

Internet Control Gets Consensus Vote at ITU

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — A group consisting of China, Russia, Gulf Arab states and other countries that want UN backing for stronger government sway over Internet affairs came closer to getting its way Thursday.

A rival Western bloc, led by a powerhouse U.S. delegation, seeks to block any UN rules on cyberspace, fearing that they could squeeze Web commerce and open the door for more restrictions and monitoring by authoritarian regimes.

The Russia-led group appeared to win a critical preliminary battle early Thursday, when the meeting's chairman declared consensus on a proposal for a more "active" government role in Internet dealings.

There was no formal vote, but Mohammed Nasser al-Ghanim said he based his decision on "the temperature of the room" following marathon negotiations.

The move frames the ideological divide at the 193-nation gathering in Dubai, which is scheduled to wrap up Friday with its first revisions of global telecom rules since 1988, years before the Internet age dawned.

That brought an immediate backlash from the U.S. and its backers, which questioned the procedure and vowed to keep any new Internet rules from the final treaty by the UN's ITU.

The group, formed in the 1860s, when the telegraph ushered in instant communications, has no powers to instantly change how the Internet operates. It also cannot compel reforms by states that already widely censor cyberspace.

But the U.S.-led coalition argues that any UN codes sanctioning greater government roles in the Internet, even under the framework of state security, could be used to justify more controls by Web watchers in places such as China and Iran.

Last month, the host United Arab Emirates announced stricter Internet laws, which outlaw postings that insult rulers or call for protests, among other things.

Nations favoring a heavier government hand are likely to be emboldened by adoption of their resolution. However, it still needs to clear at least two more hurdles before it can be considered for the final document, and it will face strong opposition from the U.S. and others.

"It's not a crime to talk about the Internet inside the ITU," said the group's Russia-educated secretary-general, Hamadoun Toure, suggesting high-level support to keep debate going on Internet issues.

In response, the head of the U.S. delegation, Ambassador Terry Kramer, said, "We do not believe the focus of this conference should be on the Internet, and we did not come to this conference in anticipation of a discussion on the Internet."

A statement from the Internet Society, an international group promoting openness in cyberspace, called the advancement of the proposal "clearly a disappointing development."

The U.S. team in Dubai also includes heavy hitters from the tech world such as Microsoft and Google, which also have taken a stand against proposals by European telecom companies to charge Internet content providers for access to domestic markets around the world.

Other issues on the table include calls for more transparency on roaming charges by cell phone companies, efforts to fight Internet fraud and spam and creation of a worldwide emergency number for cell phones and other devices.

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