



The Citizen Lab

Middle East and North Africa CyberWatch: July 28 - August 10, 2012

A biweekly report on trends in online censorship, information operations,
and Internet use in the Middle East and North Africa

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IRAN

CENSORSHIP AND FILTERING

EGYPT: Egyptian presidency files lawsuit against media outlets

Two unnamed Egyptian state media outlets and one foreign news agency have been [charged](#) with defaming President Mohammed Mursi and spreading false news. Legal action has also been taken against Iran's Fars News Agency for allegedly fabricating an interview that it claims to have held with

Mursi. In July, a similar lawsuit was filed on behalf of Mohamed Badie, the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, against Egyptian state television and the state-owned Rose al-Youssef newspaper for [falsely reporting](#) that the Muslim Brotherhood supported Hamas's efforts to buy and smuggle weapons from Egypt.

IRAN: Filtering Facebook for the people

Iran's Committee to Determine Instances of Criminal Content believes that [filtering](#) [Farsi] of social media, particularly Facebook, is in the best interest of the country. Mohammad Reza Aghamiri, a member of the Committee, stated that Facebook has the power to distort the religious and cultural beliefs of Iranian youth by offering them large amounts of "uncensored information, which they are not able to understand."

IRAN: Filtering of pro-Ahmadinejad blogs

Ahmad Shariat, a pro-government blogger, was arrested for posting content critical of Iran's Revolutionary Guards and judiciary system. A number of other pro-Ahmadinejad blogs have been filtered after publishing posts supportive of Shariat. While Ahmadinejad is [following up](#) [Farsi] with the judiciary in an attempt to see the bloggers freed, Ayatollah Khamenei [expressed his approval](#) [Farsi] of filtering pro-Ahmadinejad blogs in a recent gathering with university students.

JORDAN: Jordanian government distributes pornography filtering software

Jordan's Ministry of Information and Communications Technology has made software that enables Internet users to [block pornographic content](#) available on its website. As previously [reported](#), the ministry has been working with foreign companies to provide filtering solutions and guarantee a "clean" Internet. A grassroots [anti-pornography campaign](#) has been active in the country for several months, holding [demonstrations](#) and utilizing [social media](#) [Arabic] to demand that the government block access to pornography online.

SYRIA: Regime cuts mobile and Internet services in Aleppo

On August 2, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights [reported](#) that mobile phone and Internet services had been cut off in the city of Aleppo. An unnamed activist clarified that landlines were also down and a Syrian security source warned that telecommunications blackouts generally precede "a major military offensive." Six days later, the Syrian regime [launched a major ground assault](#) on rebel-held areas of the city.

BLOGGER AND NETIZEN ARRESTS

EGYPT: Facebook user arrested for 'blasphemy'

An Egyptian teacher, Bishoy Kamel, was [detained](#) for four days for sharing cartoons that allegedly insult Islam, the Prophet Mohammed, and President Mohammed Mursi on Facebook.

Kamel [stated](#) that, while he manages the Facebook page in question, he should not be held responsible for what other users posted on the page. He also claimed that the Facebook page had been hacked prior to the charges being laid against him.

IRAN: Arrests of Facebook users

Iranian authorities continued to crack down on the activities of Iranians on Facebook, both inside and outside of the country. The government [arrested](#) [Farsi] a number of active members and administrators of a Facebook page called "[The Campaign to Remind Shi'ites about Imam Naghi](#)" [Farsi], which satirizes Iranian religious and political topics. Their Facebook accounts are now under the control of government officials.

IRAN: Young bloggers in prison

Seven unregistered bloggers, four of whom are under the age of 20, have been [arrested](#) [Farsi] in Tabriz, Iran's fifth largest city, for using proxies and VPNs. All bloggers in Iran are required to [register](#) [Farsi] with the government before commencing on online activities. Mohammad Ghasemloo, Chief of East Azerbaijan Province's branch of the Cyber and Information Exchange Police, reported that the arrested bloggers claimed ignorance of the dangers posed by cyberspace.

KUWAIT: State security arrests member of ruling family

Sheikh Meshaal al-Malek al-Sabah, a member of Kuwait's royal family, was [arrested](#) for posting political views opposed to the policies of the ruling family on Twitter. Sheikh Meshaal has [stated](#) his intentions to run for political office and expose corruption in the government if elected.

CYBER ATTACKS

IRAN: New strategy against cyber attacks

Heidar Moslehi, Minister of Intelligence and National Security, [stated](#) [Farsi] that Iran will not only continue to improve its defence system against cyber attacks, but will also be prepared to initiate its own cyber attacks against perpetrators.

LEBANON: Lebanese banks hit by 'Gauss' virus

On August 9, Kaspersky Lab, a security firm, [announced](#) that it had discovered a virus in the Middle East that is potentially state-sponsored. 'Gauss,' as it is nicknamed, [has infected](#) at least 2,500 computers, most of which are located in Lebanon. It appears to target the login information of e-mail accounts, instant messenger usernames, social networks, and bank accounts. Researchers said that the virus is likely related to [Stuxnet](#), [Flame](#), and [Duqu](#), a series of complex malware attacks that are believed to have been developed by the United States and Israel for use against Iran.

SYRIA: Conflict heats up in cyberspace

In conjunction with escalating hostilities, Syria has recently been the subject of a [series of cyber attacks and disinformation campaigns](#). On August 3, Reuters temporarily [shut down](#) its blogging system after pro-Assad hackers posted fake blog posts attributed to Reuters journalists. Many of the posts [contained fabricated information](#) indicating that the rebels were pulling out of Aleppo. On August 6, a Twitter user posing as Russian Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokoltsev [posted a fake quote](#) from the Russian envoy to Syria, alleging that President Bashar al-Assad "had been injured or killed." No hacker group has taken credit for the attacks.

INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA USE

BAHRAIN: Government may take action against social media users

In an effort to strengthen national unity, the [Bahrain Bloc](#), a parliamentary bloc made up of both Sunni and Shi'ite MPs, has developed a new "code of honour" for social media users. The [guidelines](#) will aim to monitor content and draw attention to those who use social media to "divide the society." They will not impose a restriction on the use of social media, although users could face legal action if they are found to be inciting violence or spreading sectarianism over social networks. Bahrainis will be encouraged to voluntarily sign the code and pledge to follow its rules.

IRAN: Supreme Leader on Instagram

Ayatollah Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran, recently [joined Instagram](#) and currently has 950 followers. There are six photos that have been posted to his [profile](#). This is not Khamenei's first experiment with social media. Three years ago he joined [Twitter](#) and currently has 5,169 followers. Interestingly, Twitter is blocked in Iran and can only be accessed by VPN or proxy, which are deemed illegal.

TECHNOLOGY UPDATES

- **IRAN: Non-Iranian antiviruses continue to be used after ban on imported software**

Reza Taqipour, Minister of Information and Communications Technology, [banned](#) [Farsi] the import of non-Iranian security software products last month, referencing the successful progress of a [domestic antivirus program](#). Experts, however, [believe](#) [Farsi] that Iranian-made antivirus software should be used along with state-approved non-Iranian Internet security solutions. Governmental organizations are slated to be the first participants in this program. Many of them, including the [judiciary](#) [Farsi], are currently using non-Iranian antiviruses.