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Obama Order Gives Power to Seize Control of All Communications Systems

By John Glaser

July 13, 2012

President Obama has given the Department of Homeland Security, new powers to [take over the telecommunications industry and internet systems](#) in case of emergency.

Obama signed an executive order meant to prioritize government communications over privately-owned communications in the event of a national emergency or devastating terrorist attack.

Signed on June 6 the order “gives DHS the authority to seize control of telecommunications facilities, including telephone, cellular and wireless networks, in order to prioritize government communications over private ones in an emergency,” said Amie Stephanovich, a lawyer with the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC).

The new law builds on important precedents. The administration claims the legal basis for the order is Section 706 of the 1934 Communications Act, which authorizes the president to “cause the closing of any facility or station for wire communication” and gives him “control of any such facility or station” if a state of war, or the threat of one, exists.

Obama’s updated version extends these powers to the internet. It is an extreme, dictatorial, wartime power that can give the president the power to shut down or control all means of communication on his say so. Modern America is so reliant on these communications systems, like cellular wireless networks and the internet, that if they were controlled by the Executive Branch, it could lead to chaos.

