

**THE RISE OF NETPOLITIK**  
**How the Internet Is Changing**  
**International Politics and Diplomacy**

A Report of the Eleventh Annual Aspen Institute  
Roundtable on Information Technology

by David Bollier



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

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# Foreword

Concerns for the death or dismemberment of thousands of noncombatants throughout the world from hidden land mines led in 1992 to the formation of a nongovernmental organization (NGO) to mobilize constituencies toward banning land mines. As one solution to the problem, the new International Campaign to Ban Landmines proposed a multilateral treaty to bind nations. Initially, none of the major nations of the world subscribed. Nevertheless, a grassroots campaign highlighted by the use of online technologies to coordinate many international organizations into an effective network and the savvy use of media networks led to the signing by more than 140 countries to the Mine Ban Treaty. The 1997 Nobel Prize award for this accomplishment went not only to the organizational network but also to Jody Williams, the “coordinator” who utilized the Internet to maximum capacity.

This prime example of the modern use of technology to affect world affairs is just the tip of the iceberg. As described in the pages that follow, diasporic communities around the world affect the internal politics and external policy positions of their homelands through e-mails and websites. The rapid transmission of news directly from the source allows world players to bypass formal diplomatic channels, requires quicker and perhaps less considered responses by government officials, and enables NGOs to express and impress their positions more widely. Cybercampaigns influence political and economic decisions throughout the world.

Most recently and ironically, critics have used global communications networks to organize protests against globalization around the world. Terrorist organizations have used the Internet to recruit and inform their cell members. Information input in England to a website registered in China helped a terrorist network topple the World Trade Center in New York.

Until the current period—call it the Information Age, Communications Revolution, Third Wave, or Postindustrial Era—world affairs have been in the hands of diplomats and national leaders. Certainly long before Machiavelli wrote *The Prince*, diplomatic

strategists sought to balance one state's interest against another to achieve their own state's purposes.

Yet there is a sense that the old rules do not apply anymore. This is a period of blurring borders, flattening hierarchies, and heightened ambiguity. Those who are competitors and enemies one day are collaborators and allies the next. Those who stand alone, no matter what their strength, find even the smallest networks in opposition to be daunting. Something is different: the emergence, significance, and importance of the network structure within a world of complexity. The "life form" and organizational structure that is most in evidence in this new world of ideas and media is the network—social networks, electronic networks, media networks, to name a few. The United States has declared war on a network.

This has all the appearances of being a new era for the conduct of world affairs as it is for other sectors of the economy and global polity. We are seeing a new diplomacy that includes more nations, more players (including NGOs, media, and ad hoc networks as well as formal institutions of state), and new tools. The new communications technologies allow anyone with access to a terminal to express and produce messages instead of just receiving them, and the United Nations estimates that 655 million people—one-tenth of the world's population—used the Internet in 2002.<sup>1</sup> How can we construct a framework for understanding these new global political forces? To what extent has 2001 ushered in a fundamentally new era? If it has, what are the defining characteristics and their implications for the future of international "diplomacy"?

## Netpolitik

To frame the global strategic questions, political leaders and leading thinkers have tended to gravitate to at least two different "worldview" approaches:

- *Realpolitik* has been practiced over the past 500 years by historical luminaries such as Richelieu, Metternich, Bismarck, and Kissinger. Diplomats play political chess with nation-states, balancing and maneuvering one against the other to gain political advantage or equilibrium. This is a world of fault lines:

1. BBC, "Online Use Booming, Says UN," November 18, 2002, reporting the United Nations conference on Trade and Development's E-Commerce and Development Report.

the global alliances leading to the world wars, the subsequent Cold War, or the Clash of Civilizations suggested by Samuel Huntington.

- *Global Interdependence* or “Liberal Internationalism” regards the world as moving to an intertwined world organism composed of international players—governmental and nongovernmental—for whom reality is interreliance among nations and cultures, economies and environments, and lack of control over many of the actions that affect one’s own locale. It recognizes that people belong to several communities at the same time, have multiple self-images and identities, and need to see themselves as world citizens as well. Here, informal diplomats use soft power, the attractive power of ideas, to survive or prevail. Thomas Friedman’s *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux 1999) highlights this world approach, which is best explained, I believe, in Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye’s *Power and Interdependence* (Boston: Little Brown, 1977). The Aspen Institute Global Interdependence Initiative, a ten-year initiative headed by Princeton Lyman, is aimed at helping citizens understand their relationship to world affairs and people throughout the globe.

Other frameworks have been suggested as well:

- *Mediapolitik*: In *Mediapolitik: How the Mass Media Have Transformed World Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), Lee Edwards describes the interrelationship between the mass media and world politics in liberal democratic, authoritarian, and totalitarian regimes. He suggests, as many observers have before, that “there is a strong but always shifting correlation among government, journalism, and public opinion in foreign policy making” (p. 7). In essence, Edwards places the role of media as a central player in the conduct of world politics.
- *Cyberpolitik*: David Rothkopf, in “Cyberpolitik: The Changing Nature of Power in the Information Age” (*Journal of International Affairs* 51, no. 2 [spring 1998]: 325–59, at 326), suggests that “the realpolitik of the new era is cyberpolitik, in which the actors are no longer just states, and raw power can be countered or fortified by information power.”

- *Noopolitik*: John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt coined this term from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's concept of noosphere, the sphere of ideas. Arquilla and Ronfeldt wrote *The Emergence of Noopolitik* for the National Defense Research Institute (Santa Monica: RAND, 1999). "Noopolitik is an approach to statecraft, to be undertaken as much by non-state as by state actors, that emphasizes the role of soft power in expressing ideas, values, norms and ethics through all manner of media" (p. 29). It incorporates not only mass and cyber media but also the concept of soft power and thought leadership in developing strategy on the world stage.

All of these approaches, some of them overlapping, help to explain the dilemmas we face in the current era—dilemmas that the terrorist attacks of 2001 have so cruelly sharpened. Yet none of them may be sufficient for understanding and dealing with the twenty-first century world of high technology, biological encroachment, network structures, blurring borders, rapid communication, ambiguous actions, and endemic insecurity.

In short, the rules of international diplomacy and politics have changed—not necessarily (indeed, probably not) completely, but significantly. There are new battles every day in this Era of Complexity for the citizen's attention, affinity, and loyalty. They implicate identity, meaning, grand narratives, legitimacy, participation, rights, and access, and they are carried out over a series of networks and through a variety of media. We have adopted the name "*Netpolitik*," then, to describe the significance of the network form as an organizing principle in the conduct of world affairs.<sup>2</sup>

## The Roundtable

Against this background, the Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program convened the 2002 Roundtable on Information Technology to address ways to consider the complex issues facing national and international policymakers as we enter into this Era of Complexity. What are the significant factors that determine the

2. This use is meant to be broader than the apparent use of the word "netpolitik" in Danish (see [www.netpolitik.dk](http://www.netpolitik.dk)) to refer to the politics of the Internet (i.e., the governance of domain names and assigned numbers and similar issues), and "netpolitique" in French (see [www.netpolitique.net](http://www.netpolitique.net)), referring to the use of the Internet by political organizations. It is meant as a third organizing concept apart from *Realpolitik* and global interdependence.



evolution, and even the survival, of the layers of networks extant in the world today? What are the best frameworks for understanding the trends, forces, and characteristics of our emerging network society? How do we understand the stories of peoples who are different from us, and how do we tell our own stories, our national grand narratives, or our cultural heritages, so that they will be understood by others?

For three mornings we gathered a wonderful, eclectic mix of diplomats, technology leaders, scientists, and even the president of a small country to consider these issues. Our rapporteur, David Bollier, is among other things a writer who weaves the comments, readings, and afterthoughts into a coherent report on the topic that we hope is accessible, interesting, and insightful.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank and acknowledge the following sponsors for their generous support of the 2002 Aspen Institute Roundtable on Information Technology: Accenture, BEA Systems, Fundación AUNA, the Markle Foundation, McKinsey & Company, Prudential Corporation-Asia, and Warburg Pincus. We especially appreciate David Bollier for his brilliant work at weaving the conference dialogue into a cohesive and plausible document. We thank each of our participants who generously took time out of their busy schedules to take part in the conference and offer insightful remarks as evidenced in this report. A special thank you to Boris Trajkovski, President of Macedonia, for his presentation to the group at the session. (We have appended his remarks to this report.) We also thank Michael Goldberg for hosting our opening dinner, President Bill Clinton for meeting with Roundtable members at the opening, Secretary Madeleine Albright for speaking at our closing dinner, and Jerry Murdock, co-founder of the roundtable, for supplying the wine for the closing dinner. Finally, we thank Sunny Sumter-Sana, project manager, for her persistent work on the conference and on bringing this publication to fruition.

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Washington, DC  
January 2003



**THE RISE OF NETPOLITIK**  
**How the Internet Is Changing**  
**International Politics and Diplomacy**





# THE RISE OF NETPOLITIK

## How the Internet Is Changing International Politics and Diplomacy

by David Bollier

### Introduction

In the midst of her travels as Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright decided to venture off the standard diplomatic tour and visit the local market in Bakhara, Uzbekistan. “For all intents and purposes it could have been in the fifteenth century,” she recalled. “It was a big camel market, with rugs that looked liked they had been hanging there for a long time. Dust and all that.”

“I decided that I would go to what I thought was one of the more exotic shops, where they were selling spices of different kinds. As the guy was describing all these spices and making little paper cones to put them in, I asked him to tell me what spices would go with what foods. And he said, ‘Great, but just let me give you my e-mail address and we can stay in touch.’”

Albright’s story may be small and amusing, but it suggests how profoundly global culture and international politics are changing. Individuals from some of the most isolated corners of the world can now interact with the richest centers of civilization in an everyday fashion. Powers that were once the monopoly of nation-states— participation in international politics, control of transnational communications, credibility as sources of accurate information—are now being exercised by a much wider array of players.

The Internet has greatly lowered the costs of transmitting information, enabling people to bypass traditional intermediaries whose power revolved around the control of information: national governments, the diplomatic corps, transnational corporations, and news organizations, among others. As a result, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), academic experts, diasporic ethnic communities, and individuals are using the Internet to create their own global platforms and political influence. As the velocity of information

increases and the types of publicly available information diversify, the very architecture of international relations is changing dramatically.

These new phenomena deserve a name—the word *Netpolitik* has been suggested—to describe a new type of diplomacy that succeeds *Realpolitik*. *Realpolitik*, the German term for “power politics,” is an approach to international diplomacy that is “based on strength rather than appeals to morality and world opinion.”<sup>1</sup> Netpolitik is a new style of diplomacy that seeks to exploit the powerful capabilities of the Internet to shape politics, culture, values, and personal identity. But unlike *Realpolitik*—which seeks to advance a nation’s political interests through amoral coercion—Netpolitik traffics in “softer” issues such as moral legitimacy, cultural identity, societal values, and public perception.

To explore the dynamics of *Netpolitik*, the Aspen Institute’s Communications and Society Program convened twenty-four leaders from the worlds of politics, diplomacy, finance, high technology, academia, and philanthropy. The three-day conference, held in Aspen, Colorado, from August 1–4, 2002, sought to develop new ways to understand how the Internet is changing the powers of the nation-state, the conduct of international relations, and the very definitions of national security.

