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The defining fact of the United States is freedom of speech.

To the extent this country is actually exceptional, it's because we have the First Amendment to the Bill of rights. We have freedom of conscience. We can say what we really think.

There's no hate speech exception to that. Just because you hate what somebody else thinks, you cannot force that person to be quiet because we're citizens, not slaves.

But that right, that foundational right that makes this country what it is, that right from which all other rights flow is going away at high speed in the face of censorship.

Now, modern censorship bears no resemblance to previous censorship regimes in previous countries in previous eras.

Our censorship is affected on the basis of fights against disinformation and malinformation.

And the key thing to know about these is they're everywhere.

And of course, they have no reference at all to whether what you're saying is true or not.

In other words, you can say something that is factually accurate and consistent with your own conscience, and in previous versions of America, what an absolute right to say those things.

But because someone doesn't like them, or because they're inconvenient to whatever plan the people in power have, they can be denounced as disinformation, and you could be stripped of your right to express them, either in person or online.

In fact, expressing these things can become a criminal act and is.

And it's important to know, by the way, that this is not just the private

sector doing this.

These efforts are being directed by the US government, which you pay for and at least theoretically own.

It's your government, but they're stripping your rights at very high speed.

Most people understand this intuitively, but they don't know how it happens.

How does censorship happen? What are the mechanics of it? Mike Benz is, we can say with some confidence, the expert in the world on how this happens. Mike Benz had the cyber portfolio at the State Department. He's now executive director of Foundation for Freedom Online, and we're going to have a conversation with him about a very specific kind of censorship, by the way, we can't recommend strongly enough if you want to know how this happens Mike Benz BENZ is the man to read.

But today we just want to talk about a specific kind of censorship and that censorship that emanates from the fabled military industrial complex, from our defense industry, and the foreign policy establishment in Washington.

That's significant now because we're on the cusp of a global war.

And so you can expect censorship to increase dramatically.

And so with that, here is Mike Benz, executive director of Foundation for Freedom Online. Mike, thanks so much for joining us.

And I just can't overstate your audience how exhaustive and comprehensive your knowledge is on this topic.

It's almost it's almost unbelievable.

And so if you could just walk us through how the foreign policy establishment and defense contractors and DoD and just the whole cluster, the constellation of defense related, publicly funded institutions strip from us our freedom of speech? Sure. You know, one of the

easiest ways to actually start the story is really with the story of internet freedom and its switch from internet freedom to internet censorship, because free speech on the internet was an instrument of statecraft almost from the outset of the privatization of the internet in 1991.

We quickly discovered, through the efforts of the Defense Department, the State Department in our intelligence services, that people were using the internet to congregate on blogs and forums, and free speech was championed more than anybody by the Pentagon, the State Department, and our sort of CIA cut out NGO blob architecture as a way to support dissident groups around the world in order to help them overthrow authoritarian governments, as they were sort of billed. Essentially the, internet free speech allowed kind of instant regime change operations, to be able to facilitate the foreign policy establishment's State Department agenda.

Google is a great example of this.

Google began as a DARPA grant, by Larry Page and Sergey Brin when they were Stanford PhDs.

And they got their funding as part of a joint CIA, NSA program to chart how, quote, birds of a feather flock together online through search engine aggregation.

And then one year later, they launched Google and then became a military contractor quickly thereafter. They got Google Maps by purchasing a CIA satellite software, essentially, and the ability to track to use free speech on the internet as a way to circumvent state control over media, over in places like Central Asia, or all around the world, was seen as a way to be able to do what used to be done out of CIA station houses or out of embassies or consulates in a way that was totally turbocharged.

And all of the internet free speech technology was initially created by our national security state.

VPNs, virtual private networks to hide your IP address.

Tour the dark web, to be able to buy and sell goods anonymously and to end encrypted chats.

All these things were created initially as DARPA projects or as joint CIA NSA projects, to be able to help intelligence backed groups to overthrow governments that were causing a problem, to the Clinton administration or the Bush administration or the Obama administration.

And this plan worked magically from about 1991 until about 2014, when there began to be an about face on internet freedom and its utility.

Now, the high watermark of the sort of internet free speech moment was the Arab Spring in 2011, 2012, when you had this one by one.

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. There was a famous phone call from Google's Jared Cohen to Twitter to not do their scheduled maintenance so that, the preferred opposition group in Iran would be able to use Twitter, to win that election.

So it was, 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 Donbas broke away and they broke away with essentially a military backstop that NATO was highly unprepared for at the time.

They had one last Hail Mary chance, which was the Crimea annexation vote on, in 2014.

And when the hearts and minds of the people of Crimea voted, to join the Russian Federation, 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.

And NATO at that point declared something that they first called the Gerasimov doctrine, which is named after this Russian military, a general, who they claimed made a speech that the fundamental nature of war has changed. You don't need to win military 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.

And if you simply get the right administration into power, they control the military.

So it's infinitely cheaper than conducting a military war to simply conduct an organized political, influence operation over social media.

And legacy media and industry had been created that spanned the Pentagon, the the British Ministry of Defense in Brussels into a organized political warfare outfit, essentially infrastructure that was created, initially stationed in Germany and in Central and Eastern Europe to create psychological buffer zones, basically to create the ability to to have the military work with the social media companies, to censor Russian propaganda, or to censor domestic right wing populist groups in Europe who were rising in political power at the time because of the migrant crisis.

So you had the systematic targeting by our State Department, by our ISI, by the Pentagon, of groups like Germany's AfD, the alternative for Deutschland there, and for groups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania.

Now, when Brexit happened in 2016, it was that was that was this crisis moment where suddenly they didn't have to worry just about Central and Eastern Europe anymore.

It was coming westward, this idea of Russian control over hearts and minds.

And so that was Brexit was June 2016.

The very next month at the Warsaw Conference, NATO formally amended its charter to expressly commit to hybrid warfare as there as this new NATO capacity.

