U.S. Foreign Policy and the Internet:

Chronicling the Shift from Circumvention to Connectivity

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Abstract

Hillary Clinton's emblematic Internet freedom speech is regarded as the start of United States (U.S.) foreign policy focus on protecting and promoting Internet freedoms worldwide. This paper investigates the lesser-known foundations of such U.S. Internet freedom efforts, starting from pre-Clinton years and tracking its development until today, when the U.S. Internet freedom agenda that was based on promoting freedom of expression online mainly by funding circumvention technologies seems to be replaced by a focus on increasing global connectivity. The paper argues the reasons for this shift to be the changing international relations dynamics following Snowden revelations, the technologically deterministic international development goals tied to the newly adopted SDGs, impact of U.S. tech company lobbying, and the appearance of similar initiatives in the domestic policymaking sphere.

"The Berlin Wall symbolized a world divided and it defined an entire era. Today, remnants of that wall sit inside this museum where they belong, and the new iconic infrastructure of our age is the Internet. Instead of division, it stands for connection. But even as networks spread to nations around the globe, virtual walls are cropping up in place of visible walls."

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Hillary Clinton, U.S. Secretary of State
"Remarks on Internet Freedom," January 21, 2010
The Newseum - Washington, DC

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Introduction

Hillary Clinton's Internet freedom speech is regarded as the start of United States (U.S.) foreign policy focus on protecting and promoting Internet freedoms worldwide. This paper investigates the foundations of such U.S. Internet freedom efforts, investigating pre-Clinton years, and tracks its development until today, as the U.S. Internet freedom agenda based on promoting freedom of expression online and funding circumvention technologies is being replaced by a focus on increasing global connectivity. The paper concludes with an exploratory analysis of the potential causes of such shift.

History of U.S. Internet Freedom Agenda

In the United States, internet freedom issues entered into domestic agenda well before they became an area of foreign policy, in parallel with the U.S political system "in that the basis for human rights in foreign policy lies in various acts of congressional legislation" (Clemens et al., 2014, p. 19).[1] At the forefront of the initial discussions at the Congress were the activities of

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[1] *Internet freedom* is a contested term as it lacks clarity due to its vague assumptions on the relationship between technology and societal change that are broadly based on technological determinism (Morozov, 2011, p 290-295). For the purposes of this paper, an *Internet freedom* foreign policy agenda refers to the collection of policies, tools and diplomatic interventions that promote and protect Internet users' rights.

American technology companies offering goods and services globally. Silicon Valley was at the heart of the personal computer revolution, and American companies had global market penetration early on (Naughton, 2000, p. 318). Such expansion into international markets came with risks, as the universal and unchangeable nature of the Internet at the technical level did not always coincide with rule of law or human rights protections everywhere in the world.[2] In fact, companies themselves acknowledged the risks involved in doing business in multiple jurisdictions. In its SEC (Securities and Exchange Commission) filing for 2005, Google - having opened its first office outside the United States in 2001 - states that its "expansion and growth in international markets heightens risks as a result of the particular challenges of supporting a rapidly growing business in an environment of multiple languages, cultures, customs, legal systems, alternative dispute systems, regulatory systems and commercial infrastructures (p. 23). U.S. Congress became aware of these risks in 2005 as it began "scrutinizing Internet freedom issues [...] focusing particularly on the private sector" (Fontaine and Rogers, 2011, p. 11). In early 2006, four U.S. companies (Microsoft, Yahoo, Cisco Systems and Google[3]) were accused of submitting to the requests of the Chinese government via censoring of specific websites, offering an entirely new version of their search engine or facilitating government surveillance and intimidation of journalists ("Net firms criticized", 2006).[4] In fact, Yahoo was specifically put under spotlight by the civil society group Reporters Without Borders for causing the imprisonment of Chinese journalist Shi Tao who was "found guilty of sending foreign-based websites the text of an internal Communist Party message," after Yahoo handed over his data to the Chinese government ("Yahoo 'helped jail'", 2005). In February 2006, the four companies were asked to appear before the House of Representatives' Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations (Zeller, 2006).

