

Orwell's 1984: France Will Counter Terrorist Attacks on Free Speech by... Attacking Free Speech?

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George Orwell wasn't psychic; he was a time traveler, and we're permanently falling down the rabbit hole of 1984.

If you live in France, your right to visit certain websites has just been terminated by the almighty government.

Why? Because terrorism.

According to a report by Glenn Greenwald, "What's Scariest: Terrorism, or Governments Blocking Websites in Its Name?," the French Interior Ministry has now [ordered that five websites be blocked by the government](#) because they have officially been accused of promoting terrorism.

And this is just the beginning.

[Greenwald explains:](#)

When the block functions properly, visitors to those banned sites, rather than accessing the content of the sites they chose to visit, will be automatically redirected to the Interior Ministry website. There, they will be greeted by a graphic of a large red hand, and text informing them that they were attempting to access a site that causes or promotes terrorism: "you are being redirected to this official website since your computer was about to connect with a page that provokes terrorist acts or condones terrorism publicly."

[No judge reviews](#) the Interior Ministry's decisions. The minister first requests that the website owner voluntarily remove the content he deems transgressive; upon disobedience, the minister unilaterally issues the order to Internet service providers for the sites to be blocked. This censorship power is vested pursuant to [a law recently enacted in France](#) empowering the interior minister to block websites.

Forcibly taking down websites deemed to be supportive of terrorism, or criminalizing speech deemed to "advocate" terrorism, is a major trend in both Europe and the West generally. Last month in Brussels, the European Union's counter-terrorism coordinator issued [a memo](#) proclaiming that "Europe is facing an unprecedented, diverse and serious terrorist threat," and argued that increased state control over the Internet is crucial to combating it.

CTIRU continues to work with social media platforms to flag terrorist and extremist content to them which breaches their own terms and conditions. Since February 2010, social media platforms and other parts of the internet industry have voluntarily removed 72,000 pieces of terrorist content following referrals from CTIRU because they have agreed that the content represents a breach of their rules. The main players have started to improve their response and held a training event for the smaller platforms on this issue in December. The UK is committed to sharing its experience across the EU.

(photo: The Intercept)

“I do not want to see sites that could lead people to take up arms on the Internet,” proclaimed Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve.

In other words, what you have decided to see is banned and you are redirected to the ministry... (Surely they aren't keeping track of (read: databasing on a “special list”) any IP address of those Internet users they have to redirect. They wouldn't do that, would they?)

This comes in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris, dubbed France's 9/11. [Mac Slavo of SHTF Plan](#) points out the irony of a new European Patriot Act and the now burgeoning surveillance/police state over there in the wake of the attacks:

Establishing a framework to enhance police work and intelligence sharing concerning the actions of alleged terrorists and extremists, [the joint statement](#) from 12 European ministers and U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder declares the intent to: “counter violent extremism” and “fight against radicalization, notably on the Internet,” in part through the “swift reporting [and removal] of material that aims to incite hatred and terror.” Meanwhile, it aims to beef European border control, “step up the detection and screening of travel movements” and enhance law enforcement, particularly in “working to reduce the supply of illegal firearms throughout Europe.”

Although the statement takes a vow of respect and “scrupulous observance of fundamental freedoms, a forum for free expression, in full respect of the law,” it doesn't hold much water with the focus on new surveillance and police powers to chill free speech in the name of fighting radicalization. It seems the terrorists have once again won before the fight has even begun.

How painfully ironic, considering the Charlie Hebdo attack was supposed to be a terroristic attack on free speech to begin with.

So France will counter terrorist attacks on free speech by... attacking free speech?

We now live in a time when, under the all-encompassing blanket of “national security,” governments get to decide what is good and bad for you to say and see and think, apparently. Where does this slippery slope end? How long until merely disagreeing with the government is deemed a “terroristic threat” online?

Just wait until the new FCC Net Neutrality rules get into full swing here. The road to censorship has already been well paved, America. We're next.

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