Charles M. Firestone, executive director of the Aspen Institute’s Communications and Society Program, moderated the discussions. David Bollier, an independent author and consultant, served as rapporteur. This report represents Bollier’s interpretive synthesis of the discussion highlights, augmented selectively by excerpts from conference readings.

### *The Plan of This Report*

This report asks: How are the Internet and other digital technologies changing the conduct of world affairs? What do these changes mean for our understanding of power in international relations and how political interests are pursued? Part I explores how the faster velocity of information and the diversification of information sources are complicating international diplomacy (sections A and B). The geopolitical and military implications of these changes are significant but poorly understood (sidebar).

Part II explores how the Internet is affecting cross-cultural and political relationships and elevating the importance of “soft power” in international affairs. The new global communications infrastructure of the Internet, films, television, and music represents a robust new arena for international dialogue and conflict. Coercive military and financial powers are tempered by considerations of soft power, such as the desire to assert national pride, persuade others of a cause’s moral legitimacy, and sustain one’s cultural values.

How do people express their values, identity, and culture? Part III examines one of the most universal human tools for doing so: storytelling. Conference participants generally agreed that the successful exercise of soft power requires an understanding of the “grand narratives” of different cultures. International diplomacy therefore may require new attention to the grammar of story construction and the perplexing ways that context, trust, and meaning are generated in an electronically networked world.

## **I. Electronic Networks Are Changing the Architecture of Power and Culture**

“Control of information and entertainment, and through them, of opinions and images, has historically been the anchoring tool of state power, to be perfected in the age of mass media,” writes Manuel Castells in a 1997 essay.<sup>2</sup> Now this traditional power of nation-states is waning. There is hardly any country in the world that has not privatized and commercialized its mass-media system or allowed its citizens to connect to the Internet. Even traditionally closed countries such as China, Singapore, and Islamic fundamentalist nations have entered the Internet age, albeit with restrictions.

“We’re at the beginning of the third fundamental economic revolution in the history of humanity,” argues Bill Coleman, chairman and chief strategy officer of BEA Systems, an enterprise software company. “The agriculture revolution had to do with the quantity of food that could be produced to feed the population. The industrial revolution was fueled and lubricated by the quantity and velocity of capital. But what’s really changing the world today is the dramatic increase in the quantity and velocity of information.”

The result: the rise of new streams of cross-cultural information flows in an extraterritorial space beyond conventional political governance and jurisdictions.

As electronic networking gradually insinuates itself into more aspects of life and more corners of the world, “it is changing the powers of the nation-state and the very definition of national security,” said Madeleine Albright. Other information conduits, especially the Cable News Network (CNN) and the Internet, are superseding traditional diplomatic venues. These alternatives often are speedier and more reliable than conventional channels of communications—and, significantly, beyond the direct control of governments.

Speaking from the perspective of a small nation, Boris Trajkovski, president of the Republic of Macedonia, believes information technology has caused a shift in the fundamental bases of national power: “Power in the global information society depends less on territory, military power, and natural resources. Rather, information, technology, and institutional flexibility have gained importance in international relations. The power of knowledge, beliefs, and ideas are the main tools of political actors in the efforts to achieve their goals.”

Mircea Dan Geoana, minister of foreign affairs of Romania, agreed with this assessment: “We are witnessing a dramatic shift in the content, context, and architecture of world affairs,” he said. “We are also seeing a dramatic change in the very definition of ‘national interest,’ which is increasingly seen as having to do with economic competitiveness, cultural influence, and regional or subregional influence.”

#### *A. Coping with Faster Information in Less Time*

Once upon a time, diplomatic communications were carried on through predictable venues and stable deliberative processes. The circle of knowledgeable participants was well established. The number of participants with access to accurate, timely information was relatively small. Cable traffic from U.S. embassies was the primary source of germane information. Key players usually had adequate time and procedures for absorbing information and making intelligent judgments. The process offered no guarantees of political wisdom or strategic insight, of course, but generally there was sufficient time to filter and process the information.



The rise of CNN and the Internet has greatly shortened the time-horizons of diplomatic decision making. News from distant lands can become public knowledge more quickly than ever before. “All these large numbers of information systems make diplomacy much harder to carry on,” said Madeleine Albright, “because the information comes in very fast and you have to make decisions much faster than you might under previous circumstances. Everybody wants an answer *right away*.”

Albright said it is not unusual for CNN to report, for example, that a bomb has gone off somewhere and it wants a government official’s reaction. “You might try to hold back by saying, ‘I don’t have any comment at this moment,’ which you would think is a safe thing to say. But it turns out not to be safe, because then reporters will say, ‘Well, the U.S. government doesn’t know what it’s doing,’ or ‘There are things going on behind the scenes.’ The press is not a *deus ex machina*. Its role is to speed up the process. At the same time, it has become a player in the process.”

Robert D. Hormats, vice chairman of Goldman Sachs (International) and a former top official at the State Department and Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, believes there is greater “tension between velocity of information and judgment” now more than ever. In contrast to today’s fast-paced decision making, Hormats cited the way that President Kennedy intervened to slow down the rush to action during the Cuban missile crisis: “Kennedy understood that you could get pressed into making premature and perhaps catastrophic decisions by acting quickly on the basis of real-time information. He was able to sift through certain cultural issues. How do you deal with Russians in this kind of environment? What do they mean? Is there tension in the Politburo between one group and another? Is one group forcing one message to be sent while another is conveying a different message?”

“One of the important objectives in this new environment in which we’re all operating—where there is a lot of very high velocity information and a huge amount of information coming together—is to figure out a procedure and mindset for making intelligent judgments,” said Hormats. With so much information flooding in and intense pressures to respond quickly, policymakers must learn restraint and establish orderly procedures for processing information, he advised.

*The CNN Factor in Diplomacy*

“Patience was the last lesson of the Cold War,” agreed William Perry, senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and U.S. Secretary of Defense from 1994 to 1997. “But you didn’t have CNN then. It is much, much harder to sit back and be patient today and let things unfold. There are usually photographs being sent all over the world, and reporters are asking the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense, ‘What are you going to do about that?’ This makes life much, much harder for policymakers.”

“CNN is the sixteenth member of the U.N. Security Council,” said Madeleine Albright ruefully. Its decisions about what to cover have enormous consequences for international diplomacy, she said. The political terror and human rights abuses of Sudan and Angola were not on television, so they were largely ignored. Somalia was on television, however, and that prompted a faster, more dramatic U.S. response.

CNN and other international news outlets have actually elbowed aside many traditional sources of diplomatic communications. “When I came to Washington less than three years ago,” said Nabil Fahmy, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the United States, “I basically decided I would not compete with the media in sending information to Egypt. It was a futile attempt to get it there first. So I stopped reporting most current information. I assumed that people had the news back home because they watched CNN.”

Ambassador Fahmy also shifted approximately 80 percent of his confidential cable traffic to open, nonsecure conduits. He figured that by the time it reaches his colleagues back in Egypt, the information is fairly well known anyway. “The only thing I actually sent confidentially is opinion—my opinion, somebody else’s opinion, criticism of my own government, criticism of the U.S. government. That’s all I send confidentially.”

This shift in cable traffic has had another benefit, Ambassador Fahmy confesses: It makes it more likely that his communications are actually read. Previously, when a large volume of information was sent, it was dangerous to assume that everything was actually read or reached the appropriate person, said the ambassador. Now the contents of cable traffic—sensitive opinions about world affairs—are more likely to be considered important and read attentively.

The ambassador concedes that his move was risky; eyebrows were raised at the sudden decline in cable traffic. But he said he used the occasion to educate his home government about the new realities of diplomatic communications. Because of the news media, Ambassador Fahmy said, “I don’t control any more the scope of information on which my office is being judged.”

The flood of vivid, real-time information washing over both the public and government policymakers has led to “an information glut, but no explanation or interpretation,” said David Konzevik, president and chief executive officer (CEO) of Konzevik Y. Asociados, an international firm based in Mexico. “Then we have a skeptical society because people don’t have the instruments to analyze the information.” The Internet gives access to a lot of information, Konzevik said, but “it does not give you knowledge.”

This reality—plentiful information and scarce knowledge—suggests the need for better editorial intermediaries. New filters are needed to sift through the mountains of raw information and place it in an intelligent context and perspective. New types of editorial intermediaries are needed to select important information, interpret it, and warrant what it is trustworthy and what is not.

### *B. The Proliferation of New Information Sources*

At one time, international politics and diplomacy were the preserve of government leaders and certain elite actors in law, finance, business, and academia. Now, not only is the velocity of information posing new challenges for the diplomatic corps, so is the proliferation of new participants.

“The ‘Who’s Who’ list in international affairs has dramatically shifted over the past ten years or so,” said Mircea Dan Geoana of Romania. “There has been a tremendous shift toward NGOs, academics, international journalists, foundations, local NGOs, church groups, and the like. These groups are increasingly the target audiences whose benevolence, interests, and loyalty the nation-state must eventually capture.” Many of these newcomers to international politics are using the Internet as a low-cost, interactive platform for disseminating their messages, recruiting new allies and friends, coordinating their organizational work and alliances, and advocating their political and cultural interests.

As these new venues for research, advocacy, and public dialogue grow more influential, they are forcing governments to look beyond traditional sources of information. Governments can no longer rely exclusively on formal intelligence reports, diplomatic cables, and in-house experts. Now government leaders and diplomats must also monitor the news media and various Internet sources. They must strive to develop and assess a richer, more dynamic body of information.

Writing in the *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, Jamie F. Metzl explains how the Internet networking has enhanced the influence of civil society organizations:

Networks distribute influence and power across traditional boundaries, allowing powerful interest groups to form and re-form rapidly. The network is flexible and agile, constantly able to reconfigure itself to address new challenges. It allows ideas to compete and confers a competitive advantage on those most able to share, trade, and receive the most relevant information. Networks lower the cost of collective action, making large and disparate groups better able to organize and influence events than ever before.<sup>3</sup>

Metzl points out that spies and embassy officials once had a hammerlock on information relevant to state affairs. Through the Internet, however, NGOs, journalists, and corporations can now publish information that is “more timely, accurate, insightful, and useful than that of state actors. In short, the information revolution has reduced the transaction costs of communication and further democratized access to information and knowledge—the key assets of power.”

Immediately following the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center towers, the state media in China said nothing. But when a Chinese Internet user posted the news on a chat room 17 minutes after the attack, the official Chinese media had to weigh in. The episode showed how “official news services and television are being forced into faster, more accurate reporting about world and national events,” according to *The New York Times*. “And even Chinese journalists, when their reports of corruption are killed by local censors, have sometimes posted their banned articles on the Web, insuring national exposure and public pressure for answers.”<sup>4</sup>

Mircea Dan Geoana reported that “the open sources of information and their velocity has led to a diversification of the choices of information upon which decisions are reached. Today, at least in our system, my prime minister, let’s say, starts his day reading news wires before he reads the intelligence report. Unfortunately, every hour the staff is giving him the newest information. Most of the time, you see top leaders making decisions from the immediate media input. This is creating tremendous tactical complications.... How do you begin to discipline this process?” asked Geoana. “How do you try to filter the large amount of valued and trustworthy information which comes from open sources?”

Geoana believes that “the traditional sources of information—intelligence sources, cables from embassies, everything else—are becoming less relevant than previously. Yet having said that,” he continued, “when it comes to strategic decisions, there is an inclination for policymakers to rely upon the more conservative sources and a more deliberate decision-making process. On a tactical basis, we rely more on different open sources.” Geoana conceded that there is a real tension between traditional and new information sources.