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[2] Similarly, multinational telecom companies have always encountered similar and graver risks due to licensing requirements. For example, see the activities of the Telecom Indisutry Dialogue: (www.telecomindustrydialogue.org/about/).
[3] Following the congressional hearing as well as other pressures, Google has decided to shut-down its China-based search engine in May 2010 (Cramer and Hope, 2010).
[4] There is an ongoing case against Cisco, see ("Doe I v. Cisco," 2016).

Repeated signs of more proactive congressional action followed these incidents. For example, in 2006, Congressman Christopher Smith (Republican from New Jersey) introduced the Global Online Freedom Act (GOFA) in order to "protect freedom of expression on the Internet, and to protect United States businesses from coercion to participate in repression by authoritarian foreign governments" ("Global Online Freedom Act," 2006). It is important to note that there were earlier efforts in congressional action, including the Global Internet Freedom Act (GIFA) of 2003, which was introduced by a Republican representative from California, Christopher Cox (Saginaw, 2003). The same year, Cox authored an article in an early volume on Internet governance and jurisdictional issues, which was published by the Cato Institute and prefaced by Vint Cerf (Crews and Thierer, 2003). In the article, Cox stated that "the success of U.S. policy in support of the universal human rights of freedom of speech, press and association requires new initiatives to defeat totalitarian controls over the Internet," proving that ideologies in support of Internet freedom as a U.S. foreign policy priority existed since the early 2000s (p. 3).

GOFA, one of the first legislative means to impact Internet freedom worldwide, had subsequent versions that were introduced in 2007, 2009, 2011, 2012 and 2013 (Fidler, 2012; O'Connor 2004). However, the Act failed to become law in these multiple occasions, reaching at most to the point of being passed by the House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health and Human Rights in 2012 (Feinberg, 2012). While it is beyond this paper's scope to analyze each act from early 2000s until 2013, it is noted that GIFA/GOFA legislation moved beyond U.S. funding for circumvention technology to "erring on the side of transparency and corporate social responsibility" (Lloyd, 2008; Feinberg, 2012). The widely discussed March 2012 version of the act, which included provisions such as requiring American companies to publicly report on their business activities (and the consequent human rights implications) in countries where the rights of Internet users are at risk, was largely supported by various non-governmental organizations such as Human Rights Watch and the Electronic Frontier Foundation (Cohn,

Timm and York, 2012; Ganesan, 2012).[5] However, GOFA has not - to date - passed the US House or Senate to become law.

The Industry Awakens

Despite GOFA's lack of success, congressional efforts had a wide impact on companies. In 2006, in a rush before the Congressional hearings, Yahoo issued "vague ethical guidelines" where the company made unenforceable commitments such as "working with industry, government, academia and NGOs to explore policies to guide industry practices in countries where content is treated more restrictively than in the United States and to promote the principles of freedom of speech" (MacKinnon, 2006). Similarly, in its congressional testimony in 2006, Microsoft made a commitment to continue "active discussions within the industry and with the Executive branch," and "with NGOs focused on issues of human rights in China" ("Congressional Testimony," 2006). Such inter-company efforts and discussions turn into a more concrete outcome through the establishment of the Global Network Initiative (GNI) in October 2008, "a diverse coalition of leading Information and Communications Technology (ICT) companies, academics, investors and NGOs" ("Anniversary Newsletter," 2009). The founding companies were Google, Microsoft and Yahoo, the three of the four companies that faced congressional pressure in 2006. The GNI was established as a mechanism of corporate self-regulation based on the "GNI Principles," which were "designed to help companies identify circumstances where freedom of expression and privacy may be jeopardized or advanced," in order for the companies to "develop appropriate risk mitigation strategies" ("GNI Principles Offer Guidance," 2009).[6] The U.S. government representatives regarded the GNI as a mechanism through which Internet freedom can be advanced. In a 2013 congressional research

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[5] The idea of "social disclosure" has been introduced as early as 1999, when Cynthia A. Williams argued that "Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) can and *should* require expanded social disclosure by public reporting companies to promote corporate social responsibility," comparable to the financial transparency regulations that were already in place (Williams 1999, p. 1199).