So they went from, you know, basically 70 years of tanks to this explicit capacity building for censoring tweets if they were deemed to be Russian proxies.

And again, it's not just Russian propaganda.

This was these were now Brexit groups or groups like Matteo Salvini in Italy, or in Greece or in Germany or in Spain with the Vox party.

And now at the time, NATO was publishing white papers saying that the biggest threat NATO faces is not actually a military invasion from Russia.

It's losing domestic elections across Europe in two. All these right wing populist groups who, because they were mostly working class movements, were campaigning on cheap Russian energy at a time when the U.S.

was pressuring this energy diversification policy.

And so they made the argument after Brexit.

Now the entire rules based international order would collapse unless the military took control over media, because Brexit would give rise to "Frexit" in France, with Marine Le Pen to "Spexit" in in Spain with a Vox party to "Italexit" in Italy, to "Grexit" in Germany, to "Grexit" in Greece, the EU would come apart, so NATO would be killed without a single bullet being, being fired.

And then not only that, now that NATO is gone, now there's no enforcement arm for the International Monetary Fund, the IMF or the world Bank.

So now the financial stakeholders who depend on the battering ram of the national security state would basically be helpless against governments around the world.

So from their perspective, if the military did not begin to censor the internet, every all of the democratic institutions and infrastructure that gave rise to the. World after World War Two would collapse. So you can imagine that we.

May I ask.

Later. Donald Trump won the 2016 election.

So you well, you just told a remarkable story that I've never heard anybody explain as lucidly and crisply as you just did.

But did anyone at NATO or anyone at the State Department pause and say, wait a second, we've just identified our new enemy as democracy within our own countries. I think that's what you're saying. They feared that the people, the citizens of their own countries would get their way, and they went to war against that.

Yes.

Now, you know, there's a rich history of this dating back to the Cold War. You know, the Cold War in Europe was essentially a similar, a similar struggle for hearts and minds of people, especially in Central and Eastern Europe.

You know, in these sort of, you know, Soviet buffer zones.

And, you know, starting in 1948, the national security state was really established.

Then, you know, you had the 1947 act, which established the Central Intelligence Agency.

You had, you know, this new world order that had been created with all these international institutions.

And you had the 1948 U.N. Declaration on Human Rights, which forbid the territorial acquisition by military force.

So you can no longer run a traditional military occupation government in the way that we could.

In 1898, for example, when we took the Philippines, everything had to be done through a sort of political legitimization process, whereby there's some ratification from the hearts and minds of people within the

country.

Now, often that involves simply puppet politicians who are groomed as emerging leaders by our State Department. But the battle for hearts and minds had been something that we had been giving ourselves a long moral license. Leash, if you will.

Since 1948, one of the godfathers of the CIA, George Kennan, at 12 days after we rigged the Italian election in 1948 by stuffing ballot boxes and working with the mob, we published a memo called The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare, where he said, listen, it's a mean old world out there. We at the CIA just rigged the Italian election.

We had to do it because if the communists won, maybe there'll never be another election in Italy again.

So.

But it's really effective, guys, we need a department of dirty tricks to be able to do this around the world. And it's essentially a new social contract we're constructing with the American people.

Because this is not the way we've conducted diplomacy before, but we are now forbidden from using the War Department. In 1948, they also renamed the War Department to the Defense Department.

So, again, as part of this, this diplomatic onslaught for political control, rather than looking like it's overt military control, but essentially what ends up happening there is we created this foreign domestic firewall.

We said that we have a department of dirty tricks to be able to rig elections, to be able to control media, to be able to meddle in the internal affairs of every other plant of dirt in the country. But this sort of sacred dirt on which the American homeland sits will, they are not allowed to operate there. The State Department, the Defense Department and the CIA are all expressly forbidden from operating on US soil.

Of course, this is so far from the case, it's not even funny.

But, but that's because of a number of laundering tricks that they've

developed over 70 years of doing this. But essentially, there was no moral quandary at first with respect to the creation of the censorship industry when it started out in Germany and in Lithuania and Latvia and Estonia and in Sweden and Finland, there began to be a more diplomatic debate about it after Brexit.

And then, it was it became.

Full throttle when Trump was elected and what little resistance there was.

Was washed over by the rise and saturation of Russiagate, which basically allowed them to not have to deal with the moral ambiguities of censoring your own people.

Because if Trump was a Russian asset, you no longer really had a traditional free speech issue.

It was a national security issue.

It was only after Russiagate died in July 2019, when Robert Mueller basically choked on the stand for three hours and revealed he had absolutely nothing.

After two and a half years of investigation that the foreign to domestic switcheroo took place, where they took all of this censorship architecture spanning DHS, the FBI, the CIA, the DOD, the DOJ, and then the thousands of government funded NGO and private sector mercenary firms were all basically transmitted from a foreign folk, from a foreign predicate, a Russian disinformation predicate to a democracy predicate, by saying that disinformation is not just a threat when it comes from the Russians, it's actually an intrinsic threat to democracy itself.

And so by that, they were able to launder the entire democracy promotion regime change toolkit, just in time for the 2020 election.

It I mean, it's almost beyond belief this has happened.

I mean, my own father worked for the U.S. government in this business in the information war against the Soviet Union.

And, you know, was a big part of that. And the idea that any of those tools would be turned against American citizens by the U.S. government was, I think I want to think was absolutely unthinkable and say, 1988.

And you're saying that it's there really hasn't been anyone who's raised objections.

And it's just it's absolutely turned inward to manipulate and rig our own elections, as we would in say, Latvia.

Yeah. Well, as soon as the democracy predicate was established, you had this professional class of professional regime change artists and operatives.

That is the same people who argued that, you know, we need to bring democracy to Yugoslavia.

You. And that's the predicate for getting rid of, you know, Milosevic or any other country around the world where we basically overthrow governments in order to preserve democracy.

