Neo-McCarthyite hysteria at US Senate Intelligence Committee hearing

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15 February 2018

Tuesday's Senate Intelligence Committee hearing on "Global Threats and National Security" was an exercise in right-wing hysteria aimed at promoting the claim that all social opposition in the United States is the product of foreign subversion. This fraudulent narrative was advanced to justify censorship and police state repression.

Not since the McCarthyite witch hunts of the 1950s has Congress seen such a vitriolic denunciation of supposed foreign subversion. Russia, Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats told the committee, "perceived its past efforts [at manipulating the 2016 elections] as successful and views the 2018 US midterm elections as a potential target."

It is necessary to "inform the American people that this is real," Coats proclaimed, and that "resilience is needed for us to stand up and say we're not going to allow some Russians to tell us how to vote, how we ought to run our country."

One after another, senators pressed the assembled intelligence officials about purported Russian and Chinese plots to "sow divisions" within American society, calling on the intelligence agencies to work with technology companies to censor the Internet and prevent the dissemination of "divisive content."

Chinese students were denounced as potential spies and subversives and Americans were instructed not to buy smartphones made by Chinese companies.

All of these accusations were made without the slightest attempt at proof or substantiation. This is because they are simply made up.

The basic claim of the liars and frauds on Capitol Hill is that the US would be a peaceful and healthy democracy if it weren't for the nefarious operations of Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping. The absurdity of such a statement was revealed once again on Wednesday when a mass school shooting took place in Parkland, Florida, the 18th school shooting to occur in the seven weeks of 2018. Are Russia and China responsible for the social dysfunction that produces such atrocities with horrific regularity?

The concern of the American ruling class is not Russian or Chinese "subversion," but the growth of social opposition within the United States. The narrative of "Russian meddling" has been used to justify a systematic campaign to censor the Internet and suppress free speech.

The performance of Senator Mark Warner, the ranking Democrat on the committee, was particularly obscene. Warner, whose net worth is estimated at $257 million, appeared to be doing his best impersonation of Senator Joe McCarthy. He declared that foreign subversion works together with, and is largely indistinguishable from, "threats to our institutions… from right here at home."

Alluding to the publication of the so-called Nunes memo, which documented the fraudulent character of the Democratic-led investigation of White House "collusion" with Russia, Warner noted, "There have been some, aided and abetted by Russian Internet bots and trolls, who have attacked the basic integrity of the FBI and the Justice Department."

Responding to questioning from Warner, FBI Director Christopher Wray praised the US intelligence agencies' greater "engagement" and "partnership" with the private sector, concluding, "We can't fully police social media, so we have to work with them so that they can police themselves."

Wray was referring to the sweeping measures taken by social media companies, working directly with the US intelligence agencies, to implement a regime of censorship, including through the hiring of tens of

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thousands of "content reviewers," many with intelligence backgrounds, to flag, report and delete content.

The assault on democratic rights is increasingly connected to preparations for a major war, which will further exacerbate social tensions within the United States. Coats prefaced his remarks by declaring that "the risk of inter-state conflict, including among great powers, is higher than at any time since the end of the Cold War."

As the hearing was taking place, multiple news outlets were reporting that potentially hundreds of Russian military contractors had been killed in a recent US air strike in Syria. This came just weeks after the publication of the Pentagon's National Defense Strategy, which declared, "Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in US national security."

However, the implications of this great-power conflict are not simply external to the US "homeland." The document argues that "the homeland is no longer a sanctuary," and that "America is a target," for "political and information subversion" on the part of "revisionist powers" such as Russia and China.

Since "America's military has no preordained right to victory on the battlefield," the only way the US can prevail in this conflict is through the "seamless integration of multiple elements of national power," including "information, economics, finance, intelligence, law enforcement and military."

In other words, America's supremacy in the new world of great-power conflict requires the subordination of every aspect of life to the requirements of war. In this totalitarian nightmare, already far advanced, the police, the military and the intelligence agencies unite with media and technology companies to form a single seamless unit, whose combined power is marshaled to manipulate public opinion and suppress political dissent.

The dictatorial character of the measures being prepared was underscored by an exchange between Wray and Republican Senator Marco Rubio, who asked whether Chinese students were serving as spies for Beijing. "What is the counterintelligence risk posed to US national security from Chinese students, particularly those in advanced programs in the sciences and mathematics?" asked Rubio.

Wray responded that "the use of nontraditional collectors, especially in the academic setting, whether it's professors, scientists, students, we see in almost every field office that the FBI has around the country, not just in major cities, small ones as well, basically every discipline."

This campaign, with racist overtones, recalls the official rationale—defense of "national security"—used to justify the internment of some 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry during the Second World War.

In its open letter calling for a coalition of socialist, antiwar and progressive websites against Internet censorship, the *World Socialist Web Site* noted that "the ruling class has identified the Internet as a mortal threat to its monopolization of information and its ability to promote propaganda to wage war and legitimize the obscene concentration of wealth and extreme social inequality."

It is this mortal threat—and fear of the growth of class conflict—that motivate the lies and hypocrisy on display at the Senate Intelligence Committee hearing.

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