WHEN SOCIAL MEDIA LETS AUTHORITARIANS BUY THE TRUTH

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How dictatorships manipulate think tanks and tech giants to control global narratives

By Vic Gerami, 28 September 2025

Social media platforms are not neutral. They want us to believe their policies on conflicts, wars, and genocides are built on fairness and free speech. In reality, those rules are written in back rooms, shaped by money, lobbying, and influence. And much of that influence comes from authoritarian regimes that pay to play.

Think Tanks for Sale

The public rarely sees the machinery behind social media rules. Companies like Facebook, X, and YouTube lean on think tanks to tell them what counts as disinformation and what should be banned. On paper, these think tanks are nonprofits dedicated to scholarship. In practice, many act as lobby shops in disguise.

Authoritarian governments like Turkey and Azerbaijan pour money into these institutions. They are not buying research. They are buying access and influence. They secure a say in how global platforms define truth, what narratives are amplified, and which voices get silenced.

How It Works

The process is simple. First, regimes funnel money to think tanks under the label of "research support." Then the think tanks publish reports that echo the regime's talking points. Social media companies, eager to appear objective, cite these reports as expert guidance. Finally, those same reports are amplified by state media, bots, and propaganda outlets, giving them a fake aura of legitimacy.

The result is not neutrality. It is propaganda disguised as policy.

The Actors

Turkey's **SETA (Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research)** has been flagged by multiple analysts for its closeness to President Erdoğan's government and its alignment with ruling party narratives (Carnegie Endowment analysis). Another, **ORSAM (Center for Middle Eastern Studies)**, has published reports reinforcing Turkish state policy in diaspora affairs, as noted in a 2022 ResearchGate study.

In Azerbaijan, the Topchubashov Center openly states in its mission that part of its work is to ensure global media reflects Azerbaijan's perspective on Nagorno-Karabakh. Turkey's TESEV (Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation), long described as liberal and independent, operates in a climate where dissent is tightly constrained, and survival often means aligning with state power.

These are the institutions that tech giants hold up as independent voices. They are anything but.

The Target: Armenia and Artsakh

Armenia and Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) are prime examples of how this system works. With the backing of Turkish and Azerbaijani money, think tanks flood the media space with disinformation. They deny atrocities, rewrite history, and drown out Armenian voices with a tidal wave of propaganda.

Meanwhile, Armenians who try to post evidence, testimonies, or historical facts often find themselves shadow banned, censored, or suspended. The platforms claim they are enforcing "standards." In truth, they are enforcing policies written with the fingerprints of authoritarian funders.

Why This Matters for Everyone

This problem is not limited to Armenia. Once authoritarian regimes realize they can buy influence, no issue is safe. Genocides can be denied. Wars can be whitewashed. Civil society can be silenced. And entire populations can be manipulated into believing lies.

If social media platforms are the modern public square, then that square is up for sale. Whoever pays the most gets to define the truth.

A Warning and a Demand

The public must stop pretending these platforms are neutral. They are not. Every content moderation decision must be questioned. Every partnership with a think tank must be scrutinized. Who funds them? Who benefits? And who gets silenced as a result?

It is not enough to call for transparency. We need accountability. We need investigative journalists, watchdogs, and lawmakers to pull back the curtain on how social media companies make these decisions.

The stakes are high. When truth can be bought, lies become policy. When propaganda is treated as expertise, entire nations suffer.

Everyone beware.

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Vic Gerami is an award-winning journalist, editor of *The Blunt Post*, and founder of the Truth and Accountability League (TAAL), a nonprofit organization dedicated to combating hate, discrimination, and disinformation. He has interviewed over one hundred members of Congress, as well as countless celebrities and other high-profile public figures. He is also a documentary filmmaker, known for *Motherland* and *ARTSAKH: Armenian Genocide Continues*.

About TAAL

Truth and Accountability League (TAAL) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit advocacy organization with roots in defending Armenian identity and culture. Today, TAAL has grown into a broader platform dedicated to combating hate, discrimination, and disinformation affecting marginalized communities, including women, LGBTQ+ individuals, ethnic and cultural minorities, and other underrepresented groups.

TAAL monitors and challenges bias across media, academia, public policy, and cultural institutions. The organization provides educational programs, resources, and training to empower communities and individuals with the knowledge and tools to recognize, confront, and prevent prejudice, disinformation, and harmful narratives.

Our mission is to advance equity, promote accountability, and foster understanding, ensuring that all communities, including those of Armenian heritage, are represented, respected, and supported.

Comments



Martha – 2025-10-15 00:49:52
Thank you Vic! I thought I was reading about what is transpiring in the US.... because this is a global problem and a worldwide concern!