

# Foreword

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The Internet is the operating system of global politics. Ideas, messages, news, information, and money ricochet around the world in minutes, crossing time zones and borders in real time. Charities, banks, corporations, governments, nongovernmental organizations, and terrorist organizations all use the Internet to do business, to organize, and to speed communications. Internet technology is implicated in almost everything done in world politics today.

But the Internet is not the free operating zone that its early proponents expected. Contrary to conventional wisdom, states have shown an increased willingness to intervene to control communication through the Internet. And they have done so with precision and effectiveness.

At the beginning of the decade, few were aware of the scale of the problem. Advocacy and rights organizations charged that a handful of countries were blocking access to Web sites, but they had little evidence to support their claims. Good empirical knowledge of the scope of the problem did not exist.

Four years ago, a group of scholars at the University of Toronto, Harvard, and Cambridge (Oxford joined later) came together to begin systematic research on patterns of Internet censorship and surveillance worldwide. At the time, the project seemed very ambitious. The researchers proposed to put together a combination of contextual political and legal research and technical interrogations of the Internet in the countries under investigation. It relied heavily on the work of partners working in the countries where governments were engaged in active censorship. The project was extraordinarily challenging; in almost every case, the research implied a direct threat to national security and put researchers' personal safety at risk.

The project was ambitious in other ways as well. A transatlantic collaboration among four universities is difficult to manage at the best of times, but the ONI includes dozens of researchers and collaboration with nongovernmental, rights, and advocacy organizations all over the world. The project is also truly interdisciplinary. It involves sociologists, lawyers, international relations scholars, political scientists, and some of the world's most skilled computer programmers.

From 2003 to 2006, the ONI collaboration paid handsome dividends. It has produced eleven major country reports, reports that revealed a startling trend. States were aggressively finding ways to filter and control access to information for citizens within their borders. The reports were detailed, supported by strong evidence that had an immediate impact on policy worldwide. The ONI's China report was delivered before two U.S. congressional committees and was featured in newspapers and on television around the world. The reports highlighted

the embarrassing evidence that major U.S. corporations were implicated in Internet censorship practices. Once, the best and brightest of Silicon Valley were wiring the world; now, they were profiting from their collaboration with governments who were censoring and blocking websites. The ONI's dogged investigations called into question the conventional wisdom about the Internet's open architecture.

The significance of the research that ONI has conducted goes beyond its analysis of Internet surveillance and censorship. It speaks to fundamental questions of world politics, its structure, its power relationships, and its new forms of global control and resistance. The essays in this volume engage with all these issues. The editors of *Access Denied* present not only detailed overviews of their country investigations, but several incisive chapters that probe the legal, theoretical, and political implications of the growth of Internet-content-filtering practices worldwide.

*Access Denied* tells us unmistakably that the Internet is one of the most important—and most contested—terrains of global politics. It is being fought over by states, civil society organizations, and corporations. The essays in this volume do a superb job of educating us about the new battlefield of global politics.

Janice Gross Stein

Director, Munk Centre for International Politics