[6] As of February 2016, the GNI has been merged with a similar initiative for telecommunications companies, the Telecom Industry Dialogue.

paper on "Promoting Internet Freedom," the GNI is presented as "a type of U.S. industry activity" promoting Internet freedom (Figliola, 2013, p. 6).[7] In addition, in the later versions of the GOFA bill, members of GNI (or other similar multi-stakeholder initiatives) were provided with a "safe-harbor" of not having to abide by the disclosure requirements (Fidler, 2012). GNI's framing around the broader principles of corporate social responsibility also went in line with another human rights topic area of the State Department: Business and Human Rights ("Issues," n.d.).[8]

In addition to such private sector-led initiatives and congressional pressure, various other actors of U.S. foreign policy led initiatives on Internet freedom, including but not limited to the executive branch, the State Department and funding agencies such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). In 2006, during Condoleezza Rice's term as Secretary of State, Global Internet Freedom Task Force was established "as a way to coordinate State Department efforts to promote Internet freedom" (Fontaine and Rogers, 2011, p. 11). Under the Obama administration, with Hillary Clinton as the Secretary of State, the U.S. internet freedom agenda expanded, with the effects of external factors such as the Arab Spring coming together with internal factors such as the "21st-century statecraft" paradigm pushed by Hillary Clinton's new young and 'digital-savvy' hires Alec Ross and Jared Cohen (Ross, 2010; Fontaine and Rogers, 2011, p. 12; Cull, 2013)[9]. In her forty-five minute Internet freedom speech – which was cited in the beginning of this paper – Hillary Clinton "established the freedom to connect squarely within the U.S. human rights and foreign policy agenda"(Lichtenstein, 2010). In 2011, the State Department codified its Internet freedom strategy for the next few years to come by releasing "International Strategy for Cyberspace: Prosperity, Security, and Openness in a Networked World" (Figliola, 2013).

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[7] In addition, see the 2010 paper by Alec Ross, former Senior Advisor for Innovation in *the Office of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton*, in which he refers to close U.S. governmental cooperation with GNI (p.13).

[8] GNI is specifically referred to in a 2013 State Department policy brief entitled "U.S. Government Approach on Business and Human Rights," as a mechanism through which the U.S. government works to promote human rights in the ICT sector (cite report p. 10).

[9] Various U.S. media actors focused on the role of ICTs in the Arab Spring, for example, see an article titled "Revolution will be Tweeted" in Foreign Policy Magazine (Hounshell, 2011).

Funding Circumvention

However, to promote this idea of "freedom to connect," the U.S. had to tackle realities of "networked authoritarianism[s]" around the world - meaning the authoritarian regimes that increasingly "embraced and adjusted to the inevitable changes brought by digital communications" (MacKinnon, 2011, p. 33). Consequently, U.S. efforts in promoting Internet freedom (or even more broadly, freedom of expression and media freedom foreign policy agendas) had to include support for circumvention technology. U.S. funding of circumvention technology – in Deibert and Rohozinski's terms (2010) – targeted "first generation Internet controls" which consisted of filtering, online censorship and internet-cafe surveillance, as opposed to the second and third generation controls, which included methods such as legal pressures to intermediaries, creation of "national cyber-zones" or physical intimidation (as cited in MacKinnon, 2008, p. 43). In terms of discourse, such interventions for ensuring access to certain technologies resonates with a "liberation tech" understanding, a term coined by Larry Diamond as:

> Any form of information and communication technology (ICT) that can expand political, social, and economic freedom. … the modern, interrelated forms of digital ICT—the computer, the Internet, the mobile phone, and countless innovative applications for them, including "new social media" such as Facebook and Twitter. (Diamond, 2010, p. 70, cited in Christensen, 2011)

However, it should be noted that this approach started well before the Hillary Clinton years. According to text of the Global Internet Freedom Act of 2006, until 2006, organizations such as Voice of America and Radio Free Asia "have committed a total of $3,000,000 for technology to counter Internet jamming of their websites by the People's Republic of China" (as cited in Lloyd, 2008, p. 305). Through funding agencies and beyond, there was also indirect support for circumvention technology, specifically targeting the users in China. For example,

SafeWeb, a "CIA-backed software company" has created various circumvention tools including a proxy, which, "at its peak, handled 120 million users per month," as well as a peer-to-peer based anonymization tool called TriangleBoy, which was also funded in part by the Voice of America (Damm and Thomas, 2006, p. 62,; Altheide 2006, p. 147).

