The National Security State Is the Main Driver of Censorship in the US

Analysis by Dr. Joseph Mercola | **March 16, 2024**

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

> In a February 16, 2024, interview, Tucker Carlson and Mike Benz discussed how the fundamental right to free speech in the United States, as guaranteed by the First Amendment, is being eroded — not based on truthfulness but on alignment with the political and social agendas of those in power

> Modern censorship is not as overt as historical examples. Instead, societal, technological and political means are being used to subtly integrate censorship into daily life

> Initially a tool for freedom, the internet has been transformed into a mechanism for controlling speech, with governmental bodies, the defense industry and tech companies developing sophisticated methods for online suppression

> New laws and institutional arrangements, both in the U.S. and internationally, such as the EU Digital Services Act, have created frameworks that legalize and formalize online censorship

> Government, the private sector, civil society and media institutions are all working together to shape and control the narrative. To combat their whole-of-society censorship effort, we need a whole-of-society plan of our own that includes restructuring the legislative, civil, and media landscapes to promote true freedom

In a February 16, 2024, interview, Tucker Carlson and Mike Benz, founder and executive director of Foundation for Freedom Online (FFO), discussed the erosion of free speech.

Fundamental Right to Free Speech Is at Risk

As noted by Carlson, freedom of speech, as outlined in the First Amendment to the Bill of Rights, is being eroded — not based on the truthfulness of information, but on whether it aligns with the agendas and narratives of those in power.

This right, which has been central to the identity and exceptionalism of the United States since its inception, ensures that people can express their thoughts and beliefs without fear of censorship or persecution. This right is what distinguishes us as free individuals, opposed to slaves. And, as noted by Carlson, there's no hate speech exception in the First Amendment.

> *"... just because you hate what somebody else thinks you cannot force that person to be quiet,"* Carlson says.

Carlson also points out that while censorship itself is nothing new, the censorship we face today is very different from other historical instances. It's a far more nuanced, multifaceted approach that includes societal, technological and political dimensions. Moreover, this new form of censorship is being subtly integrated into the very fabric of our daily lives, which makes it all the more insidious and difficult to combat.

The phenomenon of labeling undesirable yet truthful information as "malinformation" is but one example of this. This labeling process, devoid of concern for the factual accuracy or the honesty of the expressed views, undermines the essence of free speech by restricting open discourse based on subjective criteria rather than objective truth.

Importantly, the mechanisms enforcing this modern censorship are not confined to private sectors or individual platforms but are significantly directed and influenced by the U.S. government itself. This intertwining of state powers with censorship activities marks a troubling departure from traditional American values, where free speech has been held sacred.

While many intuitively perceive this shift, Carlson suspects they may not fully grasp the mechanics of this censorship, or just how deeply embedded it has become in the

societal and political landscape. This lack of understanding further compounds the risk, as combating an unseen or poorly comprehended threat is far more challenging.

Modern Censorship Mechanics Explained

According to Benz, modern censorship is based on a complex, integrated system where governmental interests, military defense strategies and corporate technologies converge to regulate and restrict free speech, moving us away from the foundational ideals of internet freedom and openness toward a more controlled and surveilled communication landscape.

In the interview, he outlines the transformation from internet freedom to internet censorship, and how these changes have been influenced and directed by various government agencies and the military-industrial complex.

Initially, the internet was heralded as a tool of freedom, promoting open dialogue and the exchange of ideas across borders. This freedom was supported and even exploited by entities like the Pentagon, the State Department and intelligence services to advance U.S. interests abroad, particularly in facilitating regime change by supporting dissident groups in authoritarian countries. However, this perspective has shifted dramatically in the past decades.

According to Benz, the change began with the realization within U.S. and allied defense and intelligence communities that the same tools that promote freedom and regime change abroad could also be used against them, which led to a significant shift from promoting to restricting speech online.

> *"The high-water mark of internet free speech was the Arab Spring in 2011, 2012, when you had ... all of the adversary governments of the Obama administration — Egypt, Tunisia — all began to be toppled in Facebook revolutions and Twitter revolutions, and you had the state department working very closely with the social media companies to be able to keep social media online during those periods,"* Benz says.

"So free speech was an instrument of statecraft from the national security state to begin with. All of that architecture, all the NGOs, the relationships between the tech companies and the national security state had been long established for freedom.

In 2014, after the coup in Ukraine, there was an unexpected counter coup, where Crimea and the Donbass broke away and they broke away with, essentially, a military backstop that NATO was highly unprepared for ... That was the last straw for the concept of free speech on the internet.

