



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on August 24, 2011

Technology Keeping Internet Freedom Ahead of Censorship

Efforts by the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) to regulate the Internet may become irrelevant if the new technology being developed succeeds as expected. When the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ruled against the FCC last December, the FCC rewrote its rules to allow them to regulate the Internet anyway through the whitewash called “net neutrality.” Verizon immediately filed suit to overrule the new attempt, and a House subcommittee in March voted to invalidate the actions of the FCC. But the new rules remain in place until the issue is decided.



All of which may be irrelevant as new technology, called Telex, is being developed as a “work-around” for any such attempts by the FCC. Alex Halderman (pictured above left), an assistant professor of computer science at the University of Michigan, is one of the developers of the software. In a recent interview he explained that people living under Internet censorship are already able to connect to third-party servers outside their country, but that it doesn’t take long for the government to find these servers and block them. Telex, on the other hand, turns the entire Internet into an anti-censorship device. He says:

First, there’s software that you install on your computer. And then there are devices that we call Telex stations that internet service providers (ISPs) outside the country...put on...the wires that are carrying traffic.

So, if you’re in China, and you want access to a banned site like YouTube, you just type YouTube.com into your browser, and the Telex station will see that connection, and disguise it as something innocuous. You might be watching YouTube, but to a censor, it will just seem as if you’re visiting a harmless, non-blocked site.

We like to envision this technology as a ... response to government-level censorship...

Telex is the next advance in technology from the “mirroring” that supporters of [WikiLeaks](#) used to duplicate its information the day after the original WikiLeaks site was shut down. In a Twitter message posted afterwards, “WikiLeaks now has 355 sites ... thanks to YOU.” With that mirroring technology, removing the files Wikileaks exposed to the world through the Internet will likely be impossible. Not that the FCC isn’t going to try, however. [As noted by](#) Charles Scaliger at *The New American*, “The U.S. government has shown that it is not only willing but capable of censoring Internet content and of punishing those deemed guilty of collaboration with purveyors of censored content. It is a very small step from the crusade against WikiLeaks to broader efforts to purge the Internet of all dissent labeled as ‘hate speech.’ ”

It is not at all difficult, for example, to imagine the federal government...barring all online criticism



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of the Federal Reserve, in the interest of preserving financial stability (i.e., the status quo).

The battle over control of the Internet has rather little to do with barring files from WikiLeaks. It's much more important than that: it's control over the flow of information to citizens. And that means overriding the guarantee under the First Amendment that "Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press..." As Founder James Madison wrote: "A people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with [the] power which knowledge gives."

Senator Joe Lieberman, on the other hand, has little interest in letting citizens arm themselves with such knowledge. In fact, his out-sized response to the threat that the WikiLeaks files might shed some light on how the government works behind closed doors indicates the seriousness of that threat. He successfully pressured Amazon to cease from hosting part of WikiLeaks' operation. In his announcement, Lieberman said that Amazon's "decision to cut off WikiLeaks now is the right decision and should set the standard for other companies WikiLeaks is using to distribute its illegally seized material." But after other sites picked up and duplicated the information in locations in Sweden, Lieberman demanded that "any other company or organization that is hosting WikiLeaks immediately terminate its relationship with them."

Which is precisely the point. Lieberman doesn't like his government to be embarrassed or have its credibility tarnished by such revelations. He certainly wouldn't want the voters to discover secrets that might threaten its legitimacy. That explains the push by the FCC to extend — bully is a better word — its way into regulating the Internet through the opaque notion of "net neutrality." Jonathan Finegold [observed](#):

One hundred years ago, or even 40 or 50 years ago, such a tyrant as Lieberman would have most likely been a feared man in whatever country he could enforce his censorship. Today, men like Lieberman are nearing irrelevancy. What greater satisfaction can there be than seeing a despot stripped on his power?

And the stripping of that power comes from the simple fact that individuals seeking freedom are more highly motivated to retain their freedom than is a government in trying to take it away. The operation of individual creativity, such as reflected in Telex and the coming generations of Internet safety from censorship, will always be at least one step ahead of the government. As Finegold concludes:

Today we have seen bureaucracy in retreat. Once the state is fully denied the use of its force, through the market, we will witness a complete rout.



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