

# Choking the Internet: How much longer will your favorite sites be on line?

By [Wayne Madsen](#)

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Internet censorship. It did not happen overnight but slowly came to America's shores from testing grounds in China and the Middle East.

Progressive and investigative journalist web site administrators are beginning to talk to each other about it, e-mail users are beginning to understand why their e-mail is being disrupted by it, major search engines appear to be complying with it, and the low to equal signal-to-noise ratio of legitimate e-mail and spam appears to be perpetuated by it.

In this case, "it," is what privacy and computer experts have long warned about: massive censorship of the web on a nationwide and global scale. For many years, the web has been heavily censored in countries around the world. [That censorship continues at this very moment.](#) Now it is happening right here in America. The agreement by the Congress to extend an enhanced Patriot Act for another four years will permit the political enforcers of the Bush administration, who use law enforcement as their proxies, to further clamp censorship controls on the web.



## Internet Censorship: The Warning Signs Were Not Hidden

The warning signs for the crackdown on the web have been with us for over a decade. The Clipper chip controversy of the 90s, John Poindexter's Total Information Awareness (TIA) system pushed in the aftermath of 9-11, backroom deals between the Federal government and the Internet service industry, and the Patriot Act have ushered in a new era of Internet censorship, something just half a decade ago computer programmers averred was impossible given the nature of the web. They were wrong, dead wrong.

Take for example of what recently occurred when two journalists were taking on the phone about a story that appeared on Google News. The story was about a Christian fundamentalist move in Congress to use U.S. military force in Sudan to end genocide in Darfur. The story appeared on the English Google News site in Qatar. But the very same Google News site when accessed simultaneously in Washington, DC failed to show the article. This censorship is accomplished by geolocation filtering: the restriction or modifying of web content based on the geographical region of the user. In addition to countries, such filtering can now be implemented for states, cities, and even individual IP addresses.

With reports in the Swedish newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* today that the United States has transmitted a Homeland Security Department "no fly" list of 80,000 suspected terrorists to

airport authorities around the world, it is not unreasonable that a “no [or restricted] surfing/emailing” list has been transmitted to Internet Service Providers around the world. The systematic disruptions of web sites and email strongly suggests that such a list exists.

News reports on CIA prisoner flights and secret prisons are disappearing from Google and other search engines like Alltheweb as fast as they appear. Here now, gone tomorrow is the name of the game.

Google is systematically failing to list and link to articles that contain explosive information about the Bush administration, the war in Iraq, Al Qaeda, and U.S. political scandals. But Google is not alone in working closely to stifle Internet discourse. America On Line, Microsoft, Yahoo and others are slowly turning the Internet into an information superhighway dominated by barricades, toll booths, off-ramps that lead to dead ends, choke points, and security checks.

America On Line is the most egregious is stifling Internet freedom. A former AOL employee noted how AOL and other Internet Service Providers cooperate with the Bush administration in censoring email. The Patriot Act gave federal agencies the power to review information to the packet level and AOL was directed by agencies like the FBI to do more than sniff the subject line. The AOL term of service (TOS) has gradually been expanded to grant AOL virtually universal power regarding information. Many AOL users are likely unaware of the elastic clause, which says they will be bound by the current TOS and any TOS revisions which AOL may elect at any time in the future. Essentially, AOL users once agreed to allow the censorship and non-delivery of their email.

Microsoft has similar requirements for Hotmail as do Yahoo and Google for their respective e-mail services.

There are also many cases of Google’s search engine failing to list and link to certain information. According to a number of web site administrators who carry anti-Bush political content, this situation has become more pronounced in the last month. In addition, many web site administrators are reporting a dramatic drop-off in hits to their sites, according to their web statistic analyzers. Adding to their woes is the frequency at which spam viruses are being spoofed as coming from their web site addresses.

Government disruption of the political side of the web can easily be hidden amid hyped mainstream news media reports of the latest “boutique” viruses and worms, reports that have more to do with the sales of anti-virus software and services than actual long-term disruption of banks, utilities, or airlines.



## Internet Censorship in the US: No Longer a Prediction

Google, Microsoft, Yahoo, and Cisco Systems have honed their skills at Internet censorship for years in places like China, Jordan, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Vietnam, and other countries. They have learned well. They will be the last to admit they have imported their censorship skills into the United States at the behest of the Bush regime. Last year, the Bush-Cheney campaign blocked international access to its web site — [www.georgewbush.com](http://www.georgewbush.com) — for unspecified “security reasons.”

Only those in the Federal bureaucracy and the companies involved are in a position to know

what deals have been made and how extensive Internet censorship has become. They owe full disclosure to their customers and their fellow citizens.

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