

Sanctions: US approves transfer of anti-surveillance software to Iran

In a little noticed action, the USA has issued a licence to a Californian company to export its products to Iran. Surprising in itself, it's the nature of the product that raises eyebrows. The US bans a wide range of encryption software and related tech. from export to Iran. But it now allows the sale of a specific piece of encryption software that is designed to defeat the attempts of the Iranian government to control to monitor internet use.

Some may say that the policy is similar to that of arming dissidents which, as the USA has often found out, frequently back fires - or even fires back.

US President Obama and his Foreign Secretary Hillary Clinton have said that the internet is an important tool for democrats (that is those who seek democracy, not members of their own party) and that unrestricted access to it is (in effect) a human right.

It appears that they do not see the irony in that statement given the USA's heavy monitoring of internet traffic by a host of agencies and departments, the surveillance of which has proved material in a substantial number of investigations.

It's not just Obama and Clinton who see it as a human rights issue: Austin Heap, the self-styled Executive Director of "The Censorship Research Center" in San Francisco, says "unfiltered and open internet access is a right that people around the world are intended to have as embodied in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." He goes on "the Obama administration ... is taking decisive action to see that these rights are realised."

That's going to be news to e.g. Australia and the UK both of whom (under recently ousted governments) planned heavy monitoring of internet use.

The Censorshop Research Center was set up last year as a non-profit organisation. That does not mean that its founders do not make profit, merely that it retains no profits. Officers of US non-profit organisations are under no constraints as to their remuneration.

The company has developed "Haystack" which it describes as "the first anti-censorship tool developed specifically for Iran and built to target the methods Iran uses to filter the internet."

Clinton has lauded Iran's bloggers - she elevates their activities with the term "citizen journalists" describing them as "brave" in the face of "intimidation."