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**NTIA to bow out of DNS oversight role
International - Hogan Lovells LLP**

Domain names

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Following the rumours of an ICANN move from its current location in the United States to the more neutral Switzerland in an effort to "consciously uncouple" from the US government, the [National Telecommunications and Information Administration](#) (NTIA), the US-based guardian of the Domain Name System (DNS), has issued a [press release](#) announcing its "intent to transition key internet domain name functions to the global multistakeholder community".

The NTIA is an agency of the [US Department of Commerce](#) that advises the US President on telecommunications and information policy issues. It lists among its responsibilities administering changes to the authoritative root zone file - the database containing the lists of names and addresses of all top-level domains (TLDs) - as well as serving as the "historic steward of the DNS". Although, contractually, it controls the authoritative root server (which is located in the United States), the NTIA wields what it maintains is a largely "symbolic" power to make changes to the root zone (eg, by adding new TLDs) due to the fact that the actual power to decide what changes should be made to the root zone has been delegated to ICANN, which is responsible for the [Internet Assigned Numbers Authority](#) (IANA) functions.

The press release thus heralds the beginning of the NTIA's extrication of itself from the structure that oversees the root zone and Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information and administrator of the NTIA, Lawrence E Strickling, states in the release that "the timing is right to start the transition process", going on to add that "we look forward to ICANN convening stakeholders across the global internet community to craft an appropriate transition plan". This somewhat echoes recent comments made by ICANN CEO, Fadi Chehade, to the effect that US government oversight of ICANN was "unsustainable".

The NTIA has stipulated to ICANN that any transition proposal must have "broad community support" and address the following four principles:

- support and enhance the multistakeholder model;
- maintain the security, stability and resiliency of the internet DNS;
- meet the needs and expectation of the global customers and partners of the IANA services; and
- maintain the openness of the Internet.

In the wake of the circulating rumours and the NTIA's press release, there have been fears that stewardship of the root zone could pass to an agency controlled by a repressive government or governments. In this sense, it is notable that the press release states that: "NTIA will not accept a proposal that replaces the NTIA role with a government-led or an inter-governmental organisation solution".

Given that the current IANA functions contract expires on September 30 2015, it will be interesting to see if all the concerned parties can come together to formulate a constructive plan for an oversight agency that is both independent and accountable within the given timeframe. This will not be easy, but the stakes are high, particularly at this point in time when new gTLDs are being added to the root almost every day.

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