Beyond these China-specific applications, as a consequence of the increasing focus on promoting global Internet freedoms, the U.S. government kept on funding, directly as well as through "pass-through grants," various circumvention technologies. In 2010, two years after its establishment within the Department of State in 2008, the Internet Freedom Program awarded a total of $5 million of grants for "Promoting Freedom of Expression and Free Flow of Information Through Technology and Access" (Mottaz, 2010, p.10). In 2013, this number increased to $25 million, granted through the U.S. State Department and USAID to "groups working to advance Internet freedom - supporting counter-censorship and secure communications technology, digital safety training, and policy and research programs for people facing Internet repression" ("Internet Freedom," n.d.).

Examples to the circumvention technologies funded include the Canada-born virtual private network (VPN) Psiphon and onion routing-based, volunteer-run anonymization tool Tor, which comes in the form of a user-friendly browser bundle (Hern, 2014; Callanan et al., 2010, p. 40; Mathewson et al., 2004). Interestingly, Tor Project had its roots at the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory. One of its original developers Roger Dingledine stated that he initially wanted to create a tool to "protect himself from intrusive advertisers" (Clark, 2014). Nowadays, Tor is used around the world to circumvent censorship. According to a 2011 survey of international bloggers on their circumvention behavior carried out by the Berkman Center for Internet and Society, Tor was found to be the second most popular tool, with 28.7 percent of the sample of 244 stating that they use Tor (Faris et al., 2011). The U.S. government was not the only government to fund Tor, as others including Sweden (with its own Internet freedom

agenda) and Germany also contributed financially ("Tor: Sponsors," 2016).[10] In addition to these widely known applications, the U.S. significantly increased international development aid for digital media initiatives starting 2010 (Laura Mottaz, 2010, p. 10). In 2012, a new program called "the Open Technology Fund" (OTF) was created, with a mission to "utilize available funds to support projects that develop open and accessible technologies to circumvent censorship and surveillance, and thus promote human rights and open societies" ("About the program," n.d.). OTF is tied to Radio Free Asia, which is funded by the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), whose budget originates from annual appropriations allocated by the U.S. Congress (Ricchiardi, 2014). In 2014, OTF provided funding over eight million dollars to more than 80 projects, and its grantees ranged from Open Whisper Systems – an organization that created the widely used end-to-end encrypted messaging app Signal — to Mailvelope, a tool that facilitates PGP encryption for browser-based email ("2014 Annual Report," 2014; Groll, 2016).

The consequences of such U.S. funding for circumvention technologies have been challenged multiple times. In 2010, Tunisian blogger Ben Gharbia criticized U.S. and Western governments' "hyper-politicization" of digital activism during Arab Spring, stating also that accepting U.S. or other Western governments' interventions create "real threats to activists who accept their support and funding" (cited in Ghannam, 2011)[11]. More recently, since the beginning of 2016, following reports of U.S. government funding Carnegie Mellon University to de-anonymize Tor users, Tor Project has been trying to diversify its funding sources to become less dependent to U.S. government funding through a push for crowdfunding (Faviar, 2016). In addition, the U.S. government has faced various crises of legitimacy whilst trying to act as the global bastion of Internet freedom, such as its reactions to Wikileaks, and more importantly, the Snowden revelations (MacKinnon, 2012, p. 194).

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[10] As seen in Christensen (2012), Sweden has a similar internet freedom agenda that is reflected in its international development funding as well as diplomatic activities.

[11] In fact, "the number of individuals in prison around the world for raising their voices online is on the rise," ad hundredes of bloggers around the world are imprisoned. See: www.eff.org/offline.

At the International Stage: Internet Governance and UN Advocacy

U.S. Internet freedom agenda also includes working with various United Nations and global Internet governance fora. In terms of international norm building, the U.S. has chose to use already existing instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), "rather than advocating a new international treaty or regime" (Fontaine and Rogers, 2010, p. 26). In fact, as argued by Penney in his analysis of a 2011 report by Frank La Rue - former UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression - "the intellectual and philosophical foundations of the right to Internet access can be traced back to "cyberlibertarianism" of the 1990s, as well as the "free flow of information" paradigm which has existed since the end of World War II, and was codified into international covenants (such as the UDHR and ICCPR) "due in large part to American influence" (Penney, 2011, p. 16-22).[12]