Well, if the democracy threat is homegrown now, then that becomes, you know, then suddenly these people all have new jobs moving on the US side, and they can go through a million examples of that.

But one thing on what you just mentioned, which is that, you know from their perspective, they just weren't ready for the internet.

2016 was really the first time that social media had reached such maturity that it began to eclipse legacy media. I mean, this was a long time coming. I think folks saw this building from 2006 through 2016.

You know, internet 1.0 didn't even have social media.

From 1991 to 2004, there was no social media at all. 2004 Facebook came out 2005, Twitter, 2006 YouTube, 2007 the smartphone and so.

And in that initial period of social media, nobody was getting subscriber shifts at the level where they actually competed with legacy news media.

But over the course of being, you know, so initially, even these dissident voices within the US, even though they, they may have been loud, in moments, they never reached 30 million followers, they never reached, you know, a billion impressions a year type thing as a uncensored, mature ecosystem allowed citizen journalists and independent voices to be able to outcompete legacy news media.

This induced a massive crisis both in our military and in our State Department and intelligence services. And I give you a great example of this.

In 2019, at a meeting of the German Marshall Fund, which is, you know, an institution that goes back to the US, basically, and I'm don't want to say bribe, but the essentially the soft power economic soft power projection in Europe as part of the reconstruction of European governments after World War 2, to be able to essentially pay them, with Marshall Fund dollars.

And then in return, they basically were under our thumb in terms of how they reconstructed.

But the German Marshall Fund held the meeting in 2019.

They held a million of these, frankly, but where they, where a four star general, got up on the panel and said that that the what happens, he posed the question, what happens to the to the US military? What happens to the national security state when the New York Times is reduced to a medium sized Facebook page? And he posed this thought experiment as an example of we've had these gatekeepers, we've had these bumper cars on democracy in the form of a century old relationship with legacy media institutions.

I mean, our mainstream media is not in any shape or form, even from its outset, independent from the national security state, from the State Department, from the War Department.

You know, you had the initial, all of the initial, broadcast news companies NBC, ABC and CBS were all created by Office of War Information veterans from the from the War Department's effort in World War II.

You had these operation mockingbird relationships from the 1950s through the 1970s.

Those continued it through the use of the National Endowment for democracy and the privatization of intelligence capacities in the 1980s under Reagan.

There's all sorts of CIA reading room memos you can read, even on CIA.gov about those continued media relations throughout the 1990s.

And so you always had this backdoor relationship between The Washington Post, The New York Times, and all of the major broadcast media corporations.

By the way, you know, Rupert Murdoch and Fox are part of this as well.

You know, Rupert Murdoch was actually part of the National Endowment for democracy coalition in 1983 when it was formed as a way to do CIA operations in an above board way after the Democrats were so ticked off at the CIA for manipulating student movements in the 1970s.

But essentially there was no CIA intermediary to random citizen journalists, there was no Pentagon backstop.

You couldn't get a story killed.

You couldn't have this favors for favors relationship.

You couldn't promise access to some random person with 700,000 followers who's got an opinion on Syrian gas.

And so this induced and this was not a problem for the initial period of social media from 2006 to 2014, because there were never dissident groups that were big enough to be able to have a mature ecosystem on their own. And all of the victories on social media had gone, in the way of where the money was, which was from the State Department, and the Defense Department, and the intelligence services.

But then as that maturity happened, you now had this situation after the 2016 election where they said, okay, now the entire international order might come undone.

70 years of unified foreign policy from Truman until Trump are now about to be broken.

And we need a the same analog control systems. We had to be able to put bumper cars on bad stories or bad.

Political movements through legacy media, relationships and contacts.

We now need to establish and consolidate within the social media companies.

An initial predicate for that was Russiagate. But then after Russiagate died and they used a simple democracy promotion predicate, then it gave rise to this multi-billion dollar censorship industry that joins together the military industrial complex, the government, the private sector, civil society organizations, and then this vast cobweb of media allies and professional fact checker groups that that serve as this sort of sentinel class that surveys every word on the internet.

So, can you give us a, and thank you again for this almost unbelievable explanation of why this is happening.

Can you give us an example of how it happens? How just and just pick one among I know countless examples of how the national security state lies to the population, censors the truth, in real life.

Yeah. So, you know, we have this State Department outfit called the Global Engagement Center, which was created by a guy named Rick Stengel, who described himself as Obama's propagandist in chief.

He was the undersecretary for public affairs, which is essentially the relationship which is the liaison office role between the State Department and the mainstream media.

So this is basically the exact nexus where government talking points about war or about diplomacy or statecraft get synchronized with mainstream media.

And I, may I add something to that is someone I know, Rick Stengel, he was at one point a journalist.

And Rick Stengel has made public arguments against the First Amendment and against free speech.

And, oh, yeah, he wrote a whole book on it. He published an op-ed in 2019. He wrote a whole book on it. And he, you know, he made the argument that that we just, you know, went over here that essentially, the Constitution was not prepared for the internet.

And, we need to get rid of the First Amendment, accordingly.

And, you know, he described himself as a free speech absolutist when he was the managing editor of time magazine.

And even when he was in the State Department under Obama, he started something called the Global Engagement Center, which was the first government censorship, operation within the federal government.

But it was foreign facing, so it was okay. Now, at the time, they used the, the homegrown ISIS predicate threat for this.

And so it was very hard to argue against the idea of the State Department, having this formal coordination partnership with every major tech platform, in the U.S.

because the, you know, at the time, there were these ISIS attacks that were and we were told that ISIS was recruiting on Twitter and Facebook.

And so the Global Engagement Center was established essentially to be a State Department, entanglement with the social media companies to basically put bumper cars on their ability to, to platform accounts and to and, and one of the things they did is they created a new technology, which it's called natural language processing.

