

## OUTSIDE THE BOX

## Cease-Fire in Tunisia

The U.N.'s war on Internet freedom isn't over.

BY PETE DU PONT

Paul Volcker's recent report on the United Nations Oil for Food scandal taught us a great deal about how the U.N. works. Ten billion dollars worth of Iraqi oil was illegally smuggled to adjacent nations. Saddam Hussein collected \$229 million in bribes from 139 of 248 companies involved in the oil business and \$1.5 billion in kickbacks and illegal payments from 2,253 firms out of 3,614 providing humanitarian goods under the U.N. program. The U.N., which supervised and controlled the Oil for Food program, did nothing about any of it.

Mr. Volcker concluded that the "Secretariat, the Security Council and U.N. contractors failed most grievously in their responsibilities to monitor the integrity of the program." Secretary-General Kofi Annan's reaction was that the report was helpful, but he has taken no action at all against the United Nations employees Mr. Volcker found to have performed unethically and improperly.

Indeed, last Tuesday Mr. Annan took action to reinstate U.N. Deputy Director Joseph Stephanides, who was fired six months ago for illegal bidding procedures. It seems that Mr. Annan didn't think what had

happened in the Oil for Food program was really that bad after

all. Or to put it our own perspective, Dennis Kozlowski stole \$600 million from Tyco and got eight to 25 years in prison; Kofi Annan supervised more than \$12 billion in international theft and will stay in his job.

All of which explains why allowing the United Nations to be in charge of running the Internet is a very bad idea.

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The Internet is one of the greatest mechanisms of progress in the history of the world. More than one billion people use it; anyone with a computer and a connection has access to 167 million megabytes of information that is instantly available. Ideas and information can be shared, explained, tested and improved upon. Because of the Internet, governments, economies, institutions and individuals can and do prosper.

But the availability of such information threatens a great many despotic nations which do not believe individuals should have access to information that may be damaging to their governmental

societies. The regimes in China, Cuba, Iran, Syria and Tunisia, for example, believe Internet content must be controlled so that individuals do not have access to any information that has not been approved by their governments. In China the word "democracy" is not allowed on the Internet; it is just too dangerous to the communist government. And so such nations want international controls on Internet usages and content.

Today no organization or government controls the Internet. The mechanics of participation--domain names, suffixes like .com and .org, and technical codes--are supervised by the independent organization Iccann, an acronym for Internet Corp. for Assigned Names and Numbers, based in America and loosely overseen by the U.S. government. Much of the rest of the world, gathered last week in Tunisia for the U.N.-hosted World Summit on the Information Society, wants to take over that responsibility, or as European Union spokesman Martin Selmayr put it, the U.S. must "give up their unilateral control and everything will be fine." Perhaps as fine as it is in China, where, according to the New York Times, "major search engines . . . must stop posting their own commentary articles and instead make available only pieces

generated by government-controlled newspapers and news agencies."

Old Europe and the despotic nations want exactly that--international Internet *content* control. And they have convinced the EU establishment that U.N. control of the Internet would be just and appropriate. The last United Nations World Summit on the Internet--held in 2003--concluded that "governments should intervene. . . to maximize economic and social benefits and serve national priorities." The report of the U.N. Working Group on Internet Governance says it would have "respect for cultural and linguistic diversity, " explaining that meant "multilingual, diverse, and culturally appropriate content" on the Internet.

And what is "culturally appropriate" content? If your nation is a free society--America, Ireland, Australia--a free and unregulated-content Internet is a

good thing. For dictatorships and state controlled societies--the former USSR, China or Cuba--it is a catastrophe, for allowing citizens free access to information puts your government at risk. And if you are in between--a socialist government like France or Germany--U.N. control is a good thing because government control is always better than unregulated markets.



The good news is that last Wednesday U.N. and U.S. representatives in Tunis agreed upon, and the World Summit then adopted, a process that at least for the moment avoids U.N. control of the Internet. It created an Internet Governance Forum that allows current Icanm operational mechanisms to continue, has no regulatory power, and will begin meeting in 2006 to consider all aspects of Internet governance.

But the war against Internet freedom is far from over; Mr.

Annan again demands international discussions of "Internet governance issues" and says that change has become necessary regarding Icanm Internet oversight. So first the U.N. and the E.U. will seek Internet content control, and then perhaps the old U.N. idea of applying an international tax on e-mail messages.

When the U.S. attends those IGF meetings, our representative will surely be reminded of the repeated advice Tony Mauro, the Supreme Court correspondent for The American Lawyer, recalls receiving from Europeans at a run-up meeting of the U.N. Internet group in Budapest three years ago. Do not invoke the First Amendment in Internet discussions, he was told, for it is viewed as a sign of U.S. arrogance.

If the U.N. establishment believes free speech is arrogance, we can be confident that U.N. control of the Internet would be calamitous.

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