Increasingly, reliance on open sources may not be such a bad thing. Some U.S. government communications systems were (and sometimes still are) terribly archaic. “The State Department was so far behind in communications technology when I took over,” said Madeleine Albright. “I finally got rid of the last Wang computers”—a word-processing system of the 1970s that predated personal computers.

One reason that electronic networking is so powerful is precisely because it quickly puts relevant information into the right hands, where it can then produce a greater impact or economic value. Centralized decision makers face special challenges in competing with decentralized forces because networking overcomes the transactional barriers that can impede efficient information flows. In so doing, networking unleashes new forms of power.

This is exemplified in many new uses of the Internet, in both political and nonpolitical contexts. For example, the peer-to-peer computer sharing of the SETI Project, the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence, has organized 3.5 million individuals into a loose online network to sift through data signals for possible signs of alien life.<sup>5</sup> Other collaborative

networks gather diverse local intelligence and share it quickly and efficiently with large communities of people.<sup>6</sup>

Not surprisingly, the new varieties of information are creating new dilemmas. How can government leaders and diplomats assess the reliability of sources? Which news accounts and political analyses should matter, and which should be discounted? When does the *perceived* credibility of a source make it worthy of respect, notwithstanding its dubious quality or bias?

To help deal with such questions, some private-sector services are arising to filter and synthesize customized intelligence/news digests for government agencies, aerospace and defense industries, and financial services companies. Intellibridge Corporation, for example, provides daily analyses dealing with risk analysis, policy analysis, international relations, and homeland security issues.

To Mark Tucker, chief executive of Prudential Corporation Asia Ltd., the glut of information means “you may need to slow down before you speed up.” A rush to judgment based on a flawed review of real-time information may actually result in more delays than a decision-making process that is slower and more deliberative in the first place.

Others cautioned against immediate acceptance of messages on their face. “Leaders as well as the streetman are influenced by the presentation of content, which in most cases is more a tool to influence rather than just to convey information,” said Akram E. Farag, chairman and managing director of Digital Systems Middle East SAE, a leading communications systems integrator in that region. “By raising awareness about the use of information to influence people, recipients should differentiate between the content they are receiving versus the intent of the content provider.”

It is tempting to see the information dilemmas facing governments as a purely technical issue—a case of “if only there were sufficient supplies of the ‘right’ information and the ability to interpret it.” In fact, the problem may stem from a deeper, more complex conflict between the rigid, hierarchical processes of the State Department and the informal, flexible, free-for-all sensibilities of the Internet.

“There’s a real collision between the tradition of formal, contractual language of the State Department and the informality of the Internet,” notes Waring Partridge, consultant to the State Department and

chairman of the Partridge Group. When the State Department makes an official pronouncement, written or spoken, it has a special authority because the U.S. government stands behind it. Official statements therefore require extensive internal, confidential vetting and review before they are publicly announced. Dialogue on the Internet, by contrast, is much more casual, impulsive, and colloquial. The identity or political power of speakers may not be immediately evident. Yet whatever its limitations, the robust mix of opinions on listservs, chat rooms, and websites reaches millions of people and influences public opinion.

Partridge laments that the State Department, as a powerful government agency with formal authority, cannot readily participate in freewheeling Internet conversations. As a result, nonstate actors—Seattle protesters, land mine activists, Burmese dissidents, Rwandan exiles—are able to dominate Internet discussions and exploit online venues as important tools of soft power. The State Department and other official sources are left on the sidelines.

This discontinuity between conventional State Department modes of public communication and the public dialogues occurring on the Internet has serious implications for U.S. public diplomacy, Partridge argued. Young people, entrepreneurs, ethnic communities, advocacy groups, terrorists, and cross-border enterprises are flocking to the Internet to gain access about news, politics, and markets. Yet the U.S. government is largely absent from this public square. Partridge believes that the State Department must explore new ways to use the Internet to reach these constituencies and get its own messages across.

But the challenge facing U.S. decision makers is equally a challenge of learning to *listen* to what the nontraditional information sources are saying. “My favorite quote,” said Andrès Font, director of analysis and forecasting at Fundación AUNA in Spain, “is from Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt. He said that ‘the denial of complexity is the beginning of failure.’”

Can U.S. policymakers begin to harness the power of networking to support their strategic objectives? Their first challenge may be to honor the actual complexity of the situation.

Ambassador Fahmy feels that it is only realistic to accept the more open and rambunctious information environment. “My challenge is to put my piece of information out there, on the medium, and to compete

with what is available.” Now that the information environment is so open and diverse, policymakers increasingly “must compete on the substance of the matter,” he said. It is difficult and perhaps impossible to control or manipulate today’s information ecology.

### **The Effects of the Internet on Military Strategy**

Many of the technologies that eventually evolved into the Internet grew out of certain strategic military objectives of the 1970s. But as those technologies took root and assumed different characteristics, they produced some unintended consequences for U.S. military strategy and international diplomacy.

Few people have had as close a role in overseeing these developments as William J. Perry, currently the Michael and Barbara Berberian professor at Stanford University, senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, and co-director of the Preventive Defense Project at Stanford. In the late 1970s, as Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering, Perry was guiding the evolution of various military technologies, including the Internet. And as U.S. Secretary of Defense from 1994 to 1997, he had to grapple anew with the new strategic complications that these very technologies were creating.

A great deal of information technology was employed as a means to offset the Soviet Union’s superiority in conventional weapons, Perry explained. “All during the Cold War, the Soviet Union had about a three times advantage in conventional military forces—ships, tanks, airplanes, guns. The United States accepted that overwhelming numerical disadvantage because of the advantage we had in nuclear weapons; we figured that was a tradeoff. But by the mid-1970s, the Soviet Union had achieved parity in nuclear weapons—and what some people considered more than parity—because of their new long-range missiles.

“That led strategic thinkers in the United States to believe that deterrence might be at risk,” said Perry. “At that time in history, 1977, Harold Brown became Secretary of Defense. He decided to use technology to try to achieve parity on a conventional field. He asked me, as Undersecretary for Research and Engineering, to develop the technology programs that would offset the Soviets’ numerical advantage. This was called, not surprisingly, the ‘offset strategy.’

“First of all, we developed sophisticated sensors that could detect military units anywhere in the battle area. And then we developed ‘smart weapons’ to attack and destroy them. At the same time, we developed a newly emerging stealth technology so that those systems could not be used against our own forces. Those were the components of the offset strategy.”

“At the same time we were doing this, we were accelerating something called the ARPANET—a precursor to the Internet. The ARPANET was conceived as a way of expediting communications among military scientists



and others in the government complex who were working on common projects.”

The results of these various technology initiatives, Perry explained, were first used in combat in 1991, during Operation Desert Storm. “The world was amazed to see how really quite capable it was. The Iraqi army, with 500,000 men, was routed in five days. I think even the American military was surprised at how effective this new technology was.”

Perry has an arresting analogy to explain its efficacy: “Imagine that I’m going to form a basketball team, and the members of that team are going to be myself, Zöe Baird, Esther Dyson, Charlie Firestone, and Madeleine Albright. And we’re going down to the gym this afternoon to practice, and then we’re going to have an exhibition game with the L.A. Lakers. I’m taking bets now on who will win the game. But before you bet me, I need to tell you what the rules of the game are. The L.A. Lakers will have to play with blindfolds on, and we will not.

“Now that’s the situation the Iraqi forces were in, in Desert Storm,” said Perry. “They were playing with blindfolds on. We had complete vision of what was going on, at all times, in all places. And the outcome was never in doubt. That’s the good news about the application of information technology.”

There were some unintended consequences as well, Perry continued. Military leaders around the world were watching the role of the military technology quite closely and wondering how they might emulate it. But achieving technical parity with U.S. weaponry would be quite difficult, said Perry, even among technically advanced nations such as England, France, and Germany. And countries such as Iraq and North Korea “don’t have any real prospect of being able to do it,” he said.

Not being able to emulate U.S. technology, the less-powerful adversaries of the United States have adopted what is called “asymmetric strategies.” These include urban guerilla warfare, the sponsoring of terrorism, the development of weapons of mass destruction such as nuclear and biological weapons, and cyber-warfare to attack key commercial or military computer information systems. “These represent a distinct strategy—their own offset strategy—to offset U.S. superiority,” said Perry.

In the meantime, the ARPANET grew into the Internet, and in the 1990s “exploded in a way that no one had anticipated,” said Perry. “The World Wide Web gave the Internet a scale and significance that was never imagined. One specific application of the Web was to business because of the efficiencies it could bring. New business applications were picked up with unprecedented speed.”

“Nations all over the world saw what was happening and wanted those benefits for themselves,” said Perry. “There were two obvious exceptions: Afghanistan and North Korea. They did not accept the Internet because they believed—quite correctly, I think—that introducing the Internet would cause them to lose control over mass communications. That

was an unacceptable risk to them. Two other countries—China and Iran—saw the same danger but decided to take the risk of losing control of communications.”

The civilian and commercial embrace of the Internet on such a rapid and large scale was not the only unanticipated consequence. So was the use of the Internet to distribute pornography, play computer games, and promote political ideologies. Its adoption as a “command-and-control system for worldwide terrorism” also was an unexpected and unpleasant development, said Perry.

These two developments—terrorist use of the Internet and widespread business reliance on the Internet—have elevated cyber-warfare as a new arena for international strife. It is a vulnerability that will need greater attention in the years ahead.

### The Implications for the Military

William Perry’s presentation elicited several questions about what the new technologies mean for U.S. military strategy and international relations.

Is one lesson of this history that strong information technologies are critical to military preparedness? Some countries, such as Japan, might conclude that to be strong economically it is important to have a strong military to drive economic growth. And if information technology (IT) is central to such economic performance, perhaps some nations might conclude that economic performance, IT, and military strength are synergistically related.

Perry replied that while many of the technology components used by the United States can be readily purchased on commercial markets, the systems engineering that makes them work together is extremely sophisticated. It is unlikely that other nations’ militaries could emulate the systems engineering. Furthermore, the U.S. military’s technological prowess owes a lot to its significant investment in training. Even developed countries would have a hard time making similar commitments.

In that case, Robert Hormats pointed out, “Doesn’t that make it much harder for us to employ cooperation with our allies, or at least doesn’t it change the nature of that cooperation?” Perry agreed: “This does dramatically change our relations with allies, if they cannot fight side by side as equal partners. That was true in Kosovo, for example, where it was greatly complicated to work with allies effectively.”

Perry said that there are ways for U.S. allies to develop certain technological capabilities, and that the United States is eager for them to do so. “I am surprised and disappointed that it has not happened already,” he said. “In my own judgment, one reason it has not happened is because in some European countries, military spending is regarded as a work/jobs program to support industry—rather than as a way of getting products out.

But if our allies do not develop these capabilities, then we will have to change the way we work together as allies.”

Perry envisioned a new division of labor, for example, with allies taking on different military and nonmilitary responsibilities. He worried, however, that “this could end up being an asymmetrical alliance, which is not good. I don’t like that, but that’s where we’re headed right now.”

Madeleine Albright agreed with this analysis, adding that there is a new political challenge in “making our allies feel that they are contributing something really important. In the macho world of today, it seems that hit/kill ratios are what is most important, when that is not the case. For me, the hardest part of whatever the United States is doing now—in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Kosovo, or what might happen in Iraq—is the role of *nonmilitary* action. That still requires a variety of technology and communications that may not seem as sexy, in terms of police action. But there are a variety of other, nonmilitary aspects to war that need attention.”

