Trump campaign, possibly including Trump himself. While Trump has claimed that “Obama had my ‘wires tapped’ in Trump Tower,” Democrats have insisted that no such wiretap occurred.

In recent days, right-wing media figures, including the pundit Sean Hannity, and Republican members of congress have initiated a campaign to release the memo as part of the deepening factional conflict within the ruling elite over the allegation that Trump “colluded” with Russia.

“The House must immediately make public the memo

prepared by the Intelligence Committee regarding the FBI and the Department of Justice,” Representative Matt Gaetz, Republican from Florida, said. “The facts contained in this memo are jaw-dropping and demand full transparency.”

Whatever the source of the #ReleaseTheMemo campaign, Twitter and Facebook users have the right to read social media messages and express their opinion without fear that their information will be turned over to the government on the absurd charge that the campaign is being orchestrated from Moscow.

In their letter, Feinstein and Schiff argue that “public reports” indicate that the #ReleaseTheMemo campaign is being promoted by “social media accounts linked to Russian influence operations.” This claim is based entirely on one source: a supposed social media monitoring service called “Hamilton 68” operated by the German Marshall Fund’s Alliance for Securing Democracy.

To call this outfit dubious is an understatement. Its public spokesman is Clint Watts, a former FBI official and Army officer who has repeatedly argued for mass censorship in violation of the First Amendment. In a Senate hearing in late October, Watts declared that media outlets, which he called sources of “rebellion,” must be “silenced” on the grounds that America is in a state of “civil war.”

In arguing that calls for the release of the memo are being put forward by Russian agents, Feinstein and Schiff state that WikiLeaks has offered a reward for anyone who leaks the memo to them. This is in keeping with their argument that the organization, which has exposed more criminal wrongdoing by the US government than all the major US newspapers

combined, is a “hostile non-state intelligence service.”

The Democratic lawmakers argue that “this latest example of Russian interference is in keeping with Moscow’s concerted, covert, and continuing campaign to manipulate American public opinion and erode trust in our law enforcement and intelligence institutions,” and demand that Facebook and Twitter take action.

They demand that these companies, within a span of days, submit a report detailing “whether and how many accounts linked to Russian influence operations are involved in this campaign,” the “frequency and volume of their postings on this topic,” and “how many legitimate Twitter and Facebook account holders have been exposed to this campaign.”

If the social media companies were to comply with this request, it would entail the compilation of a list of names based on users’ private reading habits, and their statements, both public and private, entirely without a court warrant, by companies acting as agents of the US government, in violation of the US constitution’s prohibition of “general warrants” and “unreasonable searches and seizures.”

The letter by Feinstein and Schiff is the latest move in an effort by Congressional Democrats, working with the US intelligence agencies, to criminalize the freedom of expression in the name of suppressing “extremist content” aimed at “polarizing” American politics. The major social media companies have been fully complicit in this drive, turning over lists of accounts to the congressional witch-hunters and working to block the propagation of dissenting opinion on social media.

The *World Socialist Web Site* is working to fight this drive toward dictatorship. We urge readers to watch our webinar, “Organizing Resistance to Internet Censorship,” read the open letter from the WSWS International Editorial Board, “For an international coalition to fight Internet censorship,” and contact us to take up this fight.



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