

A warning to the working class

Facebook's partnership with the Atlantic Council

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8 September 2018

On May 17, Facebook announced a partnership with the Atlantic Council, the bipartisan think tank that has participated in every political and military crime of US imperialism over the past half-century. In a brief blog post by Katie Harbath, Facebook's Global Politics and Government Outreach Director explained that the relationship was necessary "to prevent our service from being abused during elections."

Harbath went on, "We're more actively working with outside experts, governments and other companies because we know that we can't solve these challenges on our own. ... Today, we're excited to launch a new partnership with the Atlantic Council, which has a stellar reputation looking at innovative solutions to hard problems." The other governments and outside experts that Facebook is working with were not mentioned by name.

That Harbath—a former digital strategist for the Republican Party Senatorial Committee—can speak of the Atlantic Council as having a "stellar reputation" dealing with "hard problems" shows that Facebook is being staffed with functionaries of the US political establishment. In reality, the Atlantic Council has a reputation as a clearing house for political and ideological propaganda—including perpetrating and defending election abuse throughout the world—in the service of the strategic interests of American capitalism.

Harbath also wrote that Facebook's expanding team of security and artificial intelligence experts will be working closely with the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRL) "to get Facebook real-time insights and updates on emerging threats and disinformation campaigns from around the world. This will help increase the number of 'eyes and ears' we have working to spot potential abuse on our service—enabling us to more effectively identify gaps in our systems, preempt obstacles, and ensure that Facebook plays a positive role during elections all around the world."

The Atlantic Council's DFRL is staffed by a team of "disinformation" specialists and former US intelligence establishment technology staffers. Its stated mission, as published on the website digitalsherlocks.com, is: "To identify, expose, and explain disinformation where and when it occurs using open source research; to promote objective truth as a foundation of government for and by people; to protect democratic institutions and norms from those who would seek to undermine them in the digital engagement space."

Anyone familiar with the history and role of the Atlantic Council knows what this language from the DFRL really means. It has nothing to do with establishing objective truth or protecting the democratic rights of the people. These are the established euphemisms of US

imperialism that have been used for decades to cover up CIA-sponsored skullduggery, assassination and political manipulation in every corner of the globe.

While the Facebook announcement last May was either ignored or reported in the capitalist media as a matter of course, this new collaboration of Facebook with the Atlantic Council is a warning: the campaign against "fake news," "election meddling" and "disinformation" is emerging as the integration of the social media monopolies into the operations of the US state and military-intelligence apparatus.

This integration of the social media platforms into the state has three key objectives:

- to manipulate and influence political outcomes in countries around the world to serve American global interests, including manipulation of elections;
- to gather data on the growth of social opposition and influence of political parties and individuals and to funnel this information into the intelligence establishment
- and to censor political content opposed to the interests of American capitalism, especially socialist, left-wing and anti-war views.

The use of social media by the US government to manipulate elections in other countries was analyzed thoroughly on the *World Socialist Web Site* last April in the two-part series "US election meddling in the age of the Internet: How Google, Facebook and Twitter are manipulating the Mexican presidential elections."

Meanwhile, the recent censorship moves by Facebook along with Twitter and Google—the shuttering of accounts, pages, blogs and YouTube channels based on unsubstantiated claims of Iranian and Russian government influence campaigns—is also proof that the transformation of the social media and Internet tech companies into an arm of the state is well underway.

The record of the Atlantic Council

A review of the Atlantic Council, an organization that has largely escaped public scrutiny, and its 57-year record shows that it is a pioneer in developing and peddling the criminal operations of the US State Department and the Pentagon as furthering "democracy" and "human rights" around the world. It is also a training ground and

revolving door for people in the foreign policy and intelligence establishment in Washington, D.C. as well as a conduit for former Pentagon brass into civilian business and government roles.

The current, honorary and lifetime Atlantic Council directors list reads like a bipartisan rogues gallery of American war-criminals, including Henry Kissinger, George P. Shultz, Frank Carlucci, James A. Baker, R. James Woolsey, Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell, Robert Gates and Leon Panetta. Among the former Atlantic Council chairman have been Obama administration officials James L. Jones, (national security advisor) and Chuck Hagel (secretary of defense). The chairman of the council is Brent Scowcroft, the retired US Air Force officer who held national security and intelligence positions in the Nixon, Bush I and Bush II administrations.

