

Greenwald: Former Intel Officials, Citing Russia, Say Big-Tech Monopoly Power Vital To National Security



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[Authored by Glenn Greenwald via Substack.](#)

When the U.S. security state announces that Big Tech's centralized censorship power must be preserved, we should ask what this reveals about whom this regime serves.



(l) An illustration of the CIA logo (Getty Images); (r) An illustration shows the logos of Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft displayed on a mobile phone and a laptop screen. (Photo by JUSTIN TALLIS / AFP)

A group of former intelligence and national security officials on Monday [issued a jointly signed](#) letter warning that pending legislative attempts to restrict or break up the power of Big Tech monopolies — Facebook, Google, and Amazon — would jeopardize national security because, they argue, their centralized censorship power is crucial to advancing U.S. foreign policy. The majority of this letter is devoted to repeatedly invoking the grave threat allegedly posed to the U.S. by Russia as illustrated by the invasion of Ukraine, and it repeatedly points to the dangers of Putin and the Kremlin to justify the need to preserve Big Tech's power in its maximalist form. Any attempts to restrict Big Tech's monopolistic power would therefore undermine the U.S. fight against Moscow.

While one of their central claims is that Big Tech monopoly power is necessary to combat (i.e., censor) “foreign disinformation,” several of these officials are themselves leading disinformation agents: many were the [same former intelligence officials who signed](#) the now-infamous-and-[debunked](#) pre-election letter [fraudulently claiming](#) that the authentic Hunter Biden emails had the “hallmarks” of Russia disinformation (former Obama Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, former Obama CIA Director Michael Morrell, former Obama CIA/Pentagon chief Leon Panetta). Others who signed this new letter



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...ing their market power to discriminate against competitors (the way Google, for instance, used its search engine business to [bury the videos of competitors](#) to its YouTube property, such as Rumble, or the way Google and Apple use their stores and Amazon uses its domination over hosting services [to destroy competitors](#)).

One [bill in the Senate](#) is co-sponsored by Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Sen. Charles Grassley (R-IA), and has attracted [ample support in both parties](#), as has a [similar House bill](#) co-sponsored by House Antitrust Committee Chair David Cicilline (D-RI) and ranking member Rep. Ken Buck (R-CO). The amount of bipartisan support each bill [has garnered](#) — and the widespread animosity toward Big Tech reflected by this Congressional support — has shocked Google, Amazon, Apple, and Facebook lobbyists, who are accustomed to getting their way in Washington with lavish donations to the key politicians in each party.

This letter by former national security officials is, in one sense, an act of desperation. The bills have received the support of the key committees with jurisdiction over antitrust and Big Tech. In the Senate, five conservative Republican Committee members who have been outspoken critics of Big Tech power — Grassley, Sens. Lindsey Graham (R-SC), Ted Cruz (R-TX), Josh Hawley (R-MI), Sen. John Kennedy (R-LA) — joined with Democrats to ensure the passage of one bill out of the Judiciary Committee by a 16-6 vote, with a companion bill passing that Committee with the support of 20 of twenty-two Senators. As *The Intercept*'s Sara Sirota and Ryan Grim [report](#): “Both bills have Big Tech reeling” since “a floor vote would likely be a blowout for Big Tech.”

The extreme animus harbored by large parts of the left and right toward Big Tech make it very difficult for any lawmaker to go on record in opposition to these proposed bills if they are forced to publicly take a position in a floor vote. Many Senators with financial ties to Big Tech — including the two California Senate Democrats who represent Silicon Valley and are recipients of their largesse (Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Alex Padilla) — have [expressed reservations](#) about these reform efforts and have refused to co-sponsor the bill, yet still voted YES when forced to vote in Committee. This shows that public pressure to rein in Big Tech is becoming too large to enable Silicon Valley to force lawmakers to ignore their constituents' wishes with lobbyist donations. These politicians will work behind the scenes to kill efforts to rein in Big Tech, but will not vote against such efforts if forced to take a public position.

As a result, Big Tech's last hope is to keep the bill from reaching the floor where Senators would be forced to go on record, a goal they hope will be advanced by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York due to his close ties to Silicon Valley. “Both [Schumer's] children are on the payroll of companies the proposals would seek to rein in,” [reported The New York Post](#): “Jessica Schumer is a [registered lobbyist](#) at Amazon, according to New York state records. Alison Schumer works at Facebook as a product marketing manager.” Despite that, Schumer claimed to *The Intercept* that he supports both bills and will vote in favor of them, even though he has [engaged in maneuvers](#) to impede the bills from getting a full floor vote.

