



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on February 3, 2011

In the Land of Pyramids, Technological Relics Outwit Internet Shutdown

Mubarak also knew what to do about the threat posed by the World Wide Web: He pushed the Internet “kill switch,” virtually cutting Egypt off from the rest of the world.

At least that’s what Mubarak *thought* he was doing. He had not, however, reckoned with human ingenuity. People always find ways around government prohibitions. So while Mubarak sat back, thinking he had outsmarted those young punks with their computers, those uppity Egyptians simply turned to older technologies that the regime had failed to block, including fax machines, ham radio, and dial-up modems, [according to the BBC](#).



“Dial-up modems are one of the most popular routes for Egyptians to get back online,” the BBC writes. “Long lists of international numbers that connect to dial-up modems are circulating in Egypt thanks to net activists We Re-Build, Telecomix and others.” In addition, says the report, Internet service providers in many foreign countries “have set up pools of modems that will accept international calls to get information to and from protesters. Many have waived fees to make it easier for people to connect.” With few Egyptian telephone lines able to make international calls, bloggers came up with a way to reach dial-up modems using a cellphone, Bluetooth, and a laptop.

One Egyptian ISP did remain online, “largely because it connects the country’s Stock Exchange and many Western companies to the outside world,” according to the BBC, which adds: “Reports from Cairo suggest that many people and businesses who are signed up to [that ISP] have removed the passwords from their wi-fi routers so others can piggy-back on their connection.”

There is a [website](#) featuring “20 Ways to Circumvent the Egyptian Governments’ [sic] Internet Block,” and protesters have found ways to get around the government’s cellphone and Twitter blockades.

The BBC reports that We Re-Build “said it was also listening on some ham radio frequencies and would relay any messages it received” and that online activists have been using fax machines to get information into Egypt, including “copies of cables from Wikileaks relating to Egypt in the hope that the information they contain about the Mubarak regime will be more widely distributed.” The story notes that “it is not clear how much impact this is having, however.”

While the Mubarak regime has definitely made communication with the outside world far more difficult, it has not been able to stop it entirely. There are simply too many methods of communication and too many Egyptians tired of living under Mubarak’s thumb. Put the two together, and it’s no wonder Mubarak decided to [pack it in](#) rather than run for reelection. After a 30-year winning streak, retirement is preferable to defeat — something Mubarak is, for the first time, almost powerless to prevent.

Americans should heed this lesson from the Egyptian situation: If you have a dial-up modem, fax



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machine, or short-wave radio, make sure it's in good working order. With the Senate [considering a bill](#) to give the President of the United States Mubarak-like power over the Internet here in America, it just might pay to have some alternate means of communication at the ready.



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