Defense Secretary "Mad Dog" Mattis Visits Google and Amazon

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US **Defense Secretary James Mattis** *said in a statement Wednesday that North Korea would face the "destruction of its people" if it did not comply with the demands of the United States.*

The retired Marine Corps general, given the name "Mad Dog" for his bloody conquest of the Iraqi city of Fallujah in 2004, issued this genocidal proclamation as he was departing for a trip not to a forward operating base, but to the headquarters of Amazon in Seattle and a Defense Department agency in Silicon Valley that works closely with tech firms such as Google.

With the United States closer to nuclear conflict than at any point since the end of the Cold War, Mattis' visit was an indication of the increasingly vital role played by the US tech giants not just in the conduct of wars abroad, but in the censorship and suppression of political opposition at home.

In the preparation for war against North Korea, and very possibly its ally China, Mattis and the US military are well aware that they face their greatest potential adversary at home, in the form of mass working class opposition to war. The growth of militarism and war are always accompanied by expanding attacks on democratic rights and the development of authoritarian forms of rule.

In the US today, the military, the intelligence agencies and major media outlets are working with technology companies, in the first instance, Google, to institute systematic censorship aimed at silencing left-wing, antiwar web sites. The chief target of this operation is the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Over the past three months, in the name of combating "fake news" and promoting "authoritative" content on the Internet, Google has implemented a change to its search algorithm that has slashed the search traffic of leading left-wing web sites by 45 percent. This political censorship operation has reduced traffic to the *World Socialist Web Site* from Google searches by more than two thirds.

The censorship algorithms rolled out by Google no doubt figured prominently in Mattis' discussions with tech executives. The nominal purpose of his visit, however, was to integrate Silicon Valley firms even more closely into the booming and lucrative business of waging war.

On Thursday, Mattis met with Amazon CEO **Jeff Bezos** at the tech giant's headquarters in Seattle.

On Friday, he spoke at the headquarters of Defense Innovation Unit Experimental (DUIX), a Defense Department unit located two miles from the Google campus in Mountain View, California. Among the unit's advisors is Eric Schmidt, the chairman of Google's parent company, Alphabet.

Mattis said the Pentagon's partnership with Silicon Valley via DUIX would make the US military "more lethal and more effective" than ever before. DUIX awards military technology contracts to US hi-tech firms.

The operation has already awarded more than $100 million in contracts for 45 pilot projects in areas such as artificial intelligence, autonomous machines and outer space. Its web page encourages technology firms to "tap into a $100+ billion market."

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos meets with Mattis Thursday [Photo Credit: @JeffBezos]

During his visit, Mattis proclaimed, "We'll get better at integrating AI advances out here into the US military" as a result of the unit, which he said would "grow in influence and impact" on the military. Among the projects rolled out by DUIX, according to *Bloomberg News*, is a system to coordinate air strikes against targets "such as fleeing vehicles."

Following his prepared remarks, Mattis added that the US military was "ready" with "military options" against North Korea.

Even more important to the Pentagon than the utility of the tech giants in waging war abroad is the use of their communication infrastructure to shape public opinion and block the expression of antiwar and oppositional sentiment. A major player in this sphere is a think tank called Jigsaw, a subsidiary of Google's parent company, Alphabet. Jigsaw is headed by **Jared Cohen**, a former State Department advisor to both **Condoleezza Rice** and **Hillary Clinton**.

Jigsaw's most prominent project is a web commenting censorship system called "Perspective API," which it calls "a new tool for web publishers to identify toxic comments that can undermine a civil exchange of ideas."

Developed in cooperation with major US newspapers, Jigsaw has already been implemented to flag comments for deletion in the *New York Times* comments section. This week, WikiLeaks noted that a comment containing the language "The CIA armed Islamists in Syria, killing thousands" would be flagged as 66 percent "toxic" by Perspective API. A comment declaring that "the US government is wonderful" is labeled zero percent "toxic," while "the US government is corrupt" is flagged as 71 percent "toxic."

In the second quarter of this year, Google spent more than it had ever previously spent, nearly $6 million, to lobby the US government. This was more than was spent by any other US company.

Google had the closest of relations with the previous White House. The *Intercept* reports that "Google representatives attended White House meetings more than once a week, on average, from the beginning of Obama's presidency through October 2015."

The *Intercept* report added,

> "Nearly 250 people have shuttled from government service to Google employment or vice versa over the course of [the Obama] administration," and concluded, "No other public company approaches this degree of intimacy with government."

The growing partnership between the tech giants and the military is in line with the findings of the US Army War College, which, in a series of recent reports, declared that controlling the growth of political opposition was a major element of contemporary military strategy, and that control over Internet communications was "vital" to military operations.

In a study titled "Social media, the vital ground: Can we hold it?" published in April, the Army War College noted,

> "The impact of social media on the media environment has been widely recognized, as has the ability of extremist and adversarial organizations to exploit the media to publicize their cause, spread their propaganda, and recruit vulnerable individuals."

It went on to conclude that

> "Social media will increasingly have a direct impact on virtually all aspects of military operations in the 21st century," and that the military had to expand its control over social media, "in particular, its use in deception and Psychological Operations (PSYOPS)."

Control over online communication will become increasingly significant amid what one Defense Department report published last month warned was an "increasing chasm between governments and their governed over the basic right to rule."

That report concluded,

> "Today, all states are experiencing a precipitous decline in their authority,

influence, reach and common attraction," as populations are presented with "myriad alternative sources of political alignment or allegiance."

Yet another report, published last year, warned that growing international antagonisms were leading to an intensifying crisis of "social order."

It concluded that states "now all wrestle with one another over competing interests while standing on quicksand—threatened" not only by national rivals, but by "the fragile and restive social order they themselves rest on."

As the danger of a major new war mounts, free and unfettered access to information becomes increasingly vital to the mobilization of the working class in opposition to the war plans of the capitalist ruling elite. We call on all our readers to share WSWS articles on social media and sign up to join the fight against Google's censorship of the Internet.

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