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Internet Control Proposals Scrapped, for now

By The Moscow Times

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DUBAI — A Russia-led coalition withdrew a proposal to give governments new powers over the Internet, a plan opposed by Western countries in talks on a new global telecom treaty.

Negotiations on the treaty mark the most sustained effort so far by governments from around the world to agree on how — or whether — to regulate cyberspace.

The United States, Europe, Canada and other advocates of a hands-off approach to Internet regulation want to limit the new treaty's scope to telecom companies.

But Russia, China and many Arab states, which want greater governmental control, have been pushing to expand the treaty beyond traditional telecom operators.

Representatives of about 150 member countries of the International Telecommunication Union have been negotiating for the past eight days in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, on the

new treaty, which was last revised in 1988, before the advent of the World Wide Web.

The Russia-led proposal could have allowed countries to block some Internet locations and take control of the allocation of Internet addresses.

That task is overseen by ICANN, a self-governing organization under contract with the U.S. Department of Commerce.

An ITU spokesman said late Monday that the coalition's plan had been scrapped.

"It looks like the Russians and Chinese overplayed their hand," said American cybersecurity expert Jim Lewis of the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"These issues will continue to be on the table for discussion in other forms during the remainder of the conference," U.S. Ambassador Terry Kramer said.

China, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates had co-signed the aborted proposal. The UAE insisted that the document had not been withdrawn.

"It may come down to the wire," a Western delegate said on condition of anonymity. "There are a lot of other [similar] proposals, so I don't think this represents a substantial conclusion and could be just maneuvering."

The United States' position is that the Internet has flourished with minimal state interference. It wants this to continue, and it argues that many of the proposed changes could allow governments to stifle free speech, reduce online anonymity and censor Internet content.

Russia and its allies insist that they need new powers to fight cybercrime and protect networks.

When the revised treaty is finalized, countries can opt out of parts of it or even refuse to sign it. The talks are due to end Friday.

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