In the eyes of NATO, as they saw it, the fundamental nature of war changed at that moment ... You don't need to win miliary skirmishes to take over Central and Eastern Europe. All you need to do is control the media and the social media ecosystem, because that's what controls elections."

Censorship Is Now Embedded Into the Internet Infrastructure

The mechanics of modern censorship, as described by Benz, involve a coordinated effort between governmental bodies, the defense industry and tech companies to develop and implement sophisticated methods to monitor, control, and suppress speech online under the guise of combating "disinformation" and "malinformation" for national security purposes.

> **"Censorship mechanisms are now embedded within the infrastructure of the internet, from social media platforms to search engines, and tools initially developed to protect democracy and promote free speech have all been repurposed to monitor and control the flow of information instead."**

But, again, these efforts are not necessarily concerned with the veracity of the information but rather with its alignment with, or opposition to, certain political agendas, both national and global.

These censorship mechanisms are now embedded within the very infrastructure of the internet itself, from social media platforms to search engines, and tools initially developed to protect democracy and promote free speech, such as VPNs, Tor, encryption and private browsing modes, have all been repurposed to monitor and control the flow of information instead.

The involvement of major tech corporations — initially funded and supported by government grants and contracts — plays a crucial role in this transformation. For example, Google began as a project funded by a Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) grant, awarded to founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin while they were Ph.D. students at Stanford.

This funding was part of a joint CIA-NSA program aimed at understanding how groups form and interact online, essentially tracking "birds of a feather" through search engine data aggregation. That technology is now being used to identify, monitor and silence "dissident" voices within the U.S., no matter how righteous their views may be.

Legal Frameworks Now Sustains Modern Censorship

Benz also reviews the legal and institutional frameworks established to sustain this modern censorship, which allows for a seamless transition between state objectives and private sector compliance.

This public-private interaction is a clear departure from the overt government censorship of old. What we now have is a far more nuanced, shadowy form of content control that blurs the lines between public and private actions against free speech.

As we saw during the COVID pandemic, this also allowed government to plead innocence and pretend that the decision to censor some content was done by the companies themselves.

However, between the Twitter Files, the CTIL files and the lawsuit against the Biden administration, we now have ample evidence showing that companies were pressured to comply with the government's demand for censorship. They didn't come up with that on their own.

According to Benz, it's quite clear that state-sponsored initiatives, supported by defense and intelligence agencies, are shaping online narratives and controlling information flow in the U.S. under the pretense that national security is at stake. As such, these initiatives have led to a form of legalized censorship.

U.S.-led initiatives have also influenced internet governance and free speech regulations internationally. For example, the European Union's Digital Services Act (DSA) is a significant legislative move towards formalizing and legalizing online censorship.

The DSA, which took effect February 17, 2024, requires tech companies to comply with stringent content moderation policies to operate within the EU market. This act represents a legal framework that extends well beyond traditional boundaries of censorship.

It pushes companies to police content in accordance with European standards, which is basically just a proxy for NATO and U.S. foreign policy objectives. Collectively, these frameworks mark a global shift towards institutionalizing online censorship through legal and regulatory measures. As noted by Benz, "What I'm describing is military rule. It's the inversion of democracy."

Building a Whole-of-Society Solution

As explained by Benz, the censorship industry was built as a whole-of-society effort, and to combat that, we need a whole-of-society solution.

According to the Department of Homeland Security, misinformation online is a whole-of-society problem that requires a whole-of-society solution. By that, they mean that four types of institutions must fuse together as a seamless whole. Those four categories and key functions are:

1. Government institutions, which provide funding and coordination.

2. Private sector institutions that do the censorship and dedicate funds to censorship through corporate-social responsibility programs.

3. Civil society institutions (universities, NGOs, academia, foundations, nonprofits and activists) that do the research, the spying and collecting of data that are then given to the private sector to censor.

4. News media/fact checking institutions, which put pressure on institutions, platforms and businesses to comply with the censorship demands.

Benz' organization, FFO, educates people about this structure, and the ways in which legislatures and the government can be restructured, how civil society institutions can be established, and how news media can be created to support and promote freedom rather than censorship.

To learn how you can be part of the solution, check out **foundationforfreedomonline.com**. You can also follow **Benz on Twitter**.

I firmly believe that we can turn this situation around, if for no other reason than the fact that there are some eight billion of us who want freedom, while those who seek to enslave us number in the thousands, or tens of thousands at the most. Either way, they're clearly outnumbered.

But we need to spread the word, and help our friends and family understand how important our decisions are. We either support the network that seeks to take our freedom, or the network that seeks to protect it. Educate yourself about what's at stake, then trust yourself to make the right decisions.