This is where these former intelligence and national security officials come in. While these former CIA, Homeland Security and Pentagon operatives have little sway in the Senate Judiciary and House Antitrust Committees, they command great loyalty from Congressional national security committees. Those committees, created to exert oversight of the U.S. intelligence and military agencies, are notoriously captive to the U.S. National Security State. The ostensible purpose of this new letter is to insist that Big



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We call on the congressional committees with national security jurisdiction – including the Armed Services Committees, Intelligence Committees, and Homeland Security Committees in both the House and Senate – to conduct a review of any legislation that could hinder America's key technology companies in the fight against cyber and national security risks emanating from Russia's and China's growing digital authoritarianism.

Why would these former national security and intelligence officials be so devoted to preserving the unfettered power of Big Tech to control and censor the internet? One obvious explanation is the standard one that always runs Washington: several of them have a financial interest in serving Big Tech's agenda.

Unsurprisingly, Apple CEO Tim Cook has [himself pushed](#) the claim that undermining Big Tech's power in any way would threaten U.S national security. And there is now an army of well-compensated-by-Silicon-Valley former national security officials echoing his message. A [well-researched Politico article](#) from September — headlined: “12 former security officials who warned against antitrust crackdown have tech ties” — detailed how many of these former officials who invoke national security claims to protect Big Tech are on the take from the key tech monopolies:

The warning last week from a dozen former national security leaders was stark: An antitrust crackdown on Silicon Valley could threaten the nation's economy and “cede U.S. tech leadership to China.”

But the group was united by more than their histories of holding senior defense and intelligence roles in the Trump, Obama and George W. Bush administrations: All 12 have ties to major tech companies, either from working with them directly or serving with organizations that get money from them, according to a POLITICO analysis....

Seven of the 12, including Panetta, [hold roles at Beacon Global Strategies](#), a public relations firm that according to a person familiar with the matter counts Google as a client...Five of the former officials, including former director of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency Robert Cardillo and former National Security Agency deputy director Richard Ledgett, serve as advisory board members at Beacon. Panetta and Michael Morell, a former acting CIA director under President Barack Obama, are senior counselors for the firm....

Frances Townsend, who was a counterterrorism and homeland security adviser to President George W. Bush, is on the national security advisory board for American Edge, a [Facebook-funded group](#) that opposes changes to strengthen antitrust laws...*Townsend is also on the board of directors of the Atlantic Council, which counts Facebook and Google as funders; the board of trustees for Center for Strategic and International Studies, which counts Apple and Google as funders; and the board of directors of the Council on Foreign Relations, which receives money from Microsoft and counts Facebook and Google in its highest membership category.*



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The view that preservation of Big Tech is vital for national security is by no means a unanimous view even in that world. Retired Gen. Wesley Clark and others have [vehemently argued](#) that this claim is a “myth.” As veteran internet security expert Bruce Schneier [observed](#): “These bills will encourage competition, prevent monopolist extortion, and guarantee users a new right to digital self-determination.” But the National Security State has enough True Believers combined with paid shills to make it appear as if Americans should be desperate to preserve and protect Big Tech’s power because this power is crucial to keeping America safe and, particularly, fighting Russia.

There are indeed valid and rational reasons for these officials to view Big Tech monopoly power as a vital weapon in advancing their national security agenda. As I [documented last week](#) when reporting on the unprecedented censorship regime imposed in the West regarding the war in Ukraine, Big Tech censorship of political speech is not random. Domestically, it is virtually always devoted to silencing any meaningful dissent from liberal orthodoxy or official pieties on key political controversies. But in terms of foreign policy, the censorship patterns of tech monopolies virtually always align with U.S. foreign policy, and for understandable reasons: Big Tech and the U.S. security state are in a virtually complete union, with all sorts of overlapping, mutual financial interests:

Note that this censorship regime is completely one-sided and, as usual, entirely aligned with U.S. foreign policy. Western news outlets and social media platforms have been [flooded with pro-Ukrainian propaganda and outright lies](#) from the start of the war. A *New York Times* [article from early March](#) put it very delicately in its headline: “Fact and Mythmaking Blend in Ukraine’s Information War.” Axios was similarly understated in [recognizing this fact](#): “Ukraine misinformation is spreading — and not just from Russia.” Members of [the U.S. Congress](#) have [gleefully spread](#) fabrications that went viral to millions of people, with no action from censorship-happy Silicon Valley corporations. That is not a surprise: all participants in war use disinformation and propaganda to manipulate public opinion in their favor, and that certainly includes all direct and proxy-war belligerents in the war in Ukraine.

