

Egyptian watchdog says authorities blocking more websites

June 13 2017, by Brian Rohan



German Chancellor Angela Merkel, right, welcomes the President of Egypt, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, left, for a meeting at the chancellery as part of the 'G20 Africa Partnership – Investing in a Common Future' conference in Berlin, Germany, Monday, June 12, 2017. (AP Photo/Michael Sohn)

Egyptian authorities have intensified their blocking of critical websites and expanded their focus to so-called VPN sites that help users bypass such restrictions, a watchdog said.

Five additional sites were blocked late Monday, bringing the total number of obstructed sites to 62 since a censorship campaign began in late May, The Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression said in a statement.

"We noticed the beginning of blocking websites that provide VPN services," it said, referring to [virtual private networks](#) that can be used to access blocked content by routing connections through servers outside the country. "Such practice points to the intent of the government to continue blocking and filtering the content that Egyptian users could access."

On May 24, Egypt's official [news](#) agency reported that the government ordered internet service providers to block access to 21 news websites, alleging they supported terrorism or reported "false news."

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi has presided over a widespread crackdown on dissent since leading the military overthrow of his predecessor, the Islamist Mohammed Morsi, in 2013.

Among the blocked sites were those of Qatar-based broadcaster Al-Jazeera. Egypt has joined Saudi Arabia and other Gulf nations in seeking to isolate Qatar over allegations it supports terrorist groups, charges Qatar denies.



German Chancellor Angela Merkel, right, welcomes the President of Egypt, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, left, for a meeting at the chancellery as part of the 'G20 Africa Partnership – Investing in a Common Future' conference in Berlin, Germany, Monday, June 12, 2017. (AP Photo/Michael Sohn)

Egyptian authorities also blocked sites linked to Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood group, now outlawed as a terror organization, and those linked to the Palestinian militant group Hamas.

However, most of the blocked addresses are news websites, including prominent investigative platform Mada Masr and other publications such as Daily News Egypt. VPN service Tunnelbear, which describes itself as providing "really simple computer and mobile apps for private browsing and to experience the internet as if you are in another country," has also been blocked.

El-Sissi was in Germany on Monday and Tuesday to attend a conference on partnership between the G20 group of major economies and African countries, and to drum up trade and investment. He took part in a panel discussion but did not take any questions.

After meeting with el-Sissi, German Economy Minister Brigitte Zypries said Berlin wants to strengthen its economic relations with Egypt, its most important trading partner in North Africa, but that adherence to the rule of law is essential, as "companies need reliable conditions for investment decisions." El-Sissi did not respond to the comment.

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