The United States’ sophisticated technology has created another source of tension in U.S. alliances: The United States is more vulnerable to attack than others precisely because we have such powerful technology. “That is true,” conceded Perry. “We are much more of a target for attack, both for the political reasons and the technical reasons.”

John T. Kunzweiler, partner in corporate development at Accenture, wondered if the remarkable efficacy of the new weapons technologies will make it easier for policymakers to “market” war. “One outcome of Desert Storm,” he said, “was that it created an expectation for future wars that they would be a little bit easier, a lot faster, and a lot shorter. So the public’s commitment or resolve about war could be less.”

Perry agreed that the technology “has made the marketing of wars easier.” This is unfortunate, he said, because wars are costly and have unintended consequences. “The technology is inculcating the belief among Americans, at least, that a war can be undertaken with no costs at all. That’s a very dangerous belief to have. . . . Once a war starts, it can get out of control very, very quickly. Anybody who thinks that a new war against Iraq would be a painless operation is going to be highly disappointed.”

## A New Definition of War?

For Madeleine Albright, the new realities of technology, military action, and international relations may mean that we need to rethink our definition of “war.” “War, today, is not a one-time act,” said Albright. “It is part of a continuum. There is the build-up to the war [sanctions, monitoring of military preparations, etc.], the war, and then the post-war.” The aftermath of military conflict is particularly complicated today—and often nonmilitary in nature, she added. It includes such tasks as coordinating different police

forces, reestablishing communications in damaged areas, and supporting civil governance. These may not be especially appealing responsibilities, but they are necessary, she said. Any alliance structure may have to develop a suitable division of labor to tackle these issues.

Andrès Font agreed that “there has been some sort of paradigm shift in the way that warfare is conducted.... For the first time, the goal is not to destroy but to disrupt,” he said, citing the disruptions to airline travel caused by the September 11 attacks. “How can this new challenge be faced?”

## II. The Internet and the Rise of Soft Power

It has been a gradual and subtle process, but the skillful use of new Internet venues by nonstate actors is altering some traditional notions of power in international relations. We tend to think of power as belonging only to the nation-state, and to associate this power with certain coercive abilities, such as military might and the authority to control interest rates.

As one commentator puts it, hard power is “the ability to get others to do what they otherwise would not do through threats and rewards.”<sup>8</sup> In fact, however, soft power is becoming increasingly important in our highly connected world. NGOs and other civil-society participants actively compete with nation-states and rivals for moral legitimacy, public image, credibility, and cultural respect.

Public diplomacy is the exercise of soft power, said Waring Partridge, who has advised the U.S. State Department about using the Internet for such purposes. Soft power, he said, can be defined as “the use of persuasion, public information, education, communications, culture, trade, aid, investment, and marketing to secure public support of interests, values, and policies.”

### *A. Public Diplomacy in a Globally Networked Environment*

Public diplomacy serves many important purposes, explained Partridge. It can be used “to gain the support of people and institutions; to attract people to shared freedoms and values; to engage and persuade others about who we are, what we do, and what we stand for; to educate and bond through the exchange of ideas, people, experiences, and trade; and to demonstrate goodwill and a desire to achieve just political arrangements.”

Partridge believes that the new information technologies are catalyzing some important shifts in hard and soft power: “The hard power traditionally exercised by governments is shifting to individuals; terrorism is one example. Meanwhile, the exercise of soft power—in cultural affairs, news, media, and markets—is moving from individuals and nongovernmental organizations to governments.”

Now that global media have become so ubiquitous (think CNN and the Internet), governments are especially eager to project the “right” images and messages. “If a state can make its power legitimate in the eyes of others and establish international institutions that encourage others to define their interests in compatible ways,” write political scientists Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “it may not need to expend as many costly traditional economic or military resources.”<sup>9</sup>

Yet hard and soft power are not distinct forces; they are closely intertwined. Partridge pointed out that “soft power supports the exercise of military and hard economic powers, and arrogant or unjust use of hard power can erode soft power.” While it is tempting to regard hard power as a unilateral ability to achieve an objective, unilateralism by “the world’s only superpower” can exact a price—in the form of resentment at American uses of hard power.

As the world becomes more networked, global image is a heightened concern. Consider the Leila incident: In July 2002, the government of Morocco sent twelve soldiers to Leila, an uninhabited island 200 meters off that nation’s coast, to claim it as its territory. Moroccan soldiers hoisted up their nation’s flag, and the images were broadcast on television around the world.

This provoked Spain, which also claims ownership of the island, to send 75 of its own soldiers to “retake” the island. From any economic or strategic vantage point, the dispute was absurd because the island is best known for its goats and wild parsley. But the real significance of the incident was a matter of soft power. While there was a show of hard power—military helicopters and armed soldiers—the vacant island was serving as a stage for a soft-power dispute: national reputation and pride.<sup>10</sup> Televised images of “foreign” soldiers claiming even a desolate chunk of the “homeland” were highly incendiary to Spanish and Moroccan citizens alike.

Soft power is becoming a more important issue as the news media and the Internet create new public stages on which international disputes can be aired. It has been pointed out that the attack on the World Trade Center was so effective precisely because it was televised and seen in real time by millions of people. If CNN has become the figurative sixteenth member of the UN Security Council, as Madeleine Albright contends, the Internet has become a prominent vehicle in its own right for international arguments about political legitimacy and cultural values.

The very existence of the Internet—especially its global scope and public accessibility—alters the political dynamics of certain issues. For example, the Egyptian government prosecuted dozens of homosexual men in 2001 for public lewdness in a restaurant, sparking headlines around the world and condemnation by gay rights groups.

“Homosexuality is not prohibited in Egypt,” said Ambassador Fahmy, “but neither is it culturally accepted. From my reading of the issue, some of our security people got worried that this was now more open. In a way, because of the use of the Internet [by homosexuals], the government acted in a manner that was much stronger than it normally would have toward lewd acts in public, be they homosexual or heterosexual in nature. Probably for the fear of losing control, through use of the Internet, the government would not have acted as they had.”

Akram Farag, chairman of Digital Systems Middle East SAE, told a story about how the Internet greatly amplified the social reaction to a column by *The New York Times* commentator Thomas Friedman. Friedman had observed that while some Egyptian peasants toiled in fields using tools that dated back thousands of years, other Egyptians were whizzing past them in air-conditioned train compartments while using laptop computers and cell phones. The column, quickly disseminated via the Internet, caused a sensation among Egyptian elite society. The intense public reaction, said Farag, shows how “the Internet is being used to amplify something that is very small and sometimes, things that are really important and serious.”

### *B. How Should the United States Exercise Soft Power?*

The United States is the world’s dominant holder of both hard and soft powers, Partridge pointed out. The American military budget

equals the military spending of the next eight nations combined. The United States creates more than 30 percent of the world's economic output. It is the top exporter of films and television programs, and its language is the world's *lingua franca*.

But U.S. dominance is not absolute. It is being challenged by newcomers taking advantage of opportunities created by globalization, the Internet, privatization, and decentralization. Entrepreneurs, affinity groups, terrorists, and cross-border enterprises can all "deal themselves into the game" now. How should the U.S. respond?

Many American leaders believe the United States must become more sophisticated in exercising soft power, and particularly in its use of the Internet. But this could prove difficult for many reasons. People who work in the tradition-bound hierarchy and culture of the State Department are not likely to be able to "mix it up" with the freewheeling, decentralized Internet culture. Many U.S. policymakers are tempted to exercise hard power unilaterally, which can undermine the exercise of soft power. Within government, there is a general ignorance about how to use the Internet effectively to get a message across. And in any case, for now, there is no well-developed strategic plan for making the U.S. government more capable of functioning in a globally networked environment.

There are some changes afoot, however. In the summer of 2002, the Bush White House launched a new permanent, fully staffed "Office of Global Communications." The office will not replace other government agencies that have international outreach missions, but it will coordinate the administration's foreign policy message in more strategic and thematic ways, using the president's clout.<sup>11</sup> The office's purpose, said a spokesman, is "telling America's story" overseas and managing America's image abroad.

Meanwhile, Waring Partridge in a formal set of recommendations has outlined ten possible initiatives that the U.S. government might undertake to enhance its public diplomacy and use of the Internet.<sup>12</sup> Among his suggestions were the following:

- Update management processes to enhance public diplomacy, such as interagency coordination and sharper polling/intelligence;
- Develop new protocols for U.S. embassies and consulates to use

websites, e-mail, and chat rooms so that the U.S. government can participate in ongoing Internet dialogues and learn what is being said in different venues;

- Train and recruit skilled Internet users at each embassy so that website creation, list management, and push e-mail and response will be routine tasks;
- Start an “American Embassy Scholars” program to grant scholarships in computer science at American-sponsored high schools overseas; and
- Add 35 more world languages to the daily translation of 15 languages used in the U.S. public diplomacy website.

The U.S. government’s use of the Internet as an instrument of soft power raises a critical point, said Ambassador Fahmy. The issue is not just how U.S. values can be disseminated to affect global values, he said, but also “how global values will affect America. That is what I think we should factor in. The influence will be *both* ways, not one way.”

As for those who ask Why can’t the United States “get its message across” in Islamic societies, Fahmy replied, “The one issue that makes people in the Middle East angry at America most is the Middle East peace process. I condemn the killing of civilians on both sides. But if you’re going to tell me that using an F-16 against a young boy in Gaza is a defensive measure—and that that standard applies anywhere else in the world—it won’t be believed. But you apply that standard to Israel and use a different language. And people see that. It’s not hidden any more.”

The Middle East dispute raises an important soft-power issue. In their essay Keohane and Nye write:

Unlike asymmetrical interdependence in trade, where power goes to those who can afford to hold back or break trade ties, information power flows to those who can edit and credibly validate information to sort out what is both correct and incorrect. Hence...credibility is the crucial resource, and asymmetrical credibility is a key source of power. Establishing credibility means developing a reputation for providing correct information, even when it may reflect badly on the information provider’s own country.



It should be emphasized that credibility cannot necessarily be secured by “the facts” alone. Cultural prejudices and values are powerful filters for interpreting even certifiable facts such as the 9/11 attacks. This is seen in the absurd 9/11 conspiracy theories that sought to validate anti-Jewish or anti-American prejudices. Some people believed that the attacks were organized by right-wing elements within the U.S. government, for example, or that Jews had been warned to stay away from the towers that day. One such conspiracy theory, a French book called *L’Effroyable Mensonge*, or *The Horrifying Lie*, by Thierry Meyssan, sold more than 200,000 copies.<sup>13</sup>

Yet even taking into account the variable dynamics of earning credibility, information undeniably is a powerful weapon. Erroneous or misleading information can be potent if it is widely believed. Even small pockets of credible information, skillfully deployed on the Internet, can have powerful effects, especially in nations with strictly controlled media.

### *C. The Ethnic Diaspora + The Internet = A New Soft Power Politics*

Some of the most politically significant uses of the Internet are occurring among national or ethnic populations who have dispersed around the globe in various diasporas. Historically, of course, “the Diaspora” has referred to the scattering of the Jews to countries outside of Palestine following their Babylonian captivity. But in recent decades, as global conflicts and migration have increased, so have the number of ethnic and national diasporas.

