Web 2.0 versus Control 2.0

The fight for free access to information is being played out to an ever greater extent on the Internet. The emerging general trend is that a growing number of countries are attemptimg to tighten their control of the Net, but at the same time, increasingly inventive netizens demonstrate mutual solidarity by mobilizing when necessary.
The Internet: a space for information-sharing and mobilizing

In authoritarian countries in which the traditional media are state-controlled, the Internet offers a unique space for discussion and information-sharing, and has become an ever more important engine for protest and mobilization. The Internet is the crucible in which repressed civil societies can revive and develop.

The new media, and particularly social networks, have given populations' collaborative tools with which they can change the social order. Young people have taken them by storm. Facebook has become the rallying point for activists prevented from demonstrating in the streets. One simple video on *YouTube – Neda* in Iran or the Saffron march of the monks in Burma – can help to expose government abuses to the entire world. One simple USB flashdrive can be all it takes to disseminate news – as in Cuba, where they have become the local "samizdats."

Here, economic interest are intertwined with the need to defend free circulation of information. In some countries, it is companies that have obtained better access to the Internet and to the new media, sometimes with positive consequences for the rest of the population.As a barrier to trade,Web censorship should be included on the agenda of the WorldTrade Organization. Several of latter's members, including China and Vietnam, should to be required to open their Internet networks before being invited to join the global village of international commerce...

Takeover
Yet times have changed since the Internet and the new media were the exclusive province of dissidents and opponents. The leaders of certain countries have been taken aback by a proliferation of new technologies and even more by the emergence of a new form of public debate.

They had to suddenly cope with the fact that "Colored Revolutions" had become "*Twitter* Revolutions." The vast potential of cyberspace can no longer be reserved for dissenting voices. Censoring political and social content with the latest technological tools by arresting and harassing netizens, using omnipresent surveillance and ID registration which compromise surfer anonymity – repressive governments are acting on their threats. In 2009, some sixty countries experienced a form of Web censorship, which is twice as many as in 2008. The World WideWeb is being progressively devoured by the implementation of national Intranets whose content is "approved" by the authorities. *UzNet*, *Chinternet*, *TurkmenNet*…It does not matter to those governments if more and more Internet users are going to become victims of a digital segregation. Web 2.0 is colliding with Control 2.0.

A few rare countries such as North Korea, Burma and Turkmenistan can afford to completely cut themselves off from theWorldWideWeb. They are not acting on their lack of infrastructure development because it serves their purpose, and it persists. Nonetheless, the telecom black market is prospering in Cuba and on the border between China and North Korea.

Netizens are being targeted at a growing rate. For the first time since the creation of the Internet, a record number of close to 120 bloggers, Internet users and cyberdissidents are behind bars for having expressed themselves freely online.The world's largest netizen prison is in China,which is far out ahead of other countries with 72 detainees, followed by Vietnam and then by Iran, which have all launched waves of brutal attacks on websites in recent months.

Some countries have been arresting netizens in the last few months, even though they have not yet pursued an elaborate Net control or repression strategy. In Morocco, a blogger and a cybercafé owner were jailed by local authorities trying to cover up a crackdown on a demonstration that turned awry. In Azerbaidjan, the regime is holding **Adnan Hadjizade** and **Emin Milli** – two bloggers who had exposed the corruption of certain officials and had ridiculed them in a video circulated on YouTube. Four online journalists are also behind bars in Yemen. It is too soon to tell if these arrests may herald a new media takeover.

More and more states are enacting or considering repressive laws pertaining to the Web, or are applying those that already exist, which is the case with Jordan, Kazakhstan, and Iraq. Western democracies are not immune from the Net regulation trend. In the name of the fight against child pornography or the theft of intellectual property, laws and decrees have been adopted, or are being deliberated, notably in Australia, France, Italy and Great Britain. On a global scale, the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), whose aim is to fight counterfeiting, is being negotiated behind closed doors, without consulting NGOs and civil society. It could possibly introduce potentially liberticidal measures such as the option to implement a filtering system without a court decision.

Some Scandinavian countries are taking a different direction. In Finland, Order no. 732/2009,

states that Internet access is a fundamental right for all citizens. By virtue of this text, every Finnish household will have at least a 1 MB/s connection by July 31, 2010. By 2015, it will be at least 100 MB/s. Iceland's Parliament is currently examining a bill, the "Icelandic Modern Media Initiative" (IMMI), which is aimed at strictly protecting freedoms on the Internet by guaranteeing the transparency and independence of information. If it is adopted, Iceland will become a cyber-paradise for bloggers and citizen journalists.