U.S. promoted global Internet freedom norm building through engaging in multilateral partnerships such as the Dutch-founded Freedom Online Coalition, as well as by keeping its commitments to a human rights-based framework when it comes to international discussions on the governance of the Internet (Calderaro et al., 2014, p.12). However, starting with the UN-sponsored World Summit on Information Society meetings in 2005, the U.S. has brought its Internet freedom agenda to international fora by not only norm building, but also by preserving its power on various organizations that are important to the technical management of the Internet, such as ICANN, which is responsible for the top-level management of the Domain Name System (DNS). Some of these activities were reactive against some governments' efforts to change the status quo, as the realities of the new digital age such as the dominance of American companies and U.S. foreign policy interests triggered a need to express sovereignty when it comes to the issues at the intersection of global policymaking and technology. For

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[12] Penney expands on this American influence, (p. 22): "Spurred on by the U.S. Congress and the First Amendment values of the growing American media - that a free press and free exchange in the 'marketplace of ideas' was essential in determining the truth and preserving other fundamental rights - freedom of information became a key element of U.S. foreign policy in the 1940s and 1950s."

example, prior to the WSIS meeting of 2005, "the Chinese government led a bid to dismantle ICANN and transfer its functions to a UN body, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU)" (MacKinnon, 2012, p. 206). In 2010, In 2011, Kenya "proposed a 'transition' away from management of the IANA functions by the U.S. Department of Commerce and toward a multilateral government-centered regime" (Schiller, 2014). Transferring Internet governance powers to the United Nations (where each member state has one vote and considerably more equal power - except in the case of Security Council) or an inter-governmental UN agency such as the ITU in order to increase the power of the nation-state in policymaking related to the Internet stayed in many governments' agendas (Bronk, 2012). For example, in 2012, at the ITU-conference World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT), there were proposals "to expand significantly the jurisdiction of the ITU to give that body the ability to regulate both Internet access and the Internet itself, " supported by Gulf states, African Telecommunications Union (ATU), India and Russia (Sohn, 2012; Rispoli 2012, p. 3). Such proposals that are regarded to be "most threatening to an open internet" according to global civil society reports were defeated in the end, and following the ITU "Plenipotentiary Conference" in 2014, the ITU has "overcome the problems of WCIT." findings "its role in the complex world of Internet governance and clarifying its responsibilities under its current mandate particularly around development and capacity building" (Brown 2013; Doria 2014).[13]

The end to the story of WCIT/ITU is important for understanding the impacts of U.S. foreign policy of Internet freedom over Internet governance. It could be argued that for a long time, the U.S. government and industry dominance over the Internet - independent from whether it is seen as democratic "multi-stakeholderism" or an American policy of "unilateral globalism" in Milton Muller's words (2010, p. 62) - has never been seen as a major problem by the majority of actors in Internet-related policymaking and to some extent many Western

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[13] Note that some Internet governance and media scholars dispute the portrayal of WCIT as an authoritarian threat. For example, Hossain argues that the threats were "exaggerated to oppose the ITU regime in favor of the multi-stakeholder approach favored by private enterprise" (2014, p. 46).

European and OECD-member countries when contrasted with an alternative nation-state based model of Internet governance where states would have higher control over what their citizens see and share online (cited in Schiller, 2014, p. 356). However, since the Tunis Agenda of 2005, the fist major UN-backed text for the "information society," alternative arguments against this model were also present. In fact, the final text of the Tunis Agenda included a call for – what was defined as – "enhanced cooperation" ("Tunis Agenda," 2005, para. 69). According to some, this term was "an intentionally vague term that left room for those governments unhappy with the results of the WSIS to continue arguing for a deeper role in Internet governance," and "never been understood in the same way by the many players" (Shears and Llanso, 2013; Ermert, 2010).

Until 2014, the preservation of the status quo can be regarded as a one-sided "success" of U.S. foreign policy, and the Internet freedom agenda a tool for "the continuation of unilateral U.S. power over Internet management" or as an "expression of state power" (Schiller, 2014, p.361; Carr, 2013, p. 622).[14] However, Edward Snowden toppled these dynamics completely in the summer of 2013. His revelations of blanket surveillance programs carried out by the United States as well as other countries that are members of the Five Eyes intelligence partnership with little or no oversight have sparked a debate on right to privacy online for the individual user, while the issue of mass surveillance carried out by the United States became "elephant in the room" in every Internet governance discussion.[15] Snowden revelations "galvanized long-standing opposition by non-Western countries, especially Russia and China, to a U.S.-dominated global Internet governance order, and created counter-hegemonic opening in this area" (Zhao, 2015, p. 83). The reactions of foreign leaders, Internet governance institutions and global, U.S.-based civil society organizations signaled concrete changes both in discourse and action. In October 2013, a few months after Snowden revelations first appeared in global news media,

