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Chairman Vint Cerf  
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Dear Vint,

I'm not enthralled that the profoundly dubious .mobi, and the somewhat shaky .travel sTLD propositions out-whatever Amadeu's proposal for a Catalan sTLD. I'm also not enthralled that the .net whatever is going to leave all the current registrant's money with Verisign. But that's not why I'm writing this note.

In the course of contacting the ccTLDs in the region affected by the tsunami of last week I happened to notice that .mm was dark. Now I don't particularly care about Burma one way or another.

I don't care that its nameservers don't resolve any resource records in the .mm zone, or at least not A records for nic.mm or www.nic.mm, nor do I care that one of the two is wicked busy, hung, or dead, and it is immaterial that both are located in the UK at some gobbled-up web hosting shop.

I don't care that the military junta isn't a legitimate government, and that the closest thing Burma has to a legitimate government are the people who spent time in Aung San Suu Kyi's kitchen during the years of her house arrest, or her party, the National League for Democracy or the National Coalition Government of Union of Burma.

I wrote to Louis Touton two years ago, then about the fact that .iq had gone dark after Ashcroft and Freed decided that Bayan Elashi was (a) an undocumented alien (Palestinian) after running a business with his four brothers in Richardson Texas for the better part of a decade, or (b) a terrorist because he or one of his brothers gave money to a Palestinian relief organization that might be connected to Hammas, which now represents something like a third of all Palestinian voters in the Occupied Territories and Gaza, or (c) liable for fines, forfeitures and imprisonment for failure to obtain export licenses prior to (i) sending "computer accessories" to Malta in 1997, where the recipient, a freight forwarder then shipped the "computer accessories" to Libya, and (ii) sending "one computer as well as memory chips and central processing units" to Syria in 1999, and (iii) sending "a computer" to Syria. Something could be done about .iq.

Just as an aside, the regulations cited arose from attempts to control by regulations the sale of “high performance (2 Teraflops or greater, circa 12/1999) computers” primarily to India, Pakistan, and China, as an attempt to control the technological pre-requisites for proliferation of nuclear and missile technology. Bush repurposed the regulation from nuclear proliferation to “terrorism”. Who knew that terrorism required access to high performance computers? I didn’t.

I worked at Thinking Machines and Hitachi SuperComputers during those years, so I’m mildly interested in how the Elashi machines could have met the technical criteria, which on January 2nd, 2001, was bumped up from 85,000 to 190,000 MTOPS for Tier 3 countries (India, Pakistan, all of the Middle East/Maghreb, the former Soviet Union, China, Vietnam and parts of South Eastern Europe). The license exception level for exports of general purpose microprocessors was bumped from 6,500 to 12,000 MTOPS. The license exception level applies for Tier 4 countries (Iraq, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Cuba, Sudan and Syria).

As it happens, the first Ashcroft/Freed gambit got laughed out of court, but that was before 9/11. The DoJ haven’t yet chosen to go in front of a jury on the “charity promotes terrorism” claims, and as an aside, every other high profile Ashcroft/Freed arrest has been thrown out of court, either at trial or upon appeal, for prosecutorial misconduct and general bogosity. The Government did get a conviction on the export regulation charges last July. The Government gets these on a regular basis, against big companies and little companies. What is unusual in the Elashi case is that the Government sought and got, not just fines and forfeitures, but uninterrupted federal custody.

I’m bringing this to your attention again, as I did at the Rome ICANN meeting, because in the last two weeks I’ve been contacted by at least two parties who wanted my advice on how to acquire the .iq delegation.

The first, a Mr. David Cuthbertson, of Adam Smith International, a rather Thatcher-esque consulting outfit, wrote to me from the British Embassy in Baghdad, Iraq, and informed me that his activity was funded by the British government, but his terms of reference clearly state that his client is the so-called “Iraqi Interim Government”

The second, a Mr. Mahmoud Baddawi, of the so-called Ministry of Communication of Iraq, wrote to me and offered that affiliation. Investigating privately I found that Mr. Maddawi was aware of, and expressed support for the Basra University to obtain a domain under the .ac.iq zone, which I think shows good sense about what .iq could look like.

