

UN Body Poised to Govern Internet

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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An unprecedented debate over how the global Internet is governed is set to dominate a meeting of officials in Dubai next week, with many countries pushing to give a United Nations body broad regulatory powers even as the United States and others contend such a move could mean the end of the open Internet.

While specifics of some of the most contentious proposals remain secret, leaked drafts show that Russia is seeking rules giving individual countries broad permission to shape the content and structure of the Internet within their borders, while a group of Arab countries is advocating universal identification of Internet users. Some developing countries and telecom providers, meanwhile, want to make content providers pay for Internet transmission.

Dozens of countries, including Russia, China and some Arab states, already restrict Internet access within their own borders. Those governments would have greater leverage over Internet content and service providers if the changes were backed up by international agreement.

The 12-day conference of the International Telecommunications Union, or ITU, a 147-year-old organization that's now an arm of the United Nations, largely pits revenue-seeking developing countries and authoritarian regimes that want more control over Internet content against U.S. policymakers and private web companies that prefer the status quo.

Fundamentally, most of the 193 countries in the ITU seem eager to enshrine the idea that the UN agency, rather than today's hodgepodge of private companies and nonprofit groups, should govern the Internet. They say that a new regime is needed to deal with the surge in cybercrime and more recent military attacks.

The ITU meeting, which aims to update a longstanding treaty on how telecom companies interact across borders, will also tackle other topics such as extending wireless coverage into rural areas.

If a majority of the ITU countries approve UN dominion over the Internet along with onerous rules, a backlash could lead to battles in Western countries over whether to ratify the treaty, with tech companies rallying ordinary Internet users against it and some telecom carriers supporting it.

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