It is a artificial intelligence, machine learning, ability to create meaning out of words in order to map everything that everyone says on the internet and create this vast topography, topography of how communities are organized online, who the major influencers are, what they're talking about, what narratives are emerging or trending, and to be able to create this sort of network graph, in order to know who to target and, and, and how information moves through an ecosystem.

And so they began plotting the language, the prefixes, the suffixes, the popular terms, the slogans that ISIS, folks were talking about on Twitter when, when Trump won the election in 2016, everyone who worked at the State Department, was expecting these promotions to the white House, National Security Council under Hillary Clinton, who I should remind, viewers, you know, was also secretary of state under Obama, actually ran the State Department, but these folks were all expecting promotions on November 18th, November 8th, 2016 and were unceremoniously, put out of jobs by a guy who was a 20 to 1 underdog, according to the New York Times, the day of the election and when that happened, these State Department folks took their special set of skills coercing governments, to, for sanctions in the State Department led the, the effort to sanction Russia over the Crimea annexation in 2014.

These State Department diplomats did an international roadshow to pressure European governments to pass censorship laws, to censor the right wing populist groups in Europe, and as a boomerang impact to censor populist groups who were affiliated in the U.S..

So you had folks, you had folks who went from the State Department directly, for example, to the Atlantic Council, which was which was this major facilitator, between the government, between government to government censorship. The Atlantic Council is a group that was one of Biden's biggest political backers.

They bill themselves as NATO's think tank.

So they represent the political senses of NATO in many respects. When NATO has, civil society actions that they want to be coordinated to, to synchronize with military action, a region the Atlantic Council essentially is deployed to consensus, build and make that political action happen within a region of interest to NATO.

Now, the Atlantic Council has seven CIA directors on its board.

A lot of people don't even know that seven CIA directors are still alive, let alone all concentrated on the board of a single organization.

That's kind of the heavyweight in the censorship industry.

They get annual funding from the Department of Defense, the State Department, and CIA cutouts like the National Endowment for democracy.

The Atlantic Council in January 2017 moved immediately to pressure European governments to pass censorship laws to create a transatlantic flank attack on free speech in exactly the way that Rick Stengel essentially called for to have US mimic European censorship laws.

One of the ways they did this was by getting Germany to pass something called NetzDG in August 2017, which was which, which was essentially kicked off the era of, of automated censorship in the U.S.

what NetzDG required was unless unless social media platforms wanted to pay a \$54 million fine for each instance of speech, each post left up on their platform for more than 48 hours that had been identified as hate speech.

They would they would be fined basically into bankruptcy when you aggregate 54 million over tens of thousands of posts per day.

And the the safe haven around that was if they deployed artificial intelligence based censorship technologies, which had been again created by DARPA to take on ISIS, to be able to scan and ban speech automatically.

And this was a this gave no.

I call these weapons of mass deletion.

These are essentially the ability to censor tens of millions of posts with just a few lines of code.

And the way this is done is by aggregating basically the field of censorship science fuzes together two disparate groups of study, if you will. There's this sort of political and social scientists who are the sort of thought leaders of what should be censored.

And then there are the sort of quants, if you will.

These are the programmers, the computational data scientists, computational linguistics.

Every university, there's over 60 universities now who get federal government grants to do this.

Censorship, the censorship work and the censorship preparation work, where what they do is they create these code books of the language that people use the same way they did for ISIS.

They do this, for example, with Covid, they created these these Covid lexicons of what dissident groups were saying about mandates, about masks, about vaccines, about high profile individuals like Tony Fauci or, were, Peter Daszak or any of these others protected VIP and individuals whose reputations had to be protected online. And they created these code books. They broke things down into narratives. The Atlantic Council, for example, was a part of this, this government funded consortium, something called the Virality Project, which which mapped 66 different narratives that dissidents were talking about around Covid, everything from Covid origins to vaccine efficacy.

And then they broke down these 66 claims into all the different factual sub claims.

And then they plugged these into these essentially machine learning models to be able to have a constant world heat map of what everybody was saying about Covid. And whenever something started a trend that was bad for what the Pentagon wanted or was bad for what Tony Fauci wanted, they were able to take down tens of millions of posts.

They did this in the 2020 election with Mail-In ballots.

It was this week.

I'm sorry. I just got to have there's so much here and it's so shocking.

So you're saying the Pentagon, our Pentagon, the U.S. Department of Defense censored Americans during the 2020 election cycle? Yes, they did this.

They oh, they did this through the so so there's the two most censored events in human history, I would argue to date are the 2020 election and the Covid 19 pandemic.

And I'll explain, you know, how I arrived there.

So the 2020 election was determined by mail in ballots.

And I'm not weighing into the substance of whether mail in ballots were or were not a legitimate or safe and reliable form of a voting. That's a completely independent topic from my perspective and the censorship issue. One but the censorship of mail in ballots is really one of the most extraordinary stories in our American history I would argue. What happened was, is you had this plot within the Department of Homeland Security.

Now this gets back to what we were talking about with the State Department's Global Engagement Center. You had this group within the Atlantic Council in the foreign policy establishment, which began arguing in 2017 for the need for a permanent domestic censorship government office to serve as a quarterback for what they called a home of society.

Counter misinformation, counter disinformation alliance.

That just means censorship.

The counter missed this info, but whole of their whole society model explicitly proposed that that we need every single asset within society to be mobilized in a whole of society effort to stop misinformation online.

It was that much of. An existential threat to democracy.

And so it but they they fixated in 2017 that it had to be centered within the government because only the government would have the clout and the coercive threat powers and the and the perceived authority to be able to tell the social media companies what to do, to be able to summon in a government funded NGOs form, to create that media surround sound, to be able to arm in a, you know, an astroturf army of fact checkers and to be able to liaise and connect all these different

copyright industry actors into a cohesive, unified whole.

And the Atlantic Council initially proposed with this blueprint called forward defense.

It's not offense, it's forward defense guys.