Yet there is little to no censorship — either by Western states or by Silicon Valley monopolies — of pro-Ukrainian disinformation, propaganda and lies. The censorship goes only in one direction: to silence any voices deemed “pro-Russian,” *regardless of whether they spread disinformation....* Their crime, like the crime of so many other banished accounts, was not disinformation but *skepticism about the US/NATO propaganda campaign*. Put another way, it is not “disinformation” but rather viewpoint-error that is targeted for silencing. One can spread as many lies and as much disinformation as one wants provided that it is designed to advance the NATO agenda in Ukraine (just as one is [free to spread disinformation provided](#) that its purpose is to strengthen the Democratic Party, which wields its [majoritarian power in Washington to demand greater censorship](#) and [commands the support of most of Silicon Valley](#)). But what one cannot do is question the NATO/Ukrainian propaganda framework without running a very substantial risk of banishment.



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Congressional Democrats have repeatedly hauled tech executives before their various Committees to [explicitly threaten them](#) with legal and regulatory reprisals if they do not censor more in accordance with the policy goals and political interests of that party.

Needless to say, the U.S. security state wants to maintain a stranglehold on political discourse in the U.S. and the world more broadly. They want to be able to impose propagandistic narratives without challenge and advocate for militarism without dissent. To accomplish that, they need a small handful of corporations which are subservient to them to hold in their hands as much concentrated power over the internet as possible.

If a free and fair competitive market were to arise whereby social media platforms more devoted to free speech could fairly compete with Google and Facebook— as the various pending bills in Congress are partially designed to foster — then that new diversity of influence, that diffusion of power, would genuinely threaten the ability of the CIA and the Pentagon and the White House to police political discourse and suppress dissent from their policies and assertions. By contrast, by maintaining all power in the hands of the small coterie of tech monopolies which control the internet and which have long proven their loyalty to the U.S. security state, the ability of the U.S. national security state to maintain a closed propaganda system around questions of war and militarism is guaranteed.

In this new letter, these national security operatives barely bother to hide their intention to exploit the strong animosity toward Russia that they have cultivated, and the accompanying intense emotions from the ubiquitous, unprecedented media coverage of the war in Ukraine, to prop up their goals. Over and over, they cite the grave Russian threat — a theme they have been disseminating and manufacturing since the Russiagate fraud of 2016 — to manipulate Americans to support the preservation of Big Tech's concentrated power, and to imply that anyone seeking to limit Big Tech power or make the market more competitive is a threat to U.S. national security:

This is a pivotal moment in modern history. There is a battle brewing between authoritarianism and democracy, and the former is using all the tools at its disposal, including a broad disinformation campaign and the threat of cyber-attacks, to bring about a change in the global order. We must confront these global challenges. . . . U.S. technology platforms have given the world the chance to see the real story of the **Russian military's** horrific human rights abuses in Ukraine. . . . At the same time, **President Putin and his regime** have sought to twist facts in order to show Russia as a liberator instead of an aggressor. . . .

The Russian government is seeking to alter the information landscape by blocking Russian citizens from receiving content that would show the true facts on the ground. . . . Indeed, it is telling that among **the Kremlin's first actions of the war** was blocking U.S. platforms in Russia. **Putin knows** that U.S. digital platforms can provide Russian citizens valuable views and facts about the war that he tries to distort through lies and disinformation. U.S. technology platforms have already taken concrete steps to shine a light on **Russia's actions to brutalize Ukraine**. . . . Providing timely and accurate on-the-ground information — and disrupting the **scourge of disinformation from Russian state media** — is essential for allowing the



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back on the Kremlin **Russia's invasion of Ukraine marks the start of a new chapter in global history**, one in which the ideals of democracy will be put to the test. The United States will need to rely on the power of its technology sector to ensure that the safety of its citizens and the narrative of events continues to be shaped by facts, not by foreign adversaries.

It is hardly controversial or novel to observe that the U.S. security state always wants and needs a hated foreign enemy precisely because it allows them to claim whatever powers and whatever budgets they want in the name of stopping that foreign villain. And every war and every new enemy ushers in new authoritarian powers and the trampling of civil liberties: both [the First War on Terror](#), justified by 9/11, and the [New Domestic War on Terror](#), justified by 1/6, should have taught us that lesson permanently. Usually, though, U.S. security state propagandists are a bit more subtle about how they manipulate anger and fear of foreign villains to manipulate public opinion for their own authoritarian ends.

Perhaps because of their current desperation about the support these bills have attracted, they are now just nakedly and shamelessly trying to channel the anger and hatred that they have successfully stoked toward Russia to demand *that Big Tech not be weakened, regulated or restricted in any way*. The cynical exploitation could hardly be more overt: if you hate Putin the way any loyal and patriotic American should, then you must devote yourself to full preservation of the power of Google, Facebook, Apple, and Amazon.

It should go without saying that these life-long security state operatives do not care in the slightest about the dangers of "disinformation." Indeed — as evidenced by the fact that most of them generated [one Russiagate fraud](#) after [the next](#) during...

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