The Internet has been a godsend to such populations because it enables large numbers of geographically isolated people with a shared history to organize themselves into large virtual communities. For them the Internet is a tool for maintaining identity and community. It also is a powerful tool for such communities to express their political and cultural beliefs and agitate for reforms, both in their native countries and in international forums.

Shanthi Kalathil, writing in the *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, notes that “the information revolution has helped create a multicentric, fragmented world, in which the concept of sovereignty has retreated in favor of an a-territorial, neo-medieval system of overlapping jurisdictions and loyalties.” Yet at the same time, he argues, the information revolution has “amplified the ideological power and cohesion of diaspora communities.”<sup>14</sup>

Some diasporas are the result of political upheavals that prompted thousands of people to flee. Others are voluntary migrations spurred by the search for economic opportunity. In both cases, however, the Internet is an important medium by which the people of those nations—current residents and expatriates—can communicate with each other. The motives include family ties, a shared nationalism, political agitation for change, and economic dependency. For many Latin American nations—especially Mexico, El Salvador, and Cuba—reports David Konzevik, an important flow of dollars comes from family members working in the United States. These nations, in effect, have two gross national products—one produced inside the country and the other produced in the United States—with e-mail and websites functioning as a coordinating device for maintaining their financial contacts and cultural identities.

Internet-based communications between foreign nationals and the home country is not unidirectional. “Many entrepreneurs who have been successful in the United States are returning to their native countries, such as India and China,” said William Perry. “Once they return, they are inclined to re-create the Silicon Valley model in their own country.”

Perry reports that he has seen the influence of returning entrepreneurs in Hong Kong and Shanghai. “I visited a newly formed company in China a few months ago,” he said. “About one-third of the people there, and one-third of the investment funds in the company, were Chinese. Another one-third of the people and funds were Chinese Americans. And the most interesting part: The last third came from Taiwan. These Taiwanese had already made the transition from Silicon Valley to Taiwan, and now they were making one more step, from Taiwan to Shanghai. All of this, I think, is enabled by the Internet.”

It is not just that people can communicate and coordinate businesses using the Internet, Perry said, but that it can enable people to nourish deep attachments to their national roots. In some cases, as emigrants return home from the United States, these connections are leading to a “brain gain” for some countries.

This, too, is a complicated outcome. While returning entrepreneurs may “import” American-style values to foreign nations, they also may engender new cultural tensions. Chinese coming home from the West

often are denigrated as “ABCs”—American Born Chinese—and treated with disdain by native Chinese and the Chinese government. Yet with the number of Internet users in China approaching 50 million, returning Chinese entrepreneurs also are exposing their country to alternative ideas and values.

Internet connections between foreign nationals and the home country are not just affecting families, businesses, and national cultures. They also are triggering new sorts of political action, as the *Asian Wall Street Journal* reported recently:

During the May 1998 riots targeting ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, the Internet enabled the outrage of overseas Chinese to find its way into mainland China, helping to inform and politicize Internet users in China. The fusion of overseas Chinese sentiment, the Internet, and a receptive domestic audience culminated in a student-led demonstration in Beijing to protest the leadership’s perceived softness toward Indonesia. The rapid transformation from online hot air to flesh-and-blood marchers in the capital both surprised and worried Chinese leaders.<sup>15</sup>

The links between diaspora communities and native populations have been important to several African countries. “Interestingly, you’ve got a lot of people outside of Africa who know lots more about what’s going on in the continent than the actual people who live there,” said Wisdom J. Tettey, assistant professor on the faculty of communication and culture at the University of Calgary, Canada.

Tettey cited the military dictatorship in Nigeria and its human rights abuses in the context of the Ogoni crisis. “A lot of groups around the world mobilized international support against the Nigerian government, and the Internet was a very effective instrument for passing on information about what was going on and how the Nigerian government was responding,” said Tettey. “The Internet allowed these groups to break the insularity that was characteristic of the government at the time.... Something that was happening in a very remote part of Nigeria, which wouldn’t ordinarily be a concern of international civil society groups, became a world topic just because of the Internet.”

In Zimbabwe, too, when there was rioting following disputed elections, the Internet proved to be an effective medium for disseminating news about the government's behavior. "A number of newspapers are online now, and even though some friends of these newspapers were attacked and journalists arrested, the fact that their reports were online allowed people to still get the news."

In Ghana, a landmark election was held in 2000—the first opportunity in decades for Ghanaians to change a government administration through the ballot box. Even though the official electoral commission asserted the exclusive right to report on the election results, several private radio stations monitored the vote at various polling stations. "This made it very hard for the electoral commission to give a doctored image of what had gone on," said Tettey. "In fact, there were a few cases where army commandos were accused of intimidating people at polling stations. Reporters, covering the polls live, reported these incidents. It was very embarrassing for the government."

But beyond this openness in domestic affairs, Tettey reported that Ghanaians in diaspora were influential in mobilizing support for the opposition candidate, especially in the weeks between the initial vote and the runoff election. Not only did they raise money for the opposition, the very interest of the "outside" Ghanaians inspired many Ghanaian residents to become active in the electioneering.

It is a mistake to think that fresh and open flows of information will necessarily feed the flames of democratic renewal. During a tour of central Asia, Mircea Dan Geoana reported that no one at a large public meeting in an Azerbaijan village was interested in talking about civil rights or freedoms. "Even though everyone was apparently free to speak their minds, without government reprisal, every question was about the need to go to war against the Armenians. The relative lack of freedom was somehow less relevant than what I call nationalism, or things that are even deeper than that."

Shanthi Kalathil, in a Carnegie Endowment paper, has noted that the Internet can amplify nationalistic sentiments. As noted above, the Internet enabled overseas Chinese activists in Indonesia to spur massive protests in Beijing against the Chinese government. Such developments have caused the Chinese government to worry less about overseas

dissidents per se than “the potentially explosive fusion of diasporic online Chinese nationalism with mainland Chinese nationalism.” Kalathil writes:

When dissatisfaction and nationalism overlap, they can place significant pressures on the Chinese leadership, which has historically used nationalism to bolster its public support and divert attention from domestic problems. The leadership is still trying to finesse the delicate line between massaging nationalism to boost regime legitimacy and inadvertently encouraging overly militant public opinion that questions the regime’s qualifications and capacity to lead.<sup>16</sup>

#### *D. The Fugue Between Global Networks and Subnational Politics*

One of the more intriguing twists in the new global media environment is the interaction between global networks and local and regional cultures. The Internet and television have not homogenized the world’s cultures into a unitary culture. Rather, the emerging global network is an instrument used by subnational communities to advance their own geopolitical interests, even as the global network superimposes its own alien dynamics on those communities.

“In Romania I’ve seen this fantastic thing,” said Mircea Dan Geoana. “A colleague of mine, a defense minister who is frustrated with the media, tried to introduce a piece of legislation guaranteeing the right of citizens to have ‘letters to the editor’ published if something was not true. Of course, it was killed immediately. So the local media went to the international correspondent of the *International Herald Tribune*, who wrote a story about the issue. When this story appeared in Romania—published by an international, Western media outlet—it legitimated the issue and helped make it a domestic political tool.”

Geoana sees more instances of “playing politics at the national, subnational, and regional levels than at the global level, even if the tool is of a global nature.” The point is that global media often are pressed into service for more parochial subnational political purposes.

“The growing political autonomy of local and regional media, using flexible communication technologies, is as important a trend as the

globalization of media in shaping public attitudes,” writes Manuel Castells.<sup>17</sup> “Furthermore, the two trends converge in many instances, with global media corporations buying into niche markets, on the condition of accepting the specificity of audiences built around local media.... Altogether, the globalization/localization of media and electronic communication is tantamount to the de-nationalization and de-statization of information, the two trends being inseparable for the moment.”

Even as global commerce links more parts of the world together, local nodes in that network retain their own distinctive traits and culture. “The notion that you can do business in Europe out of London, or business out of Tokyo to deal with all Asia, or even out of New York and deal with Los Angeles, has really diminished dramatically,” said Robert Hormats of Goldman Sachs. “For cultural reasons, for reasons of proximity, and for reasons of understanding the local economy, people want more local presence rather than less in a global economy.”

Local knowledge, suggested Klaus Grewlich, ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Baku/Azerbaijan, is qualitatively different than the kinds of knowledge available on the global network: “In networking, the information is conveyed widely but in a very superficial way. You need networks, but you also need nodes. If you have this notion of *netpolitik*, do not forget the importance of local representatives and embassies, who are crystallizing points—which very often have a higher degree of information than what you see on the network.”

This discontinuity between the global and the local can be seen in the problems in communicating across the Occidental/Oriental divide, said Grewlich. “If you receive instructions from Berlin, you must re-translate them to make sense in the local communications environment, where personal contact is much more important. You must see people several times to know exactly whom to deal with in the clan. Then, when you contact Berlin to tell them what you have learned from local leaders, they don’t understand. You have to re-translate it into the Occidental communications system, which is something you don’t have to do if you work in Berlin or Washington.”

The story illustrates one of the unacknowledged wrinkles of living in the new global Internet culture: the need to appreciate differences between communications within the local context and on the global network.

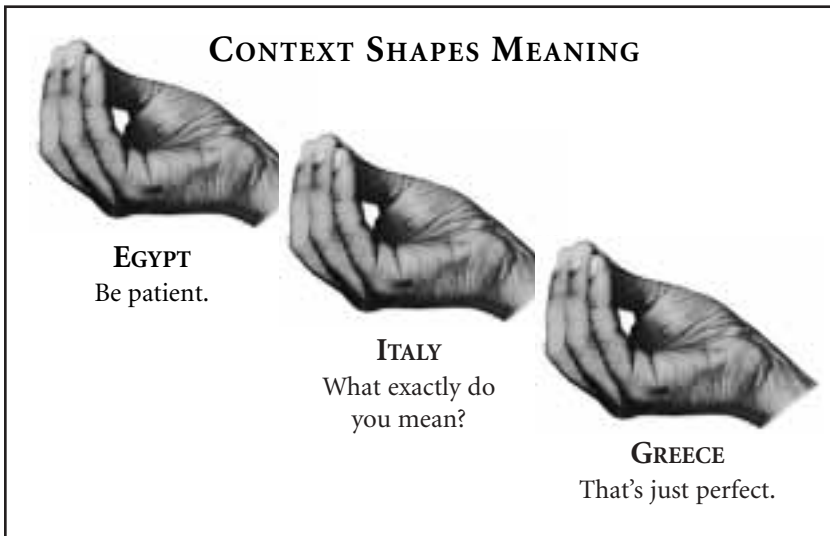
### III. International Politics As An Arena of Competing Stories

The essential lesson of Parts I and II is that the new technologies do not just change how we communicate. They change some of the ways in which we construct personal identities, consciousness, and culture. That is to say, they can alter some of the processes by which we create and interpret meaning.

When communication was more static—a book, a newspaper, a film, a speech—its social significance was more stable. One could “read” social or physical cues about a book’s quality by its production quality or its publisher. One could more easily make judgments about the credibility or origins of information.

But as the new technologies decontextualize communication from the original speaker, physical location and social circumstances, it becomes harder to “read” information. The intended meanings of the sender may or may not match the interpretations of the receiver, especially when so many communications are now transcultural. In interpreting the same story, one society may apply radically different assumptions than another society.

Consider how the simple hand gesture of an upturned palm with fingertips joined together means different things in different nations.