They initially proposed that running this out of the State Department's Global engagement Center, because they had so many assets there who were so effective at censorship under Rick Stengel Steed, and under the Obama administration.

But they said, oh, we we're not gonna be able to get away with that because we don't really have a national security predicate, and it's supposed to be foreign facing.

We can't really use that hook unless we have a sort of national security one. Then they contemplated parking at the CIA and they said, well, actually, there's two reasons we can't do that.

CIA is foreign facing, and we can't really establish a counterintelligence threat to bring it home domestically.

Also, we're going to need essentially tens of thousands of people involved in this operation spanning this whole society model.

You can't really run a clandestine operation that way.

So they said, okay, well, what about the FBI? They said, well, the FBI would be great. It's domestic.

But the problem is, is the FBI is supposed to be the intelligence arm of the Justice Department and weak. And what we're dealing with here are not acts of lawbreaking.

That's basically support for Trump.

Or if, you know, if a left wing populist had risen to power like Bernie Sanders or Jeremy Corbyn, I have no doubt they would have done in the UK, they would have done the same thing to him there.

They targeted Jeremy Corbyn and other left wing populist NATO skeptical groups in Europe.

But in the U.S.

it was it was all Trump.

And so essentially what they said is, well, the only other domestic intelligence equity we have in the US besides the FBI is the DHS.

So we are going to essentially take the CIA's power to rig and bribe foreign media organizations, which is a power they've had since the day they were born in 1947.

And we're going to combine that with the power, with the domestic jurisdiction of the FBI by putting it at DHS.

So DHS was basically deputized.

It was empowered through this obscure little cyber security, agency to have the combined powers that the CIA has abroad with the jurisdiction of the FBI at home.

And the way they did this, how did a cyber and an obscure little cyber security agency get this power was they did a funny little series of switch ruse.

So this little thing called CISA the and call it the Disinformation Governance Board. They didn't call it the censorship agency.

They gave it an obscure little name that no one would notice, called the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, who its founder said, we just security, we care about security so much it's in our name twice. And everybody sort of closed their eyes and pretended, you know, that's what it was.

But it was created by act of Congress in 2018 because of the perceived threat that Russia had hacked the 2016 election, had physically hacked it. And so we needed the cyber security power, to be able to, to be able to deal with that. And essentially on the heels of a CIA memo on January 6th, 2017, and a same day, DHS executive order on January 6th,

2017, arguing that Russia had interfered in the 2016 election and a DHS mandate, saying that elections are now critical infrastructure.

You had this new power within DHS to say that cyber security attacks on elections are now our purview.

And then they did two cute things.

One, they said so they said, miss this.

And information online are a form of cyber security attack. They are a cyber attack because they are happening online.

And they said, well, actually Russian disinformation is we're actually protecting democracy in elections. We don't need a Russian predicate after Russiagate died. So just like that, you had the Cyber Security Agency be able to legally make the argument that your tweets about Mail-In ballots, if you undermine public faith and confidence in them as a legitimate form of voting, was now you were now conducting a cyber attack on US critical infrastructure by articulating misinformation on Twitter.

And just like that and now what they did then is they.

So in other words, complaining about election fraud is the same as taking down our power grid.

Yes, you could literally be on your toilet seat at 9:30 on a Thursday night and tweet, "I think that Mail-In ballots are illegitimate." And you were essentially then caught up in the crosshairs of the Department of Homeland Security, classifying you as conducting a cyber attack on U.S.

critical infrastructure because you were doing misinformation online in the cyber realm and misinformation is a cyber attack on democracy when it undermines public faith and confidence in our democratic elections and our democratic institutions.

They would end up going far beyond that. They would actually define democratic institutions as being another thing that was a cyber security attack to, to undermine.

And lo and behold, the mainstream media is considered a democratic institution.

That would come later.

What ended up happening was in advance of the 2020 election, starting in April of 2020, although this goes back before. You had this essentially Never-Trump neocon Republican DHS working with essentially NATO on the national security side and essentially the DNC, if you will, to use DHS as the launching point for a government coordinated mass censorship campaign spanning every single social media platform on Earth in order to pre censor the ability to dispute the legitimacy of mail in ballots. And here's how they did this. They aggregated four different institutions: Stanford University, the University of Washington, a company called Graphika, and the Atlantic Council.

Now all four of these institutions, the centers within them, were where we're essentially Pentagon cutouts.

You had, you had at the Stanford Internet Observatory.

It was actually run by Michael McFaul.

If you know Michael McFaul, he was the U.S. ambassador to Russia under the Obama administration.

And he personally authored a seven step playbook for how to successfully orchestrate a color revolution that is, in part of that involved maintaining total control over media and social media, juicing up the civil society outfits, calling elections illegitimate in order....

All of these people were professional Russiagaters, professional election de-legitimizers in 2016.

So Stanford University, the Stanford Observatory under Michael McFaul was run by Alex Stamos, who was formerly a Facebook executive who coordinated with DNI and the, with respect to, Russiagate, you know, taking down Russian propaganda at Facebook.

So this is another, liaison essentially to the national security state and under Alex Stamos at Stanford Observatory was Renée DiResta, who

started her career in the CIA and wrote the Senate Intelligence Committee report on Russian disinformation.

And there's a lot more there that I'll get to at another time.

But, the next institution was the University of Washington, which is essentially the Bill Gates University in Seattle, who is headed by Kate Starbird, who, is basically three generations of military brass who got her PhD in crisis informatics, essentially doing, you know, social media surveillance for the Pentagon and getting, you know, DARPA funding and, and working essentially with the national security state then repurposed to take on mail in ballots. The third firm, Graphika, got \$7 million in Pentagon grants, and got their start as part of the Pentagon's Minerva initiative.

The Minerva initiative is the psychological warfare research center of the Pentagon.

This group was doing social media spying and narrative mapping for the Pentagon until the 2016 election happened and then were repurposed into a partnership with the Department of Homeland Security to censor, you know, 22 million Trump tweets, pro-Trump tweets about Mail-In ballots.