The Internet users' response

The outcome of the cyber-war between netizens and repressive authorities will also depend upon the effectiveness of the weapons each camp has available: powerful filtering and surveillance systems for decrypting e-mails, and ever more sophisticated proxies and censorship circumvention tools such as Tor, VPNs, Psiphon, and UltraReach. The latter are developed mainly thanks to the solidarity of netizens around the globe. For example, thousands of Iranians use proxies originally intended for Chinese surfers.

Global pressure makes a difference, too. The major world powers' geo-strategic interests are finding a communications platform on the Web. In January 2010, the United States made freedom of expression on the Internet the number one goal of its foreign policy. It remains to be seen how the country will apply this strategy to its foreign relations, and what the reaction of the countries concerned will be.

In their apparent isolation, Web users, dissidents and bloggers are vulnerable. They are therefore starting to organize, collectively or individually, depending upon what causes they wish to defend. This type of momentum can produce a Russian blogger association, or one comprised of Moroccans, or Belarus Web users groups launching campaigns to protest against government decisions, or an Egyptian blogger group mobilizing against torture or the cost of living, or even Chinese Internet users organizing cyber-movements on behalf of Iranian demonstrators on Twitter. Whether their causes are national or global, the messages they communicate are the ones that will decide the landscape of tomorrow's Internet. Resistance is getting organized.

The Enemies of the Internet 2010

The "Enemies of the Internet" list drawn up again this year by Reporters Without Borders presents the worst violators of freedom of expression on the Net: Saudi Arabia, Burma, China, North Korea, Cuba, Egypt, Iran, Uzbekistan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, and Vietnam.

Some of these countries are determined to use any means necessary to prevent their citizens from having access to the Internet: Burma, North Korea, Cuba, and Turkmenistan – countries in which technical and financial obstacles are coupled with harsh crackdowns and the existence of a very limited Intranet. Internet shutdowns or major slowdowns are commonplace in periods of unrest. The Internet's potential as a portal open to the world directly contradicts the propensity of these

regimes to isolate themselves from other countries. Saudi Arabia and Uzbekistan have opted for such massive filtering that their Internet users have chosen to practice self-censorship. For economic purposes, China, Egypt, Tunisia and Vietnam have wagered on a infrastructure development strategy while keeping a tight control over the Web's political and social content (Chinese and Tunisian filtering systems are becoming increasingly sophisticated), and they are demonstrating a deep intolerance for critical opinions. The serious domestic crisis that Iran has been experiencing for months now has caught netizens and the new media in its net; they have become enemies of the regime.

Among the countries "under surveillance" are several democracies: Australia, because of the upcoming implementation of a highly developed Internet filtering system, and South Korea, where draconian laws are creating too many specific restrictions on Web users by challenging their anonymity and promoting selfcensorship.

Turkey and Russia have just been added to the "Under Surveillance" list. In Russia, aside from the control exercised by the Kremlin on most of its media outlets, the Internet has become the freest space for sharing information. Yet its independence is being jeopardized by blogger arrests and prosecutions, as well as by blockings of so-called "extremist" websites. The regime's propaganda is increasingly omnipresent on the Web. There is a real risk that the Internet will be transformed into a tool for political control.

In Turkey, taboo topics mainly deal with Ataturk, the army, issues concerning minorities (notably Kurds and Armenians) and the dignity of the Nation. They have served as justification for blocking several thousand sites, including *YouTube*, thereby triggering a great deal of protest. Bloggers and netizens who express themselves freely on such topics may well face judicial reprisals.

Other countries, such as the United Arab Emirates, Belarus and Thailand are also maintaining their "under surveillance" status, but will need to make more progress to avoid getting transferred into the next "Enemies of the Internet" list. Thailand, because of abuses related to the crime of "lèse-majesté"; the Emirates, because they have bolstered their filtering system; Belarus because its president has just signed a liberticidal order that will regulate the Net, and which will enter into force this summer – just a few months before the elections.

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See Internet enemies and countries under surveillance : http://www.rsf.org/en-ennemi36676-Burma.html