“This simple gesture means something completely different in Italy than in Greece, and something completely different in Egypt,” said John Seely Brown, the chief scientist of Xerox Corporation until recently. “In Egypt it means, ‘be patient.’ In Greece it means, ‘this is just perfect.’ And in Italy it means, ‘What do you exactly mean, anyway?’”

Brown continued, “The social practices of the context completely determine the meaning and, very often, invert it. Now obviously, we’re going to have some trouble making sense of things because if we lift information out of that context, how do we understand the social practices? What kind of social practices have to travel with that information in order for us to imbue it with any kind of meaning?”

#### *A. The Invisible Scaffolding for Constructing Meaning*

Americans may like to think that facts are facts and that a television news story is a fairly straightforward communications artifact. But in fact, even the meaning of simple news stories can vary greatly depending upon the social practices of a given society.

“Whenever we read a news story about the health dangers of butter,” a Russian woman once told Esther Dyson, “we would run out and buy as much butter as we could find because we knew it meant there was going to be a shortage. We really had no interest in the dangers or not of butter. We went beyond the information and looked at the motivation of the sender of that information. ‘Why are they putting out this news about butter?’ we would ask. Well, it was because they didn’t want us to buy butter. They wanted us to buy margarine instead.”

In the United States, the news stories on CNN seem entirely natural and normative; the content and style of presentation complement our own cultural assumptions. But in many eastern European countries, said Dyson, CNN programming is seen as “a fantasy about some other world. It has very little relevance to most people. It just doesn’t seem real.” A Russian visiting a conference of Hungarian entrepreneurs told Dyson, “You know, I knew about Bill Gates, but he wasn’t real to me. Now, when I look at these Hungarians, I understand what I can do.” Dyson concludes that “putting stories in the context of receivers is tremendously important.”

If one starts to unravel the reasons why even simple symbols and stories can carry such radically different meanings in different societies,



one is forced to reckon with the invisible “scaffolding” of social and cultural factors that contrive to create meaning. Credibility resides in the social context and origins of a message and in the identity of the sender. Someone who is part of a trusted social network, for example, or the leader of a popular political party, is likely to be viewed more sympathetically than someone who is unfamiliar and strange. And so on.

Such issues are significant because the Internet is changing the “scaffolding” that a society uses in creating meaning. The social context of a message is no longer self-evident. Nor is the identity of the speakers generating information. The Internet is decontextualizing information from the social frames that give it meaning, making it more complicated than ever to align the intended meanings of the sender with the interpretations of the receiver.

Film is a rich medium for studying the fascinating interplay of content and context in generating meaning. Elizabeth Monk Daley, dean of the University of Southern California’s School of Cinema-Television, pointed out that in constructing films, context is a critical factor at two levels: the artistic context *within the* film and the social context of the audience.

Within a film, the juxtaposition of sounds, music, images, colors, plotlines, cinematography, etc. work to create a rich palette of meanings. “If you give me a film and let me change its soundtrack,” said John Seely Brown, “not only will I completely change the meaning of that film, but I will actually change what you see. Many of the things you *think* you saw in *Jurassic Park* were not there. Using the soundtrack, I could cut an image and then extend in your own mind what that image ‘should’ be doing. So the deep interplay between the soundtrack and the image-cutting actually leads to your seeing things that were not there.”

Brown calls this zone where context and content meet the “border around the content.” There is an implicit contextual frame through which the content is perceived and interpreted. The frame is both an internal artistic frame—the editing of a film, the lighting, the soundtrack, and so forth—as well as a social and cultural frame. In both cases, the frame consists of “subconscious mechanisms that ‘scaffold’ how we will come to understand that primary content stream,” Brown said.

The point is that the scaffolding that we use to interpret a text or film or music can enhance our understanding—or mislead us. It could be

fraught with cultural or political implications. In any case, the interplay between a work's context and content must be attended to.

Daley illustrated this point with one of her favorite examples: American cowboy western films as viewed by the Japanese. A documentary filmmaker went to a popular Japanese bar where American westerns are frequently shown. She asked the audience why they enjoyed the films. After all, she pointed out, American westerns are all about the rugged individual standing against society, and Japan is a society built on consensus. But the Japanese audience responded, "You don't understand your own films. They are about consensus around the campfire."

"Were the Japanese viewers wrong?" asked Daley. "No, but it certainly wasn't what any American filmmaker ever anticipated they would say." Daley explained that "films are created in a very specific cultural context, by people with very specific points of view.... You float your media out there in these very complex environments, and that is the danger and power of film. It's a layered communication. It impacts people on very different levels."

In a media-saturated world, international diplomacy would do well to study the ways that context and content interact. "What are the processes for constructing credibility?" asked John Seely Brown. "What are the processes for constructing trust? For constructing understanding?"

What is rarely appreciated, said Brown, is that "these processes have their own time-constant to them." Trust, credibility, and context must be built up over a long period. But information technologies typically decontextualize. What may seem to the sender to be a self-contained bundle of knowledge may be regarded in very different ways by the receiver. A National Research Council/Max Plancke Institute report, *Global Networks and Local Values*, puts it succinctly:

Global networks enable communication that is almost devoid of context. The user often does not know the content provider. Internet use is mostly unnoticed by the physical communities to which the user belongs. This is important because values are embedded in context. Trespassers cannot be reminded of the value if the violation remains invisible.<sup>18</sup>

If trust, values, and context are important factors in real communication, but the Internet generally fails to represent such factors, then a new set of structural dilemmas are spawned for anyone seeking to carry on effective online communications.

### *B. The Problem of Multiple Subjectivities*

A true meeting of the minds also can be hampered by the fact that people's subjective identities and views vary so greatly. "There are multilateral receivers," said Madeleine Albright. "I think as we sit here, we are all receiving similar but not necessarily the same message. I've heard different things today that make me think differently about things than when I walked in here. So the effect of it all is much more dynamic than we are willing to accept."

Prior belief systems shape how we receive and understand information. This can be seen in the wildly different perceptions about the attacks on the World Trade Center, as discussed above. It also is evident in the radically different histories that different nations write about the same historical events. "One of the major, ongoing sources of tension in east Asia happens to be the different descriptions and interpretations of twentieth century history between Japan and China and between Japan and Korea," said Glen S. Fukushima, president and CEO of Cadence Design Systems, Japan. "If you look at the textbooks of these countries, there is a huge discrepancy in the accounts of what occurred, especially in the 1930s and 1940s. These histories shape the consciousness of people and the ways in which information is interpreted and used."

In international diplomacy, said Albright, the multiple audiences for any single statement mean that "you don't know to whom you are really speaking. I mean, you just send out words, and you don't know how they will be taken." Ambassador Fahmy recounted how a speech he gave in Los Angeles was picked up and posted on the Internet. When read by Egyptian citizens, it was seen in a different light than it had been received by the American audience.

Journalist Jim Lehrer once asked Albright, as Secretary of State, "How long is this war [in Bosnia] going to be?" Mindful of internal warnings against a Vietnam-length scenario, Albright replied, "It's going to be relatively short." But many people eager to oust Slobodan

Milosevic interpreted this answer as meaning it would be “a short war”—a very different meaning than she had intended. Albright found this episode “a very interesting case of how what I had in my mind, as a result of the context I had come out of, differed sharply from the context of the people who were listening.”

The meaning of information varies with the speaker, too. “You can’t really disembodify facts from people,” said Robert Hormats. “For example, one of the interesting things about the American Revolution was that all the principles of the Revolution and the Constitution were embodied in Washington, Franklin, and others. The Constitution, as brilliant a document as it was on its merits, would not have been ratified without the endorsement of Washington and Franklin. That was critical in the minds of many Americans, who went along with it because these two great men did. They gave their personal credibility to the principles, and that was decisive.” In our times, Hormats lamented, “there are fewer powerful or credible authority figures to tell the story of how capitalism should work effectively.”

### *C. The Role of Stories in Netpolitik*

The clash of multiple subjectivities in *Netpolitik* may have less to do with facts and analysis than with identity and values. Clashes are not just a matter of disputed *content*; they also are a matter of disparate *contexts* for interpreting that content—one of the hallmarks of international diplomacy.

A consensus of conference participants agreed that a useful way of talking about the clash of multiple subjectivities is through stories. The point of a story is not its truth or falsity but rather the way in which it organizes identity, values, and social behavior into a coherent worldview.

“Stories allow us to explain and contextualize the world we live in.” said Elizabeth Monk Daley. “They help us understand who we are as human beings, but they do this through the language of metaphor. Their truth is mythic, not factual, and depending on the shape that the narrative takes the same fundamental story can have very many different impacts.” For example, as anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowsky once pointed out, a society that believes that men are superior to women may tell a creation myth in which the sun, a male

symbol, raped the moon, a female symbol, and therefore created the earth. On the other hand, a society could tell the story a different way—for example, that the moon seduced the sun and so created the earth. That story would have a different meaning.

“Narrative provides a chain of causality for otherwise apparently unconnected facts,” said Murray Gell-Mann, the physicist and co-chairman of the science board at the Santa Fe Institute. “The grammar of narratives is important to us because it is the best way, in most cases, to present things—not only in fiction but also in reference to facts and to very deep analysis and understanding.”

John Seely Brown said that William Perry’s story comparing the use of “smart” weapons against Iraq to a basketball game of amateurs versus the blindfolded Lakers illustrates the point: “I have sat in many presentations about that topic, and I know all the data, but suddenly I know things in a new way. Columns of data with infinite precision have taken on real meaning to me.” Stories provide vivid tools for assimilating facts and sharing understandings. As such, they can enable—or constrain—what may be communicated.

From this perspective, it is clear that stories are powerful because they resonate emotionally and speak to a “higher truth” in a given society. “One of the grand narratives of the United States,” said Elizabeth Daley, “is that anyone can achieve anything they want. Everybody can pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. This is hardly true for a great many Americans, but it remains one of our national stories.”

### *Technology and the Construction of Stories*

What is noteworthy about the Internet is its role in enabling people to construct and share new stories. As *The New York Times* reports, “Iranian women, whose ability to dress and speak freely is usually limited to the confines of their own living rooms, can now write about their loves and lusts using online diaries. On one site a woman explored the misery of a loveless arranged marriage, calling it ‘sexual slavery’—a term unheard-of in Iran. Another woman suggested that women should become more creative with the Islamic dress code.” More than a million Iranians now use the Internet, without censorship, to connect with the rest of the world, discuss taboo subjects, and explore sensitive social and political subjects.<sup>19</sup>

Diasporic communities also are using the Internet to inaugurate new narratives. Their stories previously were either unimaginable because there was no accessible media platform or unshareable because of government repression. In any case, thanks to the Internet, people are experimenting with new self-images for themselves and new public images for causes and movements. Some segments of elite society in Bosnia, Serbia, and Macedonia are talking about the “New Balkans”—a self-conscious “rebranding” of that troubled region. The hope is that the new image will allow the region to grow into a new identity and image, domestically and on the world stage.

Historically, stories have served as potent shorthand for shared experiences and worldviews. Consider the role of stories in political revolutions, said Jerry Murdock, managing director and co-founder of Insight Venture Partners: “The story of the British massacre of colonists during the American revolution and the story about Marie Antoinette and the necklace in the French Revolution played a critical role in changing public opinion. Even if some facts are dubious, stories are part of a revolution and people’s collective memory.”