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[14] For an overview of the long-running "political alliances around Internet governance," see Mueller and Wagner, 2013.
[15] This term is borrowed from an advocacy campaign by the civil society organization Free Press Unlimited: https://www.freepressunlimited.org/en/news/the-elephant-in-the-room-mass-surveillance

ICANN, IETF, Internet Society and World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) issued the "Montevideo statement," "decrying the NSA activities and calling for the "globalization" of ICANN and the IANA functions" (Mueller and Wagner, 2013, p. 1). In addition, Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff worked with ICANN to organize an international conference on Internet governance called the NETmundial meeting (Mueller and Wagner, 2013, p. 3). Consequently, in March 2014, the U.S. Department of Commerce announced that it would be willing to "transfer control of the IANA functions to the 'global multistakeholder community' " (Mueller and Kuerbis, 2014, p. 1).

These developments in the global internet governance arena including the NETmundial Statement were seen by many as reconciliation of multi-stakeholderism and multilateralism under Brazilian leadership (Trinkunas and Wallace, 2015, p. 24). Following the April 2014 NETmundial conference, the Obama administration stayed committed to the IANA transition, and did not give in to dissenting voices in the Congress, who want the U.S. government to retain oversight of the IANA function (Trinkunas and Wallace, 2015, p.32). As argued by Trinkunas and Wallace in a 2015 Brookings Institute policy paper, "in a post-Snowden environment, a U.S.-centric governance model is a vulnerability rather than a strength" (p. 35).

A Shift to a Global Connectivity Agenda

Following Snowden revelations, as well as the stepping down of Hillary Clinton in February 2013 as the Secretary of State, U.S. foreign policy promoting Internet freedom became less vocal. In fact, despite the continuation of various funding initiatives, as well as the continued push for a human rights-based framework in policy discussions, the Internet freedom discourse at large in a public diplomacy sense was formally replaced by a connectivity agenda.[16]

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[16] For example, U.S. written submissions to the UN General Assembly's overall review of the implementation of WSIS Outcomes (2015) shows that the U.S. has not completely abandoned its focus on online freedoms. See the written submissions of the U.S. at the official UN website for the WSIS + 10 review: https://publicadministration.un.org/wsis10/roadmap

On September 27, 2015, two days after the official adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), U.S. Department of State launched the "Global Connect Initiative," "which seeks to bring 1.5 billion people who lack Internet access, online by 2020" ("U.S. State Department Launches," 2015). This central aim of the Global Connect Initiative was directly rising from the SDGs, in which the goal 9c states: "Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020." The press release announcing the launch provides an overview of the working mechanisms of the initiative:

> On behalf of the Secretary of State, Under Secretary for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment Catherine Novelli delivered a key-note address at UN Headquarters on "Development in the Digital Age" to announce this new diplomatic initiative. . . . In her remarks, the Under Secretary highlighted how, through Global Connect, major U.S. development agencies will begin to make Internet access a top priority in their work around the world. . . . We will also urge international development banks to recognize the Internet as an essential element of every country's infrastructure – as the World Bank has already done. We will also partner with other governments from highly connected countries and enlist their expertise. We will work with private industry, which has created innovative solutions to connect people in remote areas. In short, we will pursue an "all of the above" approach. ("U.S. State Department Launches," 2015)

More details of the Global Connect Initiative were subsequently revealed in public meetings and Internet policy related mailing lists. Most of the public activity around the Global Connect Initiative faded away until April 2016, with the exception of a few calls targeted at global civil society organizations that are members of Internet-policy related mailing lists.[17] In April 2016, at the margins of multinational development bank meetings, the U.S. organized a wave of events related to the Global Connect initiative. On April 13, a day-long conference was

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[17] Information on these calls was distributed on networks such as Best Bits, "a civil society network on Internet governance and Internet rights." See http://bestbits.net/

held in the New York City offices of the IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers) with high-profile panelists such as Megan Smith, US Chief Technology Officer; Houlin Zhao, ITU Secretary General and Dr. Eric Brewer, VP Infrastructure at Google, who talked about "new ways to bridge the digital divide" ("Global Connect Stakeholders," 2016; Nordrum, 2016). In addition, another event was held a day later at the World Bank Headquarters in Washington D.C., with speeches by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim ("Global Connect Initiative," 2016).

