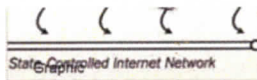


U.S. Underwrites Internet Detour Around Censors Abroad - NYTimes.com



Creating a Stealth Internet

been created by hackers in a so-called liberation-technology movement sweeping the globe.

The State Department, for example, is financing the creation of stealth wireless networks that would enable activists to communicate outside the reach of governments in countries like Iran, Syria and Libya, according to participants in the projects.

In one of the most ambitious efforts, United States officials say, the State Department and Pentagon have spent at least \$50 million to create an independent cellphone network in Afghanistan using towers on protected military bases inside the country. It is intended to offset the Taliban's ability to shut down the official Afghan services, seemingly at will.

The effort has picked up momentum since the government of President Hosni Mubarak shut down the Egyptian Internet in the last days of his rule. In recent days, the Syrian government also temporarily disabled much of that country's Internet, which had helped protesters mobilize.

The Obama administration's initiative is in one sense a new front in a longstanding diplomatic push to defend free speech and nurture democracy. For decades, the United States has sent radio broadcasts into autocratic countries through Voice of America and other means. More recently, Washington has supported the development of software that preserves the anonymity of users in places like China, and training for citizens who want to pass information along the government-owned Internet without getting caught.

But the latest initiative depends on creating entirely separate pathways for communication. It has brought together an improbable alliance of diplomats and military engineers, young programmers and dissidents from at least a dozen countries, many of whom variously describe the new approach as more audacious and clever and, yes, cooler.

Sometimes the State Department is simply taking advantage of enterprising dissidents who have found ways to get around government censorship. American diplomats are meeting with operatives who have been burying Chinese cellphones in the hills near the border with North Korea, where they can be dug up and used to make furtive calls, according to interviews and the diplomatic cables.

The new initiatives have found a champion in Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, whose department is spearheading the American effort. "We see more and more people around the globe using the Internet, mobile phones and other technologies to make their voices heard as they protest against injustice and seek to realize their aspirations," Mrs. Clinton said in an e-mail response to a query on the topic. "There is a historic opportunity to effect positive change, change America supports," she said. "So we're focused on helping them do that, on helping them talk to each other, to their communities, to their governments and to the world."

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Reporting was contributed by Richard A. Oppel Jr. and Andrew W. Lehren from New York, and Alissa J. Rubin and Sangar Rahimi from Kabul, Afghanistan.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: June 19, 2011

Because of a production error, a map last Sunday with the continuation of an article about efforts to circumvent Internet censorship by governments around the world misidentified the level of government control of the Internet in Taiwan. Because Taiwan was not included in a survey by the OpenNet Initiative that was the basis for the map, it should have been shaded gray, indicating that no data was available; not gold, which indicated pervasive government filtering of the Internet. ("No data" did not necessarily indicate that the government did not filter content.)



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