The Atlantic Council is funded by substantial government and corporate interests from the financial, defense and petroleum industries. Its 2017 annual report documents substantial contributions from HSBC, Chevron, The Blackstone Group, Raytheon, Lockheed Martin and Ford Motor Company, among many others. Also listed is Google Inc. in the \$100,000 to \$250,000 donor category. Among the largest council contributors are the US State Department, The Foreign & Commonwealth Office of the UK, and the United Arab Emirates. Other contributors include Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Boeing, BP, Exxon and the US Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines.

The Atlantic Council of the United States was founded in 1961 as a think tank and anticommunist public relations organization to prop up support within the US for NATO in the post-World War II era. It was established by Cold War former State Department leaders such as Dean Acheson and Christian Herter, along with other prominent political and business figures, as a coalition of non-government organizations who were concerned that the NATO alliance was fragmenting.

In its early activities, the council published books and journals and developed propaganda, including TV commercials starring the actor and comedian Bob Hope, to promote public support for American and European political and military cooperation against the USSR. With its founding focus on Europe and the postwar conflict with the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries, the Atlantic Council became involved in the intrigue and maneuvering of US foreign policy during the social unrest and political crisis around the world in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The council played a direct role in the response of the US government to the resignation of Charles de Gaulle in France and the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Throughout the Johnson and Nixon administrations, the council supported the US war in Vietnam.

In the aftermath of Vietnam, the Atlantic Council continued to play a role in the foreign policy of both the Carter and Reagan administrations. Its program and influence were rooted in the US drive for hegemonic control of the world's petroleum and energy resources and markets. The council's emphasis was shifted toward Asia, the Middle East and Latin America and the cover-up of black-ops and other illegal covert US military operations such as the Iran-Contra money-for-arms deal in the 1980s.

With the dissolution of the USSR and the restoration of capitalism in the former Eastern Bloc countries, the strategic orientation of the Atlantic Council shifted further as the machine of US imperialism began its now more than 25 years of unending wars in the Middle East and North Africa. During this timeframe the council opened special centers devoted to US policy in the Middle East, Latin America,

Eurasia, Europe, South Asia and Africa.

It is difficult to find information about the Atlantic Council and its activities online, except for what the organization itself publishes. In 2014, the *New York Times* reported that Fed Ex, after it made a donation to the Atlantic Council, had worked with the organization to push a treaty through the European American Chamber of Commerce to reduce transatlantic tariffs and allow more duty-free shipments.

A review of the papers and documents from these centers on the Atlantic Council website, as well as the individuals responsible and the countries under "study," reveals a comprehensive list of foreign meddling, manipulation and mayhem by the United States over the recent decades. One can find on the council's website links to initiatives such as "Emerging Leaders of Pakistan," "Ukraine in Europe," "Eurasian Energy Futures," "Afghanistan Rising" and "Rebuilding Syria."

A search of the site for the phrase "human rights" yields dozens of papers, speeches and reports dating back to 2015 on Iran, Russia, Syria, Turkey and other countries in Africa and the Middle East. Additionally, one can find articles devoted to human rights and identity politics from the standpoint of feminism and LGBT rights, especially during the final years of the Obama administration.

The Atlantic Council has a long record of posturing as a defender of "democracy" and "human rights" when it corresponds to the needs of US imperialism. The coordination of Facebook's safety and security operations with the Atlantic Council's Digital and Forensic Research Lab represents a new stage in the development of Internet censorship and political manipulation against left-wing and socialist views that has been underway for more than a year, as documented by the *World Socialist Web Site*.

There can be no illusions that this partnership is anything other than the expansion of the "eyes and ears" of the state into the ideas and activities of individuals and organizations both inside and outside the US, especially those that oppose the strategic interests of American imperialism. This, of course, includes the activities of workers and youth who organize and communicate on Facebook to express their views and take action to fight the conditions inside their workplaces and neighborhoods. New forms of social media cooperation and communication, which are secure, encrypted and free from the state, must be developed and adopted in order for workers to fight the capitalist system and for socialism in a coordinated international struggle.



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