

In 1975, the late Senator Frank Church said, “The United States government has perfected a technological capability that enables us to monitor the messages that go through the air.

That capability at any time could be turned around on the American people, and no American would have any privacy left, such is the capability to monitor everything. There would be no place to hide.”

These words came as Senator Church lead the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, better known as the Church Committee.

The Church Committee’s 1976 final report exposed numerous secret federal government programs that violated the constitutional rights of American citizens it deemed to be threats to existing social and political order.

These programs surveilled and targeted individuals like Martin Luther King Jr. and domestic organizations like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, as well as infiltrated movements to incite rivalries and discredit leaders.

Nearly fifty years later, Senator Church’s ominous warning that the government could weaponize technology against the American people reads more like a premonition. There is truly becoming “no place to hide”.

In recent decades, journalists and whistleblowers exposed examples of our government leveraging emerging technologies to violate the privacy and civil liberties of its citizens.

Intelligence agencies conducted surveillance of video game users collecting data on the contents of communications between players.

The Department of Homeland Security tracked the live locations of individuals and groups participating in the Black Lives Matter movement.

The Drug Enforcement Administration conducted “covert surveillance” of people protesting the death of George Floyd.

And it's only getting worse. Just last month, the ACLU acknowledged "The Biden administration has been quietly deploying and expanding programs that surveil what people say on social media, using tools that allow agents and analysts to invisibly monitor the vast amount of protected speech that occurs online."

And how are they doing it? Using artificial intelligence.

For years, federal agencies including the Department of Homeland Security, State Department, National Science Foundation, and FBI have been colluding with private organizations and social media companies to combat what they deemed to be "disinformation".

The purpose, so they claimed, was to combat foreign malign influence.

But in reality, the government wasn't suppressing foreign "misinformation". It was working to censor domestic speech by Americans.

Since 2020, the federal government has awarded over 500 contracts and grants related to "misinformation" or "disinformation."

While the grant awardees and their proprietary AI and machine learning technologies differ, their goals are consistent: to "mine" the internet, identify conversations indicative of "harmful" narratives, track those "threats," and develop countermeasures before messages go viral.

One NSF-funded company's mission statement claims that "social media is being manipulated and ideas are being spread uncontrollably online."

The solution it provides? An automatic controversy detection algorithm to help identify things that are "potentially opinion-shifting" in order to make communication "more productive and less dangerous".

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we witnessed the accelerated use of AI technologies to monitor and suppress public debate on issues like natural immunity, masks, and the origins of the virus.

Multiple federal agencies, including DOD and the State Department, funded automated disinformation-detection technologies designed to monitor and suppress public debate on issues like vaccines and the origins of COVID-19.

Writer Jacob Siegel in a fantastic, yet haunting, narrative explaining the last decade of US government domestic censorship efforts said, “Disinformation, now and for all time, is whatever they say it is.

That is not a sign that the concept is being misused or corrupted; it is the precise functioning of a totalitarian system.”

Make no mistake, the United States is engaging in the same activities we criticize other countries for.

But unlike China and North Korea, the United States government attempts to conceal its involvement using private entities as front companies to do its dirty work.

But make no mistake, the intent is the same. Control the narrative, eliminate dissent, and retain power.

This should terrify all Americans. The government is using your hard-earned tax dollars to surveil and censor your protected speech.

Artificial intelligence is only going to make it easier for the government to do this, and harder to detect.

This should not be a partisan issue. We must get to the bottom of how the federal government uses AI to violate the privacy and civil liberties of the American people before it's too late.