

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Verveer, Melanne S <VerveerMS@state.gov>
Sent: Friday, January 28, 2011 6:43 PM
To: H
Subject: Fw: Egypt: Communications Issues

Phil sent me this assessment of the cell phone and internet situation in Egypt. I thought it might be useful information. Your statement is running constantly on TV here in Davos.

From: Verveer, Phillip L
To: Verveer, Melanne S
Sent: Fri Jan 28 18:34:53 2011
Subject: FW: Egypt: Communications Issues

From: Verveer, Phillip L
Sent: Friday, January 28, 2011 6:12 PM
To: Hormats, Robert D; Fernandez, Jose W
Cc: Smitham, Thomas D; Charbonnet, Laurent D; McCarthy, Deborah A; Craft, William E; Posner, Michael H; Labowitz, Sarah; Kendrick, Katharine A; Baer, Daniel B; Beard, Richard C; Lett, Steven W; Spilsbury, John V; Harris, Andrew R; Stevens, Jacob D
Subject: Egypt: Communications Issues

In the larger scheme of things, the communications issues implicated by events in Egypt are not nearly as significant as others. While they are important, they should not receive undue emphasis. That said, there are two admittedly obvious points that warrant mention:

1. The Government of Egypt has engaged in the most extensive shut down of the Internet in history. The only reasonably close analogies are efforts that were undertaken in Iran and Burma, but these were not nearly as extensive as what has occurred in Egypt. Just as important, the Government of Egypt has shut down other electronic communications almost completely. The only general exception is the wireline telephone system. The relative narrowness of this exception can be seen in the fact that there are roughly six times more now disconnected mobile subscriptions than wireline. Thus, while there has been considerable focus on the shutting down of the social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), what has taken place is much more significant.
2. The costs to any modern society of shutting off electronic communications are incalculably large. They include not only the economic costs, but also large non-monetary costs to individuals who, for example, are unable to learn the whereabouts and circumstances of relatives and friends. There does not seem to me to be any possibility that disconnecting almost all electronic communications can be sustained for long. The costs to the social fabric and to the economy are much too large. It is an action that, unless reversed almost immediately, will become a very powerful independent, universally felt grievance against the government.

Philip L. Verveer
Ambassador
U.S. Coordinator, International Communications and Information Policy
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520
202 647 5212 (p)
202 647 5957 (f)