My correspondence with these two gentlemen will go on my “What little I know about the .IQ delegation” web page <http://nic-iq.nic-naa.net>, but I want to clearly articulate what I think are non issues, and what are issues.

First, the fact that .iq is “dark” is not an issue. I’m not going to take the time

to check what other ISO 3166 delegations are dark, lame, or simply silly, but these properties are not confined to .iq or .mm.

Second, the fact that .iq had few registrations prior to going dark is not an issue. The .sy delegation had equivalent marginal use at the time, and many late-adopter delegations today have marginal use, or have been converted into private use, as Afilias is doing to .in right now.

In sum, no claim of the form “I can do it better than he can” has any relevance at all.

Third, the fact that the people who held office in the Government of Iraq prior to April 2003 are dead, in exile, or in the custody of the United States is not an issue.

Fourth, the fact that the people who comport themselves as officials of an “Iraqi Interim Government” are merely authorized to do so by the United States is not an issue.

In sum, no claim of the form “Sovereignty” has any relevance at all.

In case that last point is inobvious, in the first 50 or so of the current 250 or so iso3166 code points now in the IANA root, nine are less “sovereign” than my Tribal Government.

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.ac Ascension Island
.an Netherlands Antilles
.aq Antarctica
.ax Aland Islands
.bv Bouvet Island
.cc Cocos (Keeling) Islands
.ck Cook (Harvey) Islands
.cx Christmas Island
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ISO 3166 code points are postal codes, slightly revised by the DIN, and made only slightly relevant by the UN Statistical Agency, which recently managed to discover or create Palestine. Jon’s delegations were to persons at institutions, not kings, presidents or elected governments. Why Jon made delegations is important and I’ll return to that in the next section.

Turning from the fiction of better function and the fiction of better right, there are the real issues.

Everyone who follows ICANN knows that the redelegation for Pitcarin Island was ultimately voluntary, and there is no precedent for IANA or ICANN to claim standing to hear a contested redelegation.

There are a lot of poorly run ccTLD registries. Any “better use” claim will concern these operators.

ICANN has a history of abusive contract imposition on the ccTLDs as a whole. A simple change of nameserver due to ISP change or renumbering exposes ccTLD operators to contracts of adhesion by ICANN. This period may have passed with the new ccTLD group, but it is remembered by all, and any claim by ICANN to standing to hear a contested redelegation claim on its merits will be heard by the ccTLDs as a claim to generally expand its abusive corporatist intrusion into public policy networks.

Jon picked the ISO 3166 code points to allow delegations of authority from the IANA root, and reduce the operational requirements the IANA faced at that point in time. Jon and I were sitting on a bench together at IETF-23 when some irate Brit came up and harangued Jon because the British military were not in “mil” but in .mil.uk. We explained the scaling issue to him and he went away unsatisfied, still wanting the .mil zone operator to be responsible for all UK armed forces, and presumably all the rest of the NATO/CENTO/SEATO allies of the United States.

Restated, delegation increases the operational stability of the internet.

From the root zone operator point of view, .iq and .us are just delegations operated by idiots. The real zones are those with critical infrastructure, or that serve their users. Involving the root zone operators, or the IANA, in political squabbles over which faction is “right” or what parts of some future .su breakup are correctly delegated, or which business model is using a code point allocated either to an extinct Postal Code notion of “country” or a current UN statistical unit **decreases the operational stability of the internet.**

In my letter to Mr. Cuthbertson I wrote:

For these reasons I suggest you put all the compelling reasons why the redelegation is good thing aside, and look at whether redelegation is in the critical path

I make the same recommendation through you to the IANA as I made to him. First, do not proceed covertly, either as a party making a redelegation request or as a body which has received several prior clandestine, and at least one overt redelegation requests.