While it would not be accurate to say that the connectivity agenda has completely replaced the Internet freedom agenda – as many of the funding programs for circumvention seems to continue – there has been a noticeable shift in terms of discourse. Non-profit organizations from all around the world working in the field of digital rights reacted against this shift by publishing joint letters on the Best Bits global civil society platform, prior to the Global Connect Initiative meetings. The April 2016 letter asked for "Internet connectivity consistent with human rights principles" to be "an essential element in every grant, loan, technology transfer, or policy training program that MDBs facilitate," specifically referring to surveillance, net neutrality, and rule of law ("Letter to Ministers," 2016; "Civil Society Statement," 2015).

What could be the reason of such shift? First, as signaled in the above analysis of the pre versus post Snowden approaches of the United States to global Internet governance and management, in terms of international public diplomacy discourse, it became less politically feasible for the U.S. to champion an Internet freedom agenda after revelations into infringement of users rights globally. In fact, countries such as Brazil and Germany reacted against the revelations by pushing "privacy rights in the agenda of the UN Human Rights Committee," and introducing a resolution at the UN General Assembly which, while not referring to the U.S.

directly, indirectly "censured the practices of mass surveillance conducted by American agencies" (Bauman et al., 2014).[18]

Secondly, the U.S. push for a global connectivity agenda and its main objective of "getting 1.5 billion people online by 2020" directly resonates with newly established Sustainable Development Goals, as the SDG 9, which aims to "build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation" includes a sub-goal to "significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020" ("Sustainable Development Goals," 2015). This direct tie in terms of timing as well as language suggests that the new directions in the broader global development sphere had an impact on the U.S. conversion to the connectivity agenda, as the country aimed to have a leading role in realizing this goal.

In addition, it should be noted that U.S. based technology companies are also pushing for the same goal, entering the development field by engaging in public private partnerships for building infrastructure, or by incorporating connectivity into their corporate social responsibility projects. In addition, new business models such as zero rating are marketed within a lens of increasing global connectivity. Concrete examples to such initiatives include the widely contested Free Basics initiative (or, internet.org as it was previously named) by Facebook, or Google's Project Loon. As these U.S.-based companies intensively lobby and work with the American government, the diffusion of ideas and policy agendas could be reasonably expected

The U.S. shift to a global connectivity agenda could also be tied to the appearance of similar initiatives in the domestic policymaking sphere. In the summer of 2015, stating that "the Internet is not a luxury, it is a necessity," Barack Obama has launched the ConnectHome initiative, which aims to "bring broadband, technical assistance, and digital literacy training to students living in public and assisted housing across America" (Olanoff, 2015; "Connect

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[18] See UN Resolution A/HRC/27/37, "The right to privacy in the digital age."

Home," n.d.). In addition, in April 2016, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the telecommunications regulator of the U.S., has voted to "expand the Lifeline telephone subsidy for low-income Americans to include Internet access," showing that at home, the U.S. aims to achieve universal and equal connectivity through regulatory policymaking (Hamblen, 2016).

Conclusion

This paper investigated the evolution of the U.S. Internet freedom agenda, tracking the external and internal developments that were influential in the last ten years. The speculated reasons for the shift to a global connectivity agenda should be investigated in the future, following the actual implementation of the Global Connect Initiative through the initial wave of grants and investments. It should also be noted that despite this broad shift to connectivity, U.S. funding for circumvention technology is still ongoing. The long term future of the U.S. Internet freedom agenda will be determined by various factors including the success of civil society organizations in trying to reestablish a human rights framework into the global connectivity agenda, and perhaps most importantly, by the U.S. presidential election in November 2016.

September 2016 update: More details on the Global Connect Initiative were released following the submission of this paper in mid-April. On June 24, 2016, President Obama passed an executive order on "Global Entrepreneurship," which set more specific guidelines for the Global Connect Initiative. See https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/06/24/executive-order-global-entrepreneurship

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