And then the fourth institution, as I mentioned, was the Atlantic Council, who's got seven CIA directors on the board.

So one after another, it is exactly what Ben Rhodes described it during the Obama era as the blob, the foreign policy establishment.

It's a it's the it's the Defense Department, the State Department, or the CIA every single time.

And of course, this was because they were they were threatened by Trump's foreign policy.

And so while while much of the censorship looks like it's coming domestically, it's actually by our foreign facing department of dirty tricks, color revolution blob, who are professional government topless, who were then basically descended on the 2020 election.

Now they did this.

They explicitly said the head of this election integrity partnership on tape and my foundation clipped them.

And it's been played before Congress. And it's in, you know, a part of the Missouri v Biden lawsuit now, but they explicitly said on tape that they were set up to do what the government was banned from doing itself.

And then they articulated a multi-step framework in order to coerce all the tech companies to take censorship actions.

They said on tape, the tech companies would not have done, but for their pressure, which involved using threats of government force.

Because they were the deputized arm of the government, they had a formal partnership with the DHS.

They were able to use DHS as proprietary domestic disinformation switchboard to immediately talk to top brass.

All the tech companies for takedowns, and they bragged on tape about how they got the tech companies to all systematically adopt a new terms of service speech violation band called delegitimization, which meant any tweet, any YouTube video, any Facebook post, any TikTok video, any discord posts, any Twitch video, anything on the internet that that, undermined public faith and confidence in the use of mail in ballots or early voting dropboxes or or ballot tabulation issues on election Day was a prima facie, Terms of Service violation policy under this new delegitimization policy that they only adopted because of past through government pressure from the Election Integrity Partnership, which they bragged about on tape, including the grid that they used to do this and simultaneously invoking threats of government, breaking them up, or government stopping doing favors for the tech companies unless they did this, as well as inducing crisis PR by working with their media allies.

And they said the government, DHS could not do that themselves.

And so they set up this basically constellation of State Department,

Pentagon, and I.C. networks to run this pre censorship campaign, which by their own math, had 22 million tweets on Twitter alone.

And I think it's on 15 platforms.

This is hundreds of millions of posts which were all scanned and banned or throttled so that they could not be amplified or they exist in a sort of limited state purgatory, or had these frictions affixed to them in the form of fact checking labels where you couldn't actually click through to thing or you had to.

It was is an inconvenience to be able to share it.

Now, they did this seven months before the election because at the time they were worried about the perceived legitimacy of a Biden victory in the case of a so-called red mirage blue shift event.

They knew the only way that Biden would be able to was would win mathematically, was through the disproportionate Democrat use of mail in ballots.

They knew there would be a crisis because it was going to look extremely weird if if Trump looked like he won by seven states and, you know, and then three days later it comes out, actually, the election switched. I mean, that that would put the election crisis of the Bush Gore election, on a level of steroids that the national security state said, well, the public will not be prepared for it. So what we need to do is we need to in advance we need to pre censor the ability to even question the legitimacy this took out.

Wait, wait, wait. May I ask you to pause right there.

So what you're saying is...

What you're suggesting is they knew the outcome of the election seven months before it was held.

It looks very bad.

Yes, Mike, it does look very bad.

You know, and especially when you combine this with the fact that this is right on the heels of the impeachment, the Pentagon-led, CIA-led impeachment.

You know, it was, Eric Ciaramella from the CIA, and it was the Vindmans from the Pentagon, who led the impeachment of Trump in late 2019 over, you know, an alleged phone call around withholding Ukraine aid. This same network, which came straight out of the Pentagon, hybrid warfare military censorship network created after the first, you know, Ukraine crisis in 2014, were the lead architects of the Ukraine impeachment in 2019 and then essentially came back on steroids as part of the 2020 election censorship operation.

But, you know, from their perspective, I mean, it certainly looks like the perfect crime.

These were the people DHS at the time had actually federalized much of, of the national election, administration through this January 6th, 2017, executive order from outgoing Obama DHS head Jeh Johnson, which essentially wrapped all 50 states up into a formal DHS partnership.

So DHS was simultaneously in charge of the administration of the election in many respects, and the censorship of anyone who challenged the administration, of the election. It's just like, you know, putting essentially the defendant, of a trial, as the judge and jury of the trial.

But you're not describing democracy.

I mean, you're describing a country in which democracy is impossible.

What I'm essentially describing is military rule.

I mean what's happened with the rise of the censorship industry is a total inversion of the idea of democracy itself.

You know, the democracy sort of draws its legitimacy from the idea that it is, rule by consent of the people being rule.

That is, it's not really being ruled by an overlord, because the

government is actually just our will expressed by our consent with who we vote for.

The whole push after the 2016 election and after Brexit and after a couple of other, you know, social media run elections that went the wrong way from. What the State Department wanted, like the 2016 Philippines election, was to completely invert everything that we described as being the underpinnings of a democratic society in order to deal with the threat of free speech on the internet.

And what they essentially said is we need to redefine democracy from being about the will of the voters to being about the sanctity of democratic institutions.

And who are the democratic institutions? Oh, it's us, you know, it's the military, it's NATO, it's the IMF and the World Bank.

It's the mainstream media, who it is, the NGOs.

And of course, these NGOs are largely State Department funded or IC funded.

It's essentially all of the elite establishments, that were under threat from the rise of domestic populism that declared their own consensus to be the new definition of democracy. Because if you define democracy as being the strength of democratic institutions rather than a focus on the will of the voters, then what you're left with is essentially democracy is just the consensus building architecture within the democratic institutions themselves. And from their perspective, that takes a lot of work. I mean, I mean, the amount of work these people do. *{This paragraph is at 00:48:24 - 00:49:00 in the interview.}*

I mean, for example, we mentioned the Atlantic Council, which is one of these big coordinating mechanisms for the oil and gas industry in a region for the for the finance and the JPMorgan's in the BlackRock's in a region, for the NGOs in the region, for the media, in the region. All of these need to reach a consensus.

