

2011-10-07

Fråga-svar

Syrien. Myndigheternas övervakning av regimotståndares användning av sociala medier

Fråga

Vilken kapacitet har den syriska regimen att bevaka regimotståndares användning av olika sociala medier (t.ex. Facebook eller blogg-tjänster)? Riskerar politiskt oppositionella som använder Internet som protestkanal att bestraffas enligt lag eller utsättas för repressalier?

Svar

Sammanställning av information:

Wall Street Journal (2011):

Syria is taking its war against President Bashar al-Assad's political opponents global, using diplomats in Washington, London and elsewhere to track and intimidate expatriates who speak out against the Damascus regime, according to Syrian dissidents and U.S. officials.

Syrian embassy staffers are tracking and photographing antiregime protesters and sending reports back home, Syrian activists and U.S. officials say. Syrian diplomats, including the ambassador to the U.S., have fanned out to Arab diaspora communities to brand dissidents "traitors" and warn them against conspiring with "Zionists."

[...]

"We received reports that Syrian mission personnel under Ambassador Moustapha's authority have been conducting video and

photographic surveillance of people participating in peaceful demonstrations in the United States," the State Department said.

[...]

In recent months, Tehran has sent to Mr. Assad's government scrambling devices used to disrupt satellite-phone communications among activists inside Syria and overseas, according to U.S. and European officials. Iran has also dispatched advisers to Damascus to tutor Syria on how to use social-networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, to track communications among opposition figures

This spring, Syria's intelligence agency recruited dozens of information-technology specialists for their ability to crack online pseudonyms and trace computer Internet addresses, according to online activists. A few weeks later, Mr. Assad lifted a government ban on social media and set the information-technology specialists to work spying on those who used the sites, and particularly on Syrians who communicated with activists abroad.

In May, hundreds of Syrian-Americans descended upon Damascus's red-brick mission in an upscale Washington neighborhood to challenge Mr. Assad's rule. Attendees at the event said they were unnerved when embassy staff took photos of their faces and wrote down license-plate numbers. The dissidents said they saw men in upstairs rooms monitoring the crowd.

[...]

In the U.K., a handful of Syrian-Britons said they are planning to submit a formal complaint to the Foreign & Commonwealth Office about threats and harassment by staff of the Syrian embassy in London and what they see as the inadequacy of the Foreign Office's response. They said embassy staff members have taken photos of them at rallies and warned them that continuing to demonstrate would harm their ability to return to Syria or put their families in uncomfortable situations.

[...]

In Chile, Naima Darwish, a fashion designer, said she got a call from the Syrian embassy's chargé d'affaires in Santiago two days after she created a Facebook invite for a protest denouncing the regime's violence. She agreed to meet the diplomat at a cafe, where she said he warned her to stop organizing antigovernment actions if she ever wanted to return to Syria.

France 24 (2011):

Since the beginning of the uprising in March, Abdulsattar Attar has been one of the administrators of the Facebook group Syrian

Revolution 2011 (in Arabic), which is followed by some 240,000 people. It is considered one of the principal motors of the uprising. Dozens of messages, photos and videos are published every day. Attar, 25, has never set foot in Syria. His parents fled the country in the 1980s and he grew up in Jordan, where he opened a restaurant. He now lives in exile in Belgium, far from his wife and two children. "Every few days I get threats, by email and by telephone, from the Syrian security services or from the embassy here," he told FRANCE 24 in a telephone interview

New York Times (2011) har publicerat en artikel om vilken roll sociala medier spelar under den pågående proteströrelsen i Syrien och hur myndigheterna förhåller sig till detta. Läs gärna artikeln i sin helhet.

There are about 580,000 Facebook users in Syria, a 105 percent increase since the government lifted its four-year ban on Feb. 9, according to Fadi Salem, director of the Governance and Innovation Program at the Dubai School of Government

Though Syrian officials sought to portray the decision as a sign of openness, human right advocates warned that the government could use Facebook to closely monitor regime criticism and ferret out dissidents as nearby countries erupted in revolt.

A man in his 20s living in Syria said that the police demanded his Facebook password late last month after arresting him where he worked and taking his laptop. "I told him, at first, I didn't have a Facebook account, but he told me, after he punched me in the face, that he knew I had one because they were watching my 'bad comments' on it," he said. "I knew then that they were monitoring me."

Reporters Sans Frontières (2011):

Internet control is carried out by two government agencies, the Syrian Telecommunications Establishment (STE) and the Syrian Information Organisation (SIO), which control bandwidth. The STE and SIO use Thundercache software to maintain a centralised control over the Web. The programme provides online website monitoring and filtering by spotting key "banned" words

[...]

Syria continues to incarcerate netizens so as to make examples of them and to persuade others to practice self-censorship. To date, at least three cyberdissidents are behind bars.

U.S Department of State (2011):

Internet Freedom

[...] The government also monitored Internet usage and in some instances blocked access to Internet sites or Web-based e-mail that contained or transmitted information deemed politically sensitive.

Human rights activists believed the government often attempted to collect personally identifiable information of activists in connection with that person's ideology. Human rights activists also claimed that collected personal information was used in retaliation or to coerce activists.

[...]

Cyberdissidents.org reported that at year's end, 12 cyber dissidents were either imprisoned or exiled.

In December, 19-year-old Abdul-Rahman al-Shalabi was released after his May arrest by Air Force Intelligence in Homs, where he served in the Air Defense Unit. According to human rights groups, Shalabi was arrested after frequenting Internet cafes; observers believed that he was interrogated and tortured while detained incommunicado in Damascus and Homs.

On June 23, Kamal Shieko was arrested for traveling with improper documentation. The 32-year-old is a member of the Committees for the Defense of Democratic Liberties and Human Rights in Syria and a known blogger. Many activists believed his human rights and blogging activities were the cause for his continued detention. Shieko's whereabouts remained unknown at year's end.

The trial of detained 20-year-old female blogger Tal al-Mallouhi continued at year's end. The GID summoned Mallouhi to the state security bureau in Homs for questioning in December 2009 and held her incommunicado most of the year. Mallouhi's case garnered international attention, most notably after a September 19 demonstration outside the Syrian embassy in Cairo. Observers believed that international attention prompted authorities to release information about her case. In October, news reports in Syrian media outlets claimed that Mallouhi was being charged for espionage.

International Crisis Group (2011):

The regime chose to make an example out of a teenage blogger, Tal Malouhi, who had been arrested two years prior as a result of her rather naïve and harmless political writings.⁵¹ Brought to trial gagged and in shackles, she

was sentenced to five years imprisonment based on ludicrous espionage charges.⁵² A Syrian businessman with close ties to the regime offered his interpretation: “This was a calculated move. The subtext was: ‘Now you’re free to use the internet. Use it well’”.⁵³ (s. 6)

USA. Congressional Research Service (2011):

On Friday, February 4, activists using social networking sites attempted to launch their own “day of rage” after prayers, but few demonstrators appeared amidst a heavy presence of security forces. On February 9, the state unexpectedly granted citizens access to Facebook, YouTube, and other popular social media websites as part of President Al Asad’s pledge to ease Internet restrictions. Critics charged that easing access to social media would allow the government to more closely monitor dissidents, and several Syrian bloggers were subsequently arrested.³ For the next several weeks, small demonstrations persisted, but no single event was able to spark larger public protests. (s. 2)

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