Obama Quiet as UN & Dictators Push to Control Internet

A new effort to hand control over the Internet to the United Nations is underway as oppressive regimes such as the communist dictatorship ruling mainland China clamor for more censorship and regulation of the World Wide Web. The Obama administration has remained silent so far, having failed to even select a leader to defend U.S. interests at upcoming talks on the subject. But critics of the global move are already striking back, warning that transferring Internet governance to the UN would be a massive blow to freedom and prosperity for the whole planet.

Today, the online world is largely governed and regulated by a decentralized network of non-profit groups, most of which are based in America where the Internet was born. And private-sector interests — companies such as Google, Facebook, and others — still dominate the web at present.

The "multi-stakeholder" approach, as it is known, has kept the Internet free in most of the world for over a decade while revolutionizing business, information, communications, and even civilization itself. But all of that could change soon, at least if despots of various varieties — from communists in Beijing to Islamists in Tehran — get their way.

Later this month in Geneva, Switzerland, governments will gather to begin negotiations on a potential treaty that could crush the free flow of information online, according to experts. The diplomatic process will help lay the foundation for the upcoming "World Conference on International Telecommunications" in Dubai at the end of the year.

Under the auspices of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a UN body, a collection of mostly dictatorial regimes is expected to push for a complete overhaul of existing Internet governance. Everything from pay structures and rates to cyber security and data protection could end up under an international regime, according to experts.

"A top-down, centralized, international regulatory overlay is antithetical to the architecture of the Net," wrote Robert McDowell, a commissioner with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), in a piece for the *Wall Street Journal*. "Any attempts to expand intergovernmental powers over the Internet — no matter how incremental or seemingly innocuous — should be turned back."

According to McDowell, who stood up to the Obama administration's FCC power grabs in 2010 when it sought control over the Internet under the guise of "net neutrality," pro-regulation forces are far more organized and energized than supporters of a free Internet — for now at least. And they need only a simple majority of national governments to implement their schemes through the UN, he said.

"We must awake from our slumber and engage before it is too late," McDowell warned in the piece. "Not only do these developments have the potential to affect the daily lives of all Americans, they also threaten freedom and prosperity across the globe."

But despite the renewed push for a global Internet regime and the attention it has received in recent days, despotic regimes' fixation with subduing online freedom is hardly a new phenomenon. The Chinese dictatorship, for example, has been censoring and monitoring the web within China since 1996.

As *The New American* reported in 2010, despots the world over have for years been fiendishly seeking new ways to tame the largely unregulated flow of information over the Internet. And they seem to have come to an agreement even back then: UN control is the way to go.

Led by the Brazilian government, a broad coalition including communist regimes and Islamic dictatorships ruling countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Mauritania, and others was agitating to create a UN-led, government-only regulatory regime to subdue the Internet. And while a few Western governments and companies spoke out mildly against the scheme, the chorus calling for global regulation was deafening.

"The governments are located in the center of this process," Chinese "Ministry of Industry and Information" representative Tang Zicai was quoted as saying. "This process cannot be accomplished without the meaningful participation of the governments." The Islamic military dictatorship ruling the north-African nation of Mauritania even called openly for global censorship of Internet content.

And strongmen around the world have not given up yet. In a widely quoted interview from last June, for example, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin touted "establishing international control over the Internet using the monitoring and supervisory capabilities of the International Telecommunication Union."

Like many other governments around the world, the regime ruling Russia is not happy about the current situation — especially as most of the key Internet stakeholders are based in America. And so, the "solution" — for dictators and oppressive rulers around the world, at least — is to shift that power into the hands of a global body, or at least to national governments.

"If we are going to talk about the democratization of international relations, I think a critical sphere is information exchange and global control over such exchange," Putin said in the interview. "This is certainly a priority on the international agenda."

ITU officials, of course, claim the UN body is not aiming to regulate the Internet. But the fact that oppressive governments around the world would like to rein in online freedom is undeniable. Many already do.

Even in the UK, the government-funded BBC recently carried a piece by Professor Alan Woodward of the University of Surrey saying the Internet was "broken" and "we need to start over." "While not a popular view, I think that the current Internet can only survive if adequate global governance is applied and that single, secure technology is mandated," he wrote.

Meanwhile, U.S. lawmakers and the Obama administration have been working overtime to implement various regulatory schemes. This year, Congress tried to push through a dangerous lobbyist-supported censorship bill that led to a global uproar. And last year, the President signed the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) treaty.

"The Internet does need stewards, and the Obama administration has spectacularly demonstrated that it is unfit to carry out that stewardship," noted Cory Doctorow on the popular technology blog BoingBoing, commenting on the push for global controls. Doctorow also called for an Internet free from political interference, which he said could not be achieved under the UN or Obama. "This is the

administration that gave us SOPA and the TPP, that argues that [ACTA](#) can be put into law without an act of Congress, and that has made a habit of extra-judicially seizing .com and .net domains on the sloppy say-so of its political donors from the entertainment industry," he warned.

A few analysts have [claimed](#) in recent days that the threat of UN Internet regulation is being overblown. But tyrants around the world have conclusively shown that they will stop at nothing to prevent the free flow of information among their subjects.

If the global body seems like the best way to control the web — and it does, for now at least — there can be little doubt that the planet's largely totalitarian-minded rulers will try their best to usher in a UN-run Internet regime. And according to experts, supporters of online liberty must get involved now if they hope to win the fight.

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