And that process takes a lot of time. It takes a lot of work and a lot of negotiation.

From their perspective, that's democracy.

Democracy is getting the NGOs to agree with Blackrock, to agree with the Wall Street Journal, you know, to agree with, you know, the community and activist groups who are onboarded with respect to a particular initiative.

That is the difficult vote building process from their perspective.

At the end of the day, a bunch of, you know, populist groups decide that they like a truck driver who's popular on TikTok more than the, you know, carefully constructed consensus of the NATO military brass.

Well, then, from their perspective, you know, that is now an attack on democracy.

And this is what this whole branding effort was. And of course, democracy again, has that magic regime change predicate, where democracy is, is our magic watchword to be able to overthrow governments from the ground up in a sort of color revolution style, whole of society effort to toppling a democratically elected government from the inside.

For example, as we did in Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich was democratically elected by the Ukrainian people, like him or hate him.

I'm not even issuing an opinion there. But the fact is, is we color revolutioned him out of office, we January 6th'd him out of office. Actually, to be frank, I mean with respect to... you had, you know, a State Department funded right sector thugs and, you know, \$5 billion worth of civil society money pumped into this to overthrow a democratically elected government in the name of democracy.

And they took that special set of skills home.

And now it's here, perhaps potentially, to stay.

And this is fundamentally changed the nature of American governance because of the threat of, you know, one small voice becoming popular on social media.

May I ask you a question.

So into that, that group of institutions that you say, now define democracy, the NGOs, foreign policy establishment, you included the mainstream media.

Now, in 2021, the NSA broke into my private text apps and read them and then leaked them to the New York Times against me.

That just happened again to me last week.

And I'm wondering how common that is for the Intel agencies to work with so-called mainstream media like the New York Times to hurt their opponents.

Well, that is the function of these interstitial, government funded non-governmental organizations and think tanks.

Like, for example, we mentioned the Atlantic Council, which is, you know, NATO's think tank.

But other groups like the Aspen Institute, which draws the lion's share of its funding from the State Department and other government agencies. You know, the Aspen Institute was busted doing the same thing with the Hunter Biden laptop censorship.

You know, you had this strange situation where the FBI had advance knowledge of the pending publication of the Hunter Biden laptop story, and then, magically, the Aspen Institute, which is run by essentially former CIA, former NSA, former FBI, and then a bunch of sort of civil society organizations, all hold a mass, stakeholder censorship simulation, a three day, conference. You know, this came out and Yoel Roth was there.

This was a big part of the Twitter file leaks. And it's been mentioned in multiple congressional investigations. But somehow the Aspen Institute, which is basically an addendum of the national security state got the exact same information that the national security state spied on journalists and political figures to obtain and not only leaked it, but then basically did a joint coordinated censorship simulator in September, two months before the election, in order, just like with the censorship of mail

in ballots, to be in ready position to pre censor anyone online amplifying a news story that had not even broken yet.

The Aspen Institute? So I mean, which is, by the way, I've spent my life in Washington'...

Walter Isaacson, formerly of Time Magazine, ran it, for former president of CNN.

I had no idea it was part of the national security state, I had no idea its funding came from the US government.

This the first time I ever heard that. But given assuming what you're saying is true, it's a little weird that Walter Isaacson left Aspen Institute to write a biography of Elon Musk.

Strange? Yeah.

I don't know. I haven't read that book.

I from what I've heard from people, it's a relatively fair treatment.

I, you know, just total speculation.

But I suspect that Walter Isaacson has struggled with this issue and may not even firmly fall in one particular place, in the sense that, you know, Walter Isaacson did a series of interviews of Rick Stengel, actually, with the Atlantic Council, in other settings, where he interviewed Rick Stengel, specifically on the issue of you know, the need to get rid of the First Amendment and the threat that free speech on social media poses to democracy.

Now, at the time, I was very concerned. This was between 2017 and 2019 when he did these Rick Stengel interviews.

I was very concerned because Isaacson expressed what seemed to me to be a highly sympathetic, view about the Rick Stengel, you know, perspective on killing the First Amendment.

Now, he didn't formally endorse that position, but it left me very skittish about Isaacson.

But what I should say is, at the time, I don't think very many people, in fact, I know virtually nobody in the country, had any idea how deep the rabbit hole went when it came to the construction of the censorship industry and how deep the tentacles had grown within the military, in the national security state, in order to Bouie and consolidated much of that, frankly, did not even come to public light until even last year.

You know, frankly, some of that was galvanized by Elon Musks acquisition in the Twitter files and the Republican turnover in the House that allowed these multiple investigations, the lawsuits like Missouri v. Biden in the discovery process there.

And, you know, multiple other things like the Disinformation Governance Board, who, by the way, the interim head of that, the head of that, Nina Jankowicz, got her start, in the censorship industry from this exact same, clandestine intelligence community censorship network created after the 2014 Crimea situation.

Nina Jankowicz, when her name came up in 2022, is part of the Disinformation Governance Board.

I almost fell out of my chair because I had been tracking Nina's network for almost five years at that point, when her when her name came up as part of the UK inner cluster cell of a busted clandestine operation to censor the internet called the Integrity Initiative, which was created by the UK Foreign Office and was backed by NATO Political Affairs unit, in order to carry out this thing that we talked about at the beginning of this, of this dialog, the NATO, sort of psychological inoculation, and, the ability to kill so-called Russian propaganda or rising political groups who wanted, to maintain energy relations with Russia at a time when the U.S.

was trying to kill the Nord Stream and another, pipeline relation.

Well, they did that.

Nina Jankowicz was a part of this outfit.

