Written by **R. Cort Kirkwood** on March 4, 2023

Twitter Files: Amateurs Targeted "Disinformation," Labeled Conservatives Extremists

A collection of hate-Trump, leftist amateurs has been deciding what was "disinformation" on social media, and targeting conservatives and Trump supporters with false charges of extremism.

Matt Taibbi's latest on the Twitter Files also reports that the obsession with disinformation began when President Barack Hussein Obama created a little-known, little-publicized agency called the Global Engagement Center (GEC) to tackle the "messaging" of terrorists.

Such was the center's activity that the putative threat of "disinformation" became something akin to the Red Scare of the 1950s, Taibbi wrote on Racket News. Difference is, the Red Scare wasn't just a "scare." It was a very real concern that flowed from the very real threat of international communism and the penetration of the United States government by Soviet agents.

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"Disinformation" from conservatives on Twitter threatens no one.

> 1. TWITTER FILES #17
> New Knowledge, the Global Engagement Center, and State-Sponsored Blacklists
> pic.twitter.com/8LuoKY9zzA
>
> — Matt Taibbi (@mtaibbi) March 2, 2023

Secret Contractors

The Disinformation Scare began when Obama inked Executive Order 13721. It created GEC to "counter the messaging and diminish the influence of international terrorist organizations."

"This act got almost no press and even within government, almost no one noticed," Taibbi wrote:

> In the bigger picture, however, a lame duck president kick-started the process of shifting the national security establishment's focus from counterterrorism to "disinformation." Whether by malfunction or design, this abrupt course change of Washington's contracting supertanker would have dramatic consequences. In fact, the tale of how America's information warfare mechanism turned inward, against "threats" in our own population,

might someday be remembered as the story of our time, with collective panic over "disinfo" defining this generation in much the same way the Red Scare defined the culture of the fifties.

Though GEC shouldn't be viewed as an "an evil Orwellian mind-control scheme," Taibbi continued, "GEC funded a secret list of contractors and employed a more surreptitious approach to 'counter-disinformation,' sending companies like Twitter voluminous reports on foreign 'ecosystems' — in practice, blacklists."

Such was GEC's reach that it funded a nongovernmental organization in England to "de-rank" conservative media, as the *Washington Examiner* reported in early February.

Another worrisome aspect of GEC is the "sprawling infrastructure of 'disinformation labs' that have grown around it," Taibbi wrote. That infrastructure employed angry Twitter leftists to decide what was "disinformation":

> Underneath America's love affair with "anti-disinformation" in the Trump years — which expressed itself in the seemingly instant construction of a sprawling complex of disinformation studies "labs" at institutions like Harvard, Stanford, Clemson, UT, Pitt, William and Mary, the University of Washington, and other locations — lay a devastating secret. Most of these "experts" know nothing. Many have skill, if you can call mesmerizing dumb reporters a skill, but in the area of identifying true bad actors, few know more than the average person on the street.

> This is described repeatedly in the #TwitterFiles. In one sequence Twitter was contacted by Sheera Frenkel of the *New York Times*, who was writing a hagiographic [profile] of "disinformation" warrior Renee DiResta, who'd achieved some renown as a campaigner against vaccine misinformation. Frenkel wrote Twitter to ask why they hadn't hired "independent researchers" like DiResta, Jonathan Albright, and Jonathon Morgan — coincidentally, all hired witnesses of the Senate Intelligence Committee — to help Twitter "better understand" its own business.

> At the sight of Frenkel's provocative note, some Twitter execs lost it.

> "The word 'researcher' has taken on a very broad meaning," snapped Nick Pickles. "Renee is literally doing this as a hobby… Of those three only [Albright] is the most credible, but… the bulk of his work is Medium blogs."

> "… misinformation is becoming a cottage industry," agreed comms official Ian Plunkett, referencing "countering violent extremism," a.k.a. counterterrorism.

"Hindu Nationalists"

An outrageous attack on Trump supporters demonstrated the danger of using amateurs to code and trace "disinformation." That came from the leftist GEC-funded Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab, or DFRLab.

The outfit "sent Twitter a huge list of people they suspected of 'engaging in inauthentic behavior … and Hindu nationalism more broadly,'" Taibbi explained, comparing it to the "Hamilton 68" story. That's about "a spook-laden think tank purported to track accounts linked to 'Russian influence activities'

while really following the likes of @TrumpDyke and @TimeForTrumppp."

DFRLab included "real septuagenarian Trump supporters" in its list of "Hindu nationalists." That would be amusing if it couldn't ruin a person's life.

