

Is US giving away the internet?

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In this May 10, 2016 file photo, Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, walks past reporters as he returns to the Capitol Hill in Washington. Donald Trump's campaign says a looming government plan to disengage from managing key operations of the internet poses a threat of government censorship of online information. But such an outcome is highly unlikely. (AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta, File)

Donald Trump's campaign says a government plan to give up managing key operations of the internet poses a threat of outside censorship of online information. But such an outcome is highly unlikely.

The upcoming Oct. 1 transition, which will result in no immediate discernible change for [internet](#) users, is the result of planning that started under President Bill Clinton in 1998 and continued largely unopposed during the presidencies of George W. Bush and Barack Obama. The U.S. government's role has diminished as the behind-the-scenes, technical administration has increasingly been performed by a California-based nonprofit organization that coordinates with private experts around the world.

An office within the Commerce Department, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, still has limited oversight over the system of internet addresses. But day-to-day management long ago was ceded to the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, known as ICANN. It administers the directories that steer internet traffic to its destination.

Without it, buying items online, sending or receiving emails, browsing websites, sharing digital photos and watching movies online would be impossible.

Trump's campaign asserted this week that Obama intends to use his own authority to turn control of the internet over to the United Nations and the international community, and said Democrats aligned with Hillary Clinton are failing to protect online activity.

"Internet freedom is now at risk with the president's intent to cede control to international interests, including countries like China and Russia, which have a long track record of trying to impose online censorship," said Stephen Miller, Trump's policy director.

Sen. Ted Cruz, who late Wednesday praised Trump's stand on the issue, has led Republican opposition that wants to maintain the status quo. Cruz pushed to add language to a must-pass spending bill that would force the

Obama administration to delay or head off the move, but the effort appeared headed for failure Thursday.

"Under the guardianship of the United States and the First Amendment, the internet has become truly an oasis of freedom. But that could soon change," said Cruz, R-Texas, who headed a Senate Judiciary subcommittee hearing on the subject last week.

"The only government that loses power in this transition is the United States government. All the others gain power," Paul Rosenzweig, a former deputy assistant secretary in the Homeland Security Department, told Congress. He worked on the transition plan and favors it but said improvements are needed to address how to resolve disputes about intellectual property claims and human rights complaints.

Since its creation, ICANN has quietly administered the internet's address system without significant controversy. The premise for the transition has been to turn over such key functions to the private technical experts and businesses that helped build the internet, rather than governments. The diminished American role also has coincided since 2013 with heightened suspicions about the U.S. government's designs on the internet, after Edward Snowden revealed that the National Security Agency had hacked into networks overseas used by U.S. corporate data centers.

Alternatives to ICANN's role include turning over control to a U.N agency, the International Telecommunication Union, where countries with less regard for freedom of speech would have a greater say and the private groups have little influence. Also in play: the risk that foreign governments may develop their own private networks that might not function seamlessly with the internet.

"If we don't make a transition to a more global form of governance,

many people will say, 'Look, this is a U.S tool, and we're going to make our own internet,'" said Michael Chertoff, former Homeland Security secretary under George W. Bush and Obama. "We have to realize that even though we know our motives are good motives, there are people who will argue that if we don't give it up that we have bad motives. To maintain credibility we have to go through this process."

The planned change "offers the best hope of protecting [internet freedom](#) ," NTIA Administrator Lawrence E. Strickling said. He said there are robust checks and balances that will be put in place after the transition to ensure the internet's technical management is properly handled.

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