



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on March 18, 2014

United States to Give Up Its Control of the Internet

Last Friday the Department of Commerce [announced](#) that in October 2015 it will relinquish all remaining control over the “root” of the Internet to an obscure but vital private non-profit organization. That group, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), promises to create a new structure that will keep the Internet private, safe, and robust. Many freedom-loving people and organizations are concerned that ICANN will now fall under the governance of the UN and the totalitarian regimes that make up the bulk of its membership.



From the start of the Internet, informally considered to be in 1994, a computer genius named Jon Postel managed the Internet from his office in California, under the name Internet Assigned Names Authority (IANA). When Postel died suddenly in 1998 at age 55, his responsibilities were transferred to ICANN under the control of the Department of Commerce (DoC). Although the relationship between the DoC was constitutionally questionable, violating various constitutional boundaries and safeguards ([according to Michael Fromkin](#), a University of Miami Law School professor), the DoC largely kept its hands off the new entity, allowing it to grow and change and respond to the explosion of the Internet over the next 15 years.

However, the contract under which ICANN has been operating ends September 2015 after which ICANN will operate on its own. What happens after that date is remarkably unclear and fraught with danger. According to Larry Strickling, the head of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) inside the DoC, every effort will be made to insure that the new ICANN management won't be replaced by the United Nations or any other international government agency. Said Strickling: “I want to make clear that we will not accept a proposal that replaces the NTIA role with a government-led or an intergovernmental solution.”

His strong stance gave observers of the pending change small comfort in light of others heralding the handoff of Internet oversight and indirect control from the United States to an as-yet-unknown gaggle of collectivists salivating at the opportunity to control the Internet.

The current director of ICANN, Fadi Chehade, expressed confidence that the transition from U.S. oversight will be smooth and uneventful, using language only statisticians could appreciate:

We thank the U.S. government for its stewardship, for its guidance over the years.

And we thank them today for trusting the global community to replace their stewardship with appropriate oversight mechanisms.

The world wants to participate increasingly in how we shape it together. That's why [this transition is taking place] now.

ICANN has already been under the influence of the United Nations for years, belonging to the UN's



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World Intellectual Property Organization, which was created in 1967 allegedly to “encourage creative activity [and] to promote the protection of intellectual property throughout the world.” The World Intellectual Property Organization has already exceeded its own initial purposes, morphing from “protecting” intellectual property to “transferring” those property rights, or their interpretation of those rights, “to developing countries in order to accelerate economic, social and cultural development,” as determined by the UN.

Last October Chehade signed onto the Montevideo Statement on the Future of Internet Cooperation, which proclaimed as its purpose the reinforcement of “the importance of globally coherent Internet operations,” while warning against “Internet fragmentation at a national level.” It supports efforts “towards the evolution of global multistakeholder Internet cooperation.” It called for “accelerating the globalization of ICANN’s ... functions, towards an environment in which all stakeholders, including all governments, participate on an equal footing.”

This is only language an internationalist could love. One internationalist, Senator Jay Rockefeller (D-W.VA.), had nothing but praise for the coming transition:

Since 1998 the U.S. has been committed to transitioning management of the Internet’s domain name system to an independent entity that reflects the broad diversity of the global Internet community.

[This announcement] is the next phase in this transition.

Several times over the last decade, China and Russia have pushed to have control of the Internet transferred to the United Nations under the auspices of its International Telecommunications Union (ITU). The ITU is headed up by one Hamadoun Touré, who conveniently happens to serve on the board of the UN’s International Multilateral Partnership Against Cyber Threats. It doesn’t take much imagination to know what Touré might like to do, given the opportunity to protect the global community from threats such as those posed by the inconvenient and embarrassing voices of the likes of Edward Snowden or WikiLeaks.

Steve DilBianco, the executive director of NetChoice, a pro-business group, warned that “without proper safeguards, Russian President Vladimir Putin or another authoritarian leader could pressure ICANN to shut down domains that host critical content.” He added:

That kind of freedom of expression is something that the U.S. has carefully protected. Whatever replaces [our current] leverage, let’s design it carefully.

As the day draws nearer, perhaps Congress will conclude that letting ICANN go into the hands of despots doesn’t serve American interests, and will thwart the transition. Without such an intervention, the root of the Internet appears likely to wind up in the hands, either de facto or de jure, in the hands of internationalists, exercising ultimate control over access to and the content contained on hundreds of millions of websites now populating the Internet.

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