"One, a woman named Marysel Urbanik who immigrated from Castro's Cuba in her youth, struggled to understand why a Washington think tank had sent Twitter a letter ID'ing her as either 'inauthentic' or a Hindu nationalist," Taibbi continued:

> "They say I'm what?"
>
> "A Hindu nationalist," I said. "Well, suspected."
>
> "But I'm Cuban, not Indian," she pleaded, confused. "Hindu? I wouldn't even know what words to say."
>
> Such listmakers are either employing extremely expansive definitions of hate speech, extremely inexact methods of identifying spam, or they're doing both in addition to a third thing: keeping up a busywork campaign for underemployed ex-anti-terror warriors, who don't mind racking up lists of "foreign" disinformationists that just happen to also rope in domestic undesirables.

Those "undesirables" are conservatives and Trump supporters such as Urbanik.

> 3. DFRLab said it suspected 40,000 accounts of being "paid employees or possibly volunteers" of India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).
>
> But the list was full of ordinary Americans, many with no connection to India and no clue about Indian politics. https://t.co/B5L8KsY6ZH pic.twitter.com/vqijzp9BR2
>
> — Matt Taibbi (@mtaibbi) March 2, 2023

> 8. But Americans on DFR's list, like Marysel Urbanik, are unconvinced its focus is "exclusively international."
>
> "This is un-American," says Urbanik, who immigrated from Castro's Cuba. "They do this in places that don't believe in free speech." pic.twitter.com/7MKySCe3XN
>
> — Matt Taibbi (@mtaibbi) March 2, 2023

DFRLab, by the way, employs anti-American, hate-Trump leftists such as Jared Holt, who worked for Right Wing Watch and has promoted terror-supporting Antifa goons in friendly interviews on his podcast. Indeed, Holt has admitted to using material from "anti-fascist activists and researchers" in his articles.

"Openly Absurd" Methodologies

Such was GEC's activity that even Twitter complained about it. Those complaints mirror others from sources who told Taibbi that the "experts" on disinformation don't use readily available "sophisticated methods for detecting true bad actors."

In fact, their "methodologies are often openly absurd," and include tracking those who follow accounts or retweet memes the disinformation trackers don't like or find suspicious.

"One former GEC staffer laughs about how experts win over the media with impressive-looking 'hairball' charts that nearly always come down to some sort of volume or affinity analysis: who retweets whom, whose ideas 'rhyme' with whose, etc.," Taibbi wrote.

In other words, the "disinformation" experts were hanging out on Twitter and capriciously red-flagging accounts they found objectionable ideologically.

Landing the crosshairs of a GEC contractor can mean professional and financial ruin.

"The Hamilton 68 scam in this sense was perfect," he concluded:

> It used digital alchemy to create streams of news stories tying ordinary Americans to "foreign" disinformation. With headlines like CNN's "Russian bots are using #WalkAway to try to wound Dems in midterms" in hand, a "Disinfo Lab" or a noble journalistic enterprise like the "extremism" desk at *USA Today* can finish the important work of calling up strings of Internet companies to "ask" why this or that person is still allowed to use credit cards, advertise on Amazon, etc.

> 1.THREAD: Twitter Files #15
> MOVE OVER, JAYSON BLAIR: TWITTER FILES EXPOSE NEXT GREAT MEDIA FRAUD
> pic.twitter.com/bLRpDpuWql
>
> — Matt Taibbi (@mtaibbi) January 27, 2023

> 3."Falsely accuses a bunch of legitimate right-leaning accounts of being Russian bots."
> pic.twitter.com/EHRWACkZu4
>
> — Matt Taibbi (@mtaibbi) January 27, 2023

For more on the Twitter Files:

Twitter Files: Pfizer Exec Pressed Platform to Ban Vax Skeptics

Twitter Helped Run Pentagon Psywar Ops, Propaganda Campaigns

FBI Paid Twitter $3.4M for Censorship Operation, Bureau Alumni Packed Payroll

Twitter a "Subsidiary" of FBI, Censored on Bureau's Orders

Twitter Banned Trump, but Not Leaders Who Advocated Violence, Genocide

Key Twitter Exec Behind Trump Ban Was GOP, Trump-hater Roth

Twitter Files Detail Trump Suspension, Regular Meetings With FBI, DHS

Twitter Blacklist Operation Exposed in Second Dump of "Twitter Files"

Musk Fires Former FBI Attorney Who Vetted Twitter Files, Helped Suppress Hunter Biden Laptop Story

Musk: Twitter Might Have Interfered in Brazil's Election, Too

Musk Releases "Twitter Files" That Detail Effort to Block Hunter Biden Laptop Story

"Every Conceivable" Government Agency, Congress Included, Pushed Twitter to Censor; Schiff Targeted Top Journalist to Shut Him Up