The root nameserver operators use a pgp remailer to ensure the authenticity of communications within the operator community. If the authentication key sets are intercepted, someone other than a member of that community will be able to masquerade undetected as a root server operator. That would not be a good thing.

The redelegation process should not encourage covert attempts to intercept communications between the IANA and the incumbent sponsor and/or operator, or false actors to masquerade undetected as an operator of a delegation from the IANA root. That too would not be a good thing.

Second, do not identify the DNS as a legitimate military target, or the IANA root as a political asset of the current administration. Bayan Elashi should be able to direct the .iq zone operator from custody just as Martha Stewart is able to direct her civil and corporate affairs, also from custody. If he is prevented from doing so by the DoJ, and he has been prevented from do so to this date, the cause for failure is DoJ policy, not abandonment or incapacity by the incumbent sponsor/operator.

Bayan Elashi must be informed that he can authorize the IANA to make a change of addresses for the authoritative servers, from 63.175.195.20 and 208.21.175.13, to some two or more addresses in RIR allocations amenable to his purpose, and that he can authorize the IANA to enter into technical coordination with a party he designates to operate the .iq registry.

Third, absent any response from Mr. Elashi, who's hypothetical lack of response can only be attributed to duress, any proposal to operate a .iq registry for the benefit of the users should "step into the shoes" of the incumbent, as operator and as delegation authority, making no change inconsistent with the prior operational practice or policy.

Finally, I continue to maintain and expand upon the zone file set I made available in April 2003. The structure is shown below. These are available from <http://iq.nic-naa.net>.

Structure – the .iq zone files (original from 13 April, 2003, modified)

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.iq                - top-level, NS and glue
.ac.iq            - universities
.aero.iq          - airfields, stld projection (new)
.sch.iq           - secondary and primary sites
.edu.iq           - tertiary sites, stld projection
.med.iq           - hospitals, clincs
.muhafazat.iq     - 18 administrative units
Iraq proper:
  al-anbar, babil, baghdad, basrah,
  dhi-qar, diyala, karbala, maysan,
  al-muthanna, an-najaf, ninawa,
  al-qadisiyah, salah-ad-din, at-tamim,
  wasit
Iraqi Kurdistan:
  arbil, dahuk, as-sulaymaniyah
.fed.iq           - assuming a federal form
.gov.iq           - assuming a non-federal form
.press.iq         - press, domestic and foreign
.nom.iq           - individuals
.{com,net,org}.iq - gtld projections
.mil.iq           - prudent
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.pol.iq                   - political parties, candidates  
.int.iq                   - stld projection

I offer the same recommendation through you to the IANA as I made to Mr. Cuthbertson. The .iq zone operator should provide more than a server or some few servers, confined within a building or a few buildings located in the “Green Zone” of central Baghdad, with the attendant power, A/C, and connectivity issues that fragile of an infrastructure entails. The constellation of nameservers should resolve a useful tree, and populating that tree need not wait until the tree is rooted in the IANA root.

That about covers it Vint. It is yours, in the ICANN plural sense, but you may as well take the blame as the credit for being the technocrat, to screw up, or not. I hope you, in the ICANN plural sense, don’t screw up. The .iq registry could be useful to all Iraqis and to the expanded adoption of good, even “Best Practices” to public registries not yet converted into private use. We are only six years from when Jon passed from our midst, two from when .iq went dark, and only six months from when Bayan Elashi was convicted for violating a comically repurposed export regulation.

I urge prudence. It is not a good sign that Mr. Cuthbertson’s clients reject ab initio the utility, let alone the necessity, of communications with the incumbent sponsor/operator, and Mssrs. Cuthbertson and Baddawi may well be in an awkward position themselves in the near future, forcing this issue yet again.

Best Regards,

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encl: none