If a good story has consequences, so does the absence of one. Mircea Dan Geoana of Romania believes that the grand narrative of European integration, which has compelling economic reasons behind it, is not especially attractive to the average European citizen. “Citizens are basically disconnected from the grand story, which will affect our destinies for the next historical cycle. They don’t care. And we, in politics and bureaucracies, are incapable of telling a story to our own citizens.”

“Perhaps the story is not good,” suggested Esther Dyson, chairman of EDventure Holdings. “That may be why it’s hard to tell it in a way that’s meaningful to individual people. Maybe that is a symptom and not a problem.”

Sometimes a good story emerges almost magically, enabling an unrecognized sentiment to be publicly articulated—which in turn can catalyze the formation of a new community. Among open-source software programmers, for example, Eric Raymond’s landmark essay on “the cathedral and the bazaar”—about two conflicting models of software development—became a narrative for popularizing Linux and expanding the open-source community.<sup>20</sup>

Ranjit Singh, president and CEO of Reliacast, a video streaming firm, pointed out that there is a self-organizing, emergent aspect to new stories: “When enough people get focused on an issue and start to produce new things and start thinking about the same problem, a groundswell starts to happen—and a new message emerges.” He cited the strange alchemies by which elites in the Balkan region developed the idea of the “New Balkans” and decentralized terrorist cells developed a shared ideology and strategic plans of action.

In enabling the creation and dissemination of new stories, the Internet is changing the international ecology of cultural narratives. “We are in the process of melding our stories in many different ways,” said Madeleine Albright, “primarily because of the impact of global communications and the ability to hear the other person’s story. Whoever heard the story of Uzbekistan ten years ago? Whoever even knew where it was?”

The result of more stories, however, is a new tension between “local” stories and the emerging “global story,” said Albright. “There is a conflict between being part of a small group to which you belong and being part of a larger group—the world community. The concept of national sovereignty and your individual story is being threatened by the pressure of having to be part of a larger system.”

In concurrence that the Internet is promoting more transnational tensions, Klaus Grewlich points to the recent National Research Council/Max Plancke Institute report, *Global Networks and Local Values*:

Because of its pluralizing potential, the Internet increases the likelihood that transnational conflicts will arise—but because there is no sovereign international authority to adjudicate and, especially, to enforce, the resolution of Internet-driven conflicts is highly complex. At the same time, the Internet and information technology have the potential to fractionate the public because they allow individuals to customize the information they receive.<sup>21</sup>

The “fractionalization” of publics holds a real danger, warned Mircea Dan Geoana. He sees a “double disconnect” in the stories being told via the Internet. One set of stories disconnects elites at the national level from their fellow citizens, and another set disconnects the West from the rest of the world.

“For young, educated elites worldwide, American soft power—movies, music, consumerism—is really attractive. Eventually, they will come to the United States to study and work. But if this soft power is not distributed in a more balanced way, it could provoke a backlash,” said Geoana. “I think this has already started, at least in the Arab world.”

Unless we address the “fundamental architecture of globalization,” said Geoana, “we will lose the chance to affect the next stage of globalization and use information technology as a tool for reducing the gap between haves and have-nots.” The parts of the structural architecture that need revamping, he said, include financial markets; global institutions such as the United Nations, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund; and information technologies. “We don’t have the clarity and vision to address these kinds of things. Instead, we are getting better at media ‘spin.’”

#### *Toward a New Global Story?*

If stories emerge in a “bottoms-up” fashion from a social or cultural milieu, eventually becoming a shared artifact for explaining our relationships to each other and the world, then perhaps a new “global story” is already incubating. It simply has not yet crystallized or reached a critical mass. There is little question, however, that the Internet provides a hospitable “host environment” for formulating resonant stories.

“The Internet and globalization are parallel forces that are leading us in the direction of creating a new language,” argued Zoë Baird. The “new language” will be different from our existing way of talking about the world, she suggested, because “participants in the new language will be participating with people from different sectors with whom they realize, all of a sudden, that they share power.” The conversation about globalization expanded once it became clear that NGOs were a powerful force in the South. So, too, the new language emerging in international politics must recognize the legitimate needs of underrepresented constituencies who are only now being heard, thanks to the Internet.

If there is a new “global story” emerging, it may have to do with the necessary conditions of becoming a “knowledge society.” “If a country wants to participate in a knowledge society and enjoy the benefits that



come from that,” said T. Michael Nevens, a director of McKinsey & Company’s Silicon Valley office, “there are certain things they have to do. There are some consequences.”

A nation that decides to embrace the Internet implicitly accepts the fact that outside ownership and access to capital must be possible. There must be a suitable media infrastructure for broadcasting, telephony, and the Internet, as well as tolerance for a range of voices to be heard on these media. Some sense of intellectual property rights is needed to develop market-based investment and growth, and entrepreneurial leadership also must be honored. An educational system must provide the expertise and employees for this system.

“I think there are a set of rules and virtues that characterize a knowledge society,” said Nevens. “There may be no mechanisms to articulate or enforce these rules and virtues, but I think they are becoming clearer. And I think they help explain why some countries can participate well and others cannot. For a lot of countries, this is part of a huge shift in the way that they operate—a shift that may take an extraordinarily long time to achieve. If it takes too long, I would suggest they’re going to become more and more isolated from the rest of the global community, which is probably a dangerous thing.”

Using information technology (IT) more imaginatively to help promote economic development therefore is a significant concern. Some of the challenges and solutions are outlined in *Creating a Development Dynamic*, a report jointly sponsored by Accenture, the Markle Foundation, and the U.N. Development Programme.<sup>22</sup> The report surveys the range of IT initiatives being taken in dozens of nations to promote health, education, economic opportunity, environmental protection, and other societal improvements.

Robert Hormats believes that any nation that aspires to reap the benefits of information technology eventually will have to accept greater openness and pluralism in its domestic life. Closed societies, whether because of authoritarian rule or religious fundamentalism, “deprive themselves of the opportunity to assimilate information and make more intelligent policy judgments,” said Hormats. “Here is where the information revolution is out of sync with the political architecture.”

Andrès Font of Fundación AUNA in Spain is not so sure that *Netpolitik* necessarily leads to one model of government or cultural

values. “Why is Argentina, a country that has all the inputs to be successful, a disaster? Why is China, an authoritarian regime that has been successful in controlling the Internet, being successful? Why has Singapore, also an authoritarian regime but of a different kind, been successful in promoting economic development?”

The pluralism that goes along with the Internet, in short, may be more pluralistic than we might imagine. Perhaps there are *Netpolitik* hybrids that can function well without emulating the American political/cultural archetype.

In any case, many conference participants agreed that the proliferation of new geopolitical and cultural stories has created a new imperative in international diplomacy: to cultivate “the humility of listening.” “If I want to tell my story and you want to tell the American or Egyptian story, you are not going to be able to do that unless you understand the other person’s story. We need to learn not just each other’s facts,” said Daley, “but each other’s stories.”

Daley noted that ancient Greek stories, unlike American stories about the individual, are all about balance, harmony, and the restoration of order. Europe’s stories also differ from American stories. The head of the Polish film school once denounced American films that celebrated the power of the individual to affect history, Daley said. That perspective radically contradicts the Polish experience, in which the individual is so often seen as the *victim*, not the agent, of historical events.

“That confrontation was a shocking moment for me,” said Daley. “We all had to back up and really take another hard look at the kind of stories we were telling. I would like to propose that we can learn a great deal if we truly listen to one another’s stories.”

## Conclusion

Perhaps the most important imperative in *Netpolitik* is to recognize that it exists. The Internet and other information technologies are no longer a peripheral force in the conduct of world affairs but a powerful engine for change. Global electronic networking is not only remaking economies, but transforming people’s values, identities, and social practices. Moreover, these changes are not just occurring within the boundaries of nation-states but in all sorts of unpredictable transnational communications.

These changes are enabling all sorts of newcomers to enter the fray of international politics. NGOs, diasporic communities, critics of land mines and human rights abuses, antiglobalization protesters, journalists, indigenous peoples, and others are finding their own voices on a global public stage. More ominously, the very technology that is empowering civil society and businesses is enabling political extremists to build global terrorist networks and pioneer alarming new forms of warfare.

The new transnational flows of information are transforming some fundamental terms of power in international affairs. New types of soft power involving moral legitimacy and respect, credibility as an information source, and cultural values are coming to the fore. Military and financial powers that traditionally have belonged to the dominant nations are now constrained in new ways by soft power and the politics of credibility. A tighter skein of global interdependence may mean that unilateralism by any single nation, especially the United States, could be a more problematic policy approach.

*Netpolitik* is still an unfolding doctrine. It seems to be characterized, however, by a higher velocity of information, new time pressures on thoughtful policymaking, a more robust pluralism in international affairs, and new challenges to the power of the nation-state and traditional diplomacy. *Netpolitik* seems to be a volatile force because of its great reach: affecting everything from the exercise of state power and military might to issues of deep personal identity and social values. We barely understand how the Internet is being used across the world; understanding how it is remaking the conduct of international politics will require much more research, study, and debate.

Which is why, in the end there may be great wisdom in “the humility of listening” to each other’s stories. Since time immemorial, stories have conveyed rich bodies of complex information in deeply human ways. Thanks to the Internet, more segments of the earth’s inhabitants can now tell their stories. This is a significant development in human history. What may matter most in the future is our ability to hear each other’s stories, learn from them, and perhaps develop a new global story.

## Notes

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20. Eric Raymond, "The Cathedral and the Bazaar." Available at [www.tuxedo.org/~esr/writings/cathedral-bazaar](http://www.tuxedo.org/~esr/writings/cathedral-bazaar). (last accessed December 6, 2002).
21. *Global Networks and Local Values*, 5. Although this report is formally a report of the National Research Council, in fact it is the product of a U.S./German steering group effort: The Committee to Study Global Networks and Local Values and a German delegation from the Max-Planck-Projektgruppe. Ambassador Klaus Grewlich served as a member and authored the quotation in the text.
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# APPENDIX







# The Impact of Information Flow

Boris Trajkovski,  
President of the Republic of Macedonia

Remarks delivered at the Eleventh Annual  
Roundtable on Information Technology

Allow me to express my sincere appreciation to the Aspen Institute for organizing this event on a topic that is of vital significance in today's international politics. I also find this partnership very important towards cooperation among representatives of governments, non-governmental organizations and businesses in evaluating and defining major challenges posed by the advent of the new information and communication technologies and their role towards strengthening democracy, sustainable development, peace and stability, security and prosperity in all corners of the world.

I hope that during our discussions and exchange of opinions we will have an opportunity to better understand where we stand now in terms of the impact of the information flow.

I have always believed in the exchange of ideas and experiences for where our visions stand. It is a prerequisite for finding the solutions to challenges that our countries are facing and giving a vision to ourselves as well as to our citizens on how to precede in the difficult road ahead towards managing those challenges posed by the information flow.

The decade of the conflicts in the region of South East Europe, including the last year's crisis in Macedonia is over, but the conflicts have left behind them a legacy of distrust. Across the region, fragile and weak governance undercuts the proper functioning of the democratic state institutions, media, and businesses.

It is widespread among the public that the truth is hidden from them, and that they should not believe official versions, but rather they should demystify all expressions of power, whatever they might be. In this context, increasing the awareness of the media for the responsibility of the information that they transmit to the wider public is critical for better conflict prevention in the post-conflict region of South East

Europe. The real political task ahead in this regard is also to engage in a dialogue with the hearts and minds of the wider public.