And then who is the head of it after Nina Jankowicz went down. It was Michael Chertoff, and Michael Chertoff was running the Aspen Institute

Cyber Group, and then the Aspen Institute then goes on to be the censorship simulator for the Hunter Biden laptop story.

And then two years later, Chertoff is then the head of the disinformation governance board after Nina was forced to step down.

Of course, Michael Chertoff was the chairman at BAE I'm sorry.

And Michael Chertoff was the chairman of the largest military contractor in Europe, BAE Military.

So you've blown my mind so many times in this conversation that I'm going to need a nap directly after it's done.

So I've just got two more questions for you. One short, one a little longer.

The short one is, for people who've made it this far i- an hour in - and want to know more about this topic.

And by the way, I hope you'll come back whenever you have the time to explore different threads of the story.

But for people who want to do research on their own, how can your research on this be found on the internet? Sure. So our foundation is [FoundationForFreedomOnline.com](https://www.FoundationForFreedomOnline.com).

We publish all manner of reports on every aspect of the censorship industry from what we talked about with the role of the military industrial complex in national security, state to what the universities are doing to, you know, like I sometimes refer to as digital MKUltra, there's just the field of basically the science of censorship and how and the funding of these psychological manipulation methods in order to nudge people into different belief systems, as they did with Covid, as they did with energy and every sensitive policy issues, what they essentially had an ambition for.

But my [FoundationForFreedomOnline.com](https://www.FoundationForFreedomOnline.com) website is one way.

The other way is just on X.

My handle is at Mike Benz Cyber.

I'm very active there and publish a lot of long form video and written content on all this.

I think it's one of the most important issues in the world today.

It certainly is. And so that leads directly and seamlessly to my final question, which is about X.

And I'm not just saying this because I post content there, but I think objectively it's the last big platform that's free or sort of free or more free.

You post there too.

But, you know, we're at the very beginning of an election year with a couple of different wars unfolding simultaneously in 2024. So do you expect that that platform can stay free for the duration of this year? It's under an extraordinary amount of pressure, and that pressure is going to continue to mount as the election approaches.

Elon Musk is a very unique individual, and he has a unique buffer, perhaps when it comes to the national security state, because the national security state is actually quite reliant on Elon Musk properties, whether that's for the, the electrical, you know, the sort of the green revolution when it comes to Tesla and, and the battery technology there when it comes, when it comes to Space X, the State Department is hugely dependent on, on space, because of its unbelievable, you sort of pioneering and saturating presence in the field of low Earth orbit satellites that, are basically how our telecom system runs to things like Starlink.

There are dependencies that the national security state has on Elon Musk. I'm not sure he'd have as much room to negotiate if he had become the world's richest man, selling, you know, at a lemonade stand.

And if the national security state goes too hard on him by invoking something like CFIUS to sort of nationalize some of these properties, I think the shockwave that it would send to the international investor

community would be irrecoverable at a time when we're engaged in great power competition.

So they're trying to kill, you know, they're trying to sort of induce a, I think, a sort of corporate regime change through, a series of things involving a sort of death by a thousand paper cuts.

I think there are 7 or 8 different Justice Department or SEC or FTC investigations into Elon Musk properties that all started, after his acquisition of X. But then what they're trying to do right now is what I call the transatlantic flank attack 2.0.

You know, we talked in this dialog about how the censorship industry really got its start when a bunch of State Department exiles, who were expecting promotions, took their special set of skills in coercing European countries to pass sanctions on themselves to cut off their own leg despite themselves, in order to pass sanctions on Russia. They ran back that same playbook with doing a road show for censorship instead for sanctions. We are now witnessing, you know, transatlantic flank attack 2.0, if you will, which is because they have lost a lot of their federal government powers to do this same censorship operation they been doing from 2018 to 2022, in part because the House has totally turned on them, in part because of the media, in part because Missouri v.

Biden, which won a slam dunk case actually banning government censorship at the trial court and appellate court levels, is now before the Supreme Court.

They've now moved into two strategies.

One of them is state level censorship laws.

California just passed a new law which the censorship industry totally drove from start to finish around...

They call it platform accountability and transparency, which is basically forcing Elon Musk to give over the kind of narrative mapping data that these CIA conduits and Pentagon cutouts were using to create these weapons of mass deletion, these abilities to just censor everything at scale because they had all the internal platform data.

Elon Musk took that away.

They're using state laws like this new California law to crack that open. But the major threat right now is the threat from Europe, with, with, you know, something called the eU Digital Services Act, which was cooked up in tandem with folks like Newsguard, which is run by, you know, which has has a board of Michael Hayden, head of the CIA, NSA, four star general.

Rick Stengel is on that board.

You know, from from the State Department's propaganda office.

Tom Ridge is on that board from the Department of Homeland Security.

Oh, and Anders Fogh Rasmussen is on that board.

He was the, the general secretary of NATO under the Obama administration.

So you have NATO, the CIA, the NSA, four star general, DHS, and the State Department working with the EU to craft the censorship laws that now are the largest existential threat to X other than potential advertiser boycotts, because there is now disinformation is now banned as a matter of law in, in the EU. And the EU is a bigger market for X than the US.

There's only 300 million some people in the U.S. there's 450 million in Europe.

X is now forced to comply with this brand new law that just got ratified this year, where they either need to forfeit 6% of their global annual revenue to the EU to maintain operations there or put in place essentially the kind of, you know, CIA bumper cars, if you will, that I've been describing over the course of this, in order to have an internal mechanism to censor anything that the EU, which is just a proxy for NATO, deems to be disinformation.

And you can bet with 65 elections around the globe this year, you can you can predict every single time what they're going to define

disinformation as.

So that's the main the main fight right now is, is dealing with the transatlantic flank attack from Europe.

I said this five times, but that's just one of the most remarkable stories I've ever heard.

And I'm grateful to you for bringing it to us. Mike Benz, Executive Director of the Foundation for Freedom Online.

And I hope we see you again.

Thanks, Tucker.