In this regard, we have to make sure that we succeed with our reforms towards strengthening democratic institutions and the free market economy. We have to make sure that we also have structural stability, a situation involving sustainable economic development, democracy, respect for human rights, viable political structures, and healthy social and environmental conditions with the capacity to manage change without resorting to violent conflict.

At present we are undergoing a major transformation, close to a revolution, with the recent rapid changes in information technology and the interaction between the governments, the media and the citizens, as consumers of the information.

This revolution dramatically accelerates the cross-border movement of ideas, knowledge, capital, goods and services, resulting in a huge increase in transnational political, economic, and cultural interaction and in the emergence of many new institutions and structures that transcend state borders. There is an important part of this revolution with new possibilities offered by the new information technologies for conflict prevention, management and resolution. Conflicts in the world will exist. Their roots may change. Their perpetrators may be different. Their manifestations may alter. But there will be conflicts and some will be violent. There will always be means for violence. Therefore, the world has to be equipped with new ways for conflict management, which will address the broader human security agenda and the root causes of conflicts. We need to possess a culture of prevention. We should not wait until a crisis has broken out, we must act preventively.

This need is proved with the recent crises in the world, which illustrate the pressing need for the international community, for all of "us", to work together to prevent tragedies before they occur.

A significant trend that dominates today's world with regard to information is also the declining power of the state. The rise of new information and communication technologies, global media, and the ineffectiveness of government to regulate such activities, point to the decline in autonomy and power of the state. Today, as the most powerful information provider, the Internet is truly multinational. No state can claim the ownership over the Internet.

There is also the increasing importance of media. This is an important dimension in understanding the new developments with regard to a state's role. The global media calls for more openness on the part of the government and openness is becoming one of the defining characteristics of policy makers. The world is changing so rapidly that the governmental as well as non-governmental sectors, including businesses, need to be continuously learning, even reinventing themselves. This transformation highlights the need for governments to alter their modes of interaction with each other and with relevant actors in the multi-centric world. There is also a need for knowledge, competence and ethical awareness of the governmental, non-governmental and business authorities as the way in which we conduct policies is changing.

Information flow has a big impact on the conduct of policies—an impact that also changes our role as policy makers. The management of the global issues in an era of growing interdependence, demands innovative governance on our part as the rapid pace of the change in the information flow alters the concept of what we consider information. These changes are redefining the tasks to be done with the help of information, and with it, to redefine the institutions that produce those and those who process them as we as policy practitioners no longer know first through official channels.

Power in the global information society depends less on territory, military power, and natural resources. Rather, information, technology, and institutional flexibility have gained importance in international relations. The power of knowledge, beliefs, and ideas are the main tools of political actors in the efforts to achieve their goals.

With the new changes, the traditional foundations of security have also been turned upside down. The object of security is no longer simply the territorial integrity of the state. The information revolution has dramatically increased the dependence of our countries on efficient national and transnational information infrastructures.

In this context, the state is not the only actor that provides public services such as security, respect of rule of law, welfare, healthcare and education. The developments of the past decade have led many observers to assume that the forces driving global change are undermining the state and its political agency. However, we are not

witnessing the end of the nation state but a return to overlapping authorities. Clearly, the state has to adapt its functions to the conditions of a rapidly changing international environment.

We have to make sure that the new information and communication technologies meet the public's needs. They have to address civic, educational, and cultural concerns. There shouldn't be a gap between market reach and social need.

Addressing this problem is particularly difficult now that information flow and control is not only limited to the TV or radio. Information today is regarded in the context of the Internet, along with an expanding array of digital appliances and competing content-distribution systems.

We need to think about how the Internet and new technologies in general can help our society become more effective. There is a need of young people in developing countries to become more educated and capable. We have to help them to become a learning society, where people will have plentiful opportunities to educate themselves in a variety of contexts, for both personal and professional purposes.

We all agree today, at the beginning of the 21st century, that we are experiencing a period of fundamental change. However, there is much uncertainty about what kind of world the current global transformations will produce. In order to understand these changes and adapt to them, we need to work on making sure to equip ourselves to meet the challenges posed by the speed with which the world is evolving and the extreme global complexity that is emerging.

I hope you find my suggestions reasonable and useful.

The Eleventh Annual Aspen Institute  
Roundtable on Information Technology

*The Rise of Netpolitik: How the Internet Is Changing  
International Politics and Diplomacy*

**List of Conference Participants**

August 1-4, 2002  
Aspen, Colorado

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Note: Titles and affiliations are as of the date of the conference.

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## About the Author

**David Bollier** is an independent strategist, journalist, and consultant specializing in progressive public policy and citizen action. Much of his recent work develops a new analysis and language for reclaiming “the commons,” the publicly owned assets, gift-economies and natural systems that belong to everyone and function in tandem with markets. Bollier’s critique of the commons is set forth in his 2002 book, *Silent Theft: The Private Plunder of Our Common Wealth* (Routledge; [www.silenttheft.com](http://www.silenttheft.com)).

Bollier has been an advisor to television writer/producer Norman Lear on politics, public affairs, and special projects since 1984. He is also a Senior Fellow at the Norman Lear Center at the USC Annenberg Center for Communication and Co-founder of Public Knowledge, a policy advocacy organization that represents the public’s stake in copyright, patent, and Internet issues. He is based in Amherst, Massachusetts.



# **The Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program**

[www.aspeninstitute.org/c&s](http://www.aspeninstitute.org/c&s)

The Communications and Society Program is a global forum for leveraging the power of leaders and experts from business, government and the non-profit sector in the communications and information fields for the benefit of society. Its roundtable forums and other projects aim to improve democratic societies and diverse organizations through innovative, multi-disciplinary, values-based policy-making. They promote constructive inquiry and dialogue, and the development and dissemination of new models and options for informed and wise policy decisions.

In particular, the Program provides an active venue for global leaders and experts from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds to exchange and gain new knowledge and insights on the societal impact of advances in digital technology and network communications. The Program also creates a multi-disciplinary space in the communications policy-making world where veteran and emerging decision-makers can explore new concepts, find personal growth and insight, and develop new networks for the betterment of the policy-making process and society.

The Program's projects fall into one or more of three categories: communications and media policy; communications technology, social change and the democratic process; and networks and leadership. Ongoing activities of the Communications and Society Program include annual roundtables on journalism and society, international journalism, telecommunications policy, internet policy, information technology, and diversity and the media. The Program also convenes the Aspen Institute Forum on Communications and Society, in which CEOs of business, government and the non-profit sector examine issues relating to the societal impact of new communications technologies.

Conference reports and other materials are distributed to key policymakers and opinion leaders within the United States and around the world. They are also available to the public at large through the World Wide Web.

**Charles M. Firestone** is executive director of the Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program. Prior to joining the Aspen Institute in 1989, Mr. Firestone was director of the Communications Law Program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and an adjunct professor at the UCLA Law School. He was also first president of the Los Angeles Board of Telecommunications Commissioners. Mr. Firestone's career includes positions as an attorney at the Federal Communications Commission, as director of litigation for a Washington, D.C. based public interest law firm, and as a communications attorney in Los Angeles. He has argued several landmark communications cases before the United States Supreme Court and other federal appellate courts.

## Previous Publications from the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Information Technology

*The Internet Time Lag: Anticipating the Long-Term Consequences of the Information Revolution* (2001), Evan I. Schwartz

Some of the unintended consequences of the Internet and the freedoms it symbolizes are now rushing to the fore. We now know that the network of terrorists who attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon made full use of communication technologies including e mail, Travelocity.com, automatic teller machines (ATMs), data encryption, international money transfers, cell phones, credit cards, and the like. Is the Internet an epochal invention, a major driver of the economy for many years to come, or just a passing fad? Will the new phenomena of recent years -- such as the contraction of hierarchies, instant communication, and lightning-fast times to market -- last beyond the funding bubble? What is the next new economy? What are the broader social consequences of the answers to those earlier questions? This report takes a wide-ranging look toward the economic, business, social, and political consequences of the Internet, as well as its wide-ranging ramifications for the process of globalization.

58 pages, ISBN Paper: 0-89843-307-X \$12.00 per copy.

*Uncharted Territory: New Frontiers of Digital Innovation* (2001), David Bollier

This report looks critically at key insights on the new economy and its implications in light of the digital revolution. The report begins with an examination of the interplay between the current economy and the capital economy and then probes the emerging world of mobile commerce and its potential for driving the next great boom in the economy. It further explores new business models resulting from the combination of mobile communications and the new economy.

68 pages, ISBN Paper: 0-89843-307-X 12.00 per copy.

*Ecologies of Innovation: The Role of Information and Communications Technologies* (2000), David Bollier

This report explores the nature of innovation and the role of information and communications sectors in fostering ecologies of innovation. In this context, the report examines the ways that the creation of new ecologies are affecting significant societal institutions and policies, including foreign policies, industry and business structures, and power relationships.

44 pages, ISBN Paper: 0-89843-288-X, \$12.00 per copy.

*The Global Wave of Entrepreneurialism: Harnessing the Synergies of Personal Initiative, Digital Technologies, and Global Advance* (1999), David Bollier

This report examines problems arising from the growth of entrepreneurialism and digital technologies.

41 pages, ISBN Paper: 0-89843-264-2, \$12.00 per copy.

*The Global Advance of Electronic Commerce: Reinventing Markets, Management, and National Sovereignty* (1998), David Bollier

This report addresses issues of electronic commerce in the context of global marketplace impact and the transformation of national sovereignty.

64 pages, ISBN Paper: 0-89843-236-7, \$12.00 per copy.

*The Networked Society: How New Technologies Are Transforming Markets, Organizations, and Social Relationships* (1997), David Bollier

This report explores how electronic networking—the Internet and intranets—is transforming commerce, organizational performance and leadership, business and social relationships, and personal identity and allegiances.

43 pages, ISBN Paper: 0-89843-213-8, \$10.00 per copy.

*The Future of Electronic Commerce* (1996), David Bollier

This report examines communications and information technologies that are redefining the fundamental conditions and relationships of commercial transactions, as well as the implications of the new electronic commerce for individuals, businesses, and society.

64 pages, ISBN Paper: 0-89843-188-3, \$10.00 per copy.

*The Future of Community and Personal Identity in the Coming Electronic Culture* (1995), David Bollier

This report concentrates on issues of personal identity, community-building, and setting boundaries in our lives and our environment; it includes a background paper titled "The New Intermediaries" by Charles M. Firestone.

48 pages, ISBN Paper: 0-89843-166-2, \$10.00 per copy.

*The Promise and Perils of Emerging Information Technologies* (1993), David Bollier

This report explores the use of complex adaptive systems as a model for determining information technology's role in the workplace and in diverse societal settings. It includes a background paper by John Seely Brown, Paul Duguid, and Susan Haviland titled, "Towards Informed Participants: Six Scenarios in Search of Democracy in the Electronic Age," which offers progressive scenarios of how the interaction of humans and information technologies might influence and affect democratic life in the coming decade.

44 pages, ISBN Paper: 0-89843-149-2, \$10.00 per copy.

*The Information Evolution: How New Information Technologies are Spurring Complex Patterns of Change* (1993), David Bollier

This report explores the use of a new paradigm of co-evolving complex adaptive systems for thinking about information, information technologies, and information-oriented societies.

28 pages, ISBN Paper: 0-89843-132-8, \$10.00 per copy.

