

Global Diplomacy and Information Society

David A. Gross

*Ambassador and Coordinator for International Communications and Information Policy,
Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, United States Department of State*

Although the nexus between information and communications technologies (ICT) and foreign policy is not always immediately apparent, it is profoundly important. The role of ICTs in driving globalization and economic integration cannot be underestimated. At the same time, technology is changing individual lives by providing opportunities for creativity, innovation and communication to citizens around the globe. Considering the dramatic changes at both the macro and micro levels that have been brought about by the digital revolution, it is no wonder that we increasingly see the integration of ICT policy and diplomacy. Information technology is an essential element to achieving fundamental U.S. foreign policy objectives. These include:

- Expanding the circle of development by opening societies and building the infrastructure of democracy;
- Igniting a new era of global economic growth through free markets and free trade; and
- Developing agendas for cooperative action with other main centers of global power.

The United Nations World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) was guided by the need, according to the United Nations General Assembly, to “marshal the global consensus and commitment required to promote the urgently needed access of all countries to information, knowledge and communication technologies for development so as to reap the full benefits of the information and communication technologies revolution.” The General Assembly recognized the need to include technology in the ongoing international dialogue on development, globalization and human rights.

The Department of State has primary authority for the conduct of foreign policy with respect to U.S. international communications and information policy. To achieve this mission, we work in close coordination with numerous other U.S. Government agencies as well as with representatives of U.S. private sector and civil society. This includes, for example, our work on WSIS, on spectrum and standards issues at the International Telecommunication Union, and U.S. participation in other ICT organizations and forums such as the OECD, CITELE and APEC. By promoting policy and regulatory reform, we encourage the worldwide deployment of communications and information technologies, infrastructure and services. We strongly believe that the global deployment of these technologies and services help to spur social and economic development, especially in developing countries where the need is greatest.

World Summit on the Information Society

WSIS is an integral factor linking global diplomacy and the development of the Information Society. The global community has come together for the first time to affirm that information and communication technologies are a key element of political progress, economic growth, and social development. We are pleased that, through the adoption of the WSIS Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action, the international community universally recognized that infrastructure development, human capacity building, and network security are critical to achieving our shared vision of a global, inclusive information society. By agreeing to the Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action, the United States reaffirmed our commitment to the importance of the use of information and communication technologies to promote peace, security and stability, and to enhance democracy, respect for human rights, open and transparent government and the rule of law.

A global consensus emerged at the World Summit that a multi-stakeholder approach to the development of information and communication technologies and, in particular the Internet, is essential. Stakeholders include governments, international organizations, the private sector and civil society. The delegates to WSIS identified and achieved consensus on key challenges presented by the Information Society in which we now live: First, governments affirmed their commitment to freedom of the press and freedom of expression. Second, governments agreed that achieving ubiquitous and affordable access to information and communication infrastructures and services requires a stable policy and regulatory environment that attracts private investment, fosters competition, and promotes the development of human capacity through education and training. Third, WSIS recognized that building confidence in the security of information and communication technologies is critical and that cooperation is needed to foster a global culture of cyber security. Fourth, WSIS acknowledged the importance of intellectual property protection to the Information Society.

Diplomacy and Development of the Information Society

Information and Freedom

We cannot underestimate the pivotal role that telecommunications and IT play in globalization – technologies such as the Internet, wireless phone service and satellite TV are transforming politics, society and individual lives in ways unimaginable only a few years ago. Development of these technologies greatly expands opportunities for the United States to achieve foreign policy goals of empowering people through technology and offering fuller access to a wealth of educational opportunities, information resources and forums for exchange of ideas.

Countries that invest in information technology can maximize the potential of their most precious resource – their citizens. The Geneva Declaration of Principles recognizes the important role of capacity building in the areas of education, technology know-how and access to information as the keys to a knowledge economy. Prosperity in an information economy depends upon support for education, individual creativity and an environment of economic and political freedom. We have observed that societies built upon a foundation of respect for the hopes and aspirations of their people are much better positioned to benefit from the Information Society.

Advances in the global information architecture have also promoted the cause of freedom. Democracy is strengthened by the access to knowledge and the ability of citizens to exchange ideas in an environment free from fear and restrictions. One of the central achievements of the WSIS is the recognition of the right to freedom of opinion and expression as well as freedom of the press as the essential foundation of the Information Society. The sharing of ideas made possible through new technologies and new connections both within a country as well as to the rest of the world can have a powerful impact on how people relate to their government and what they expect from it.

An atmosphere of peace, prosperity and democracy spurs innovation and entrepreneurship. As U.S. Secretary of State Rice notes, “These three goals – security, opportunity and freedom – are linked. We know that security shelters the prosperity that opportunity brings. Security and prosperity, in turn, allow human creativity to flourish – but human creativity can only flourish fully in freedom.”

Rule of Law

An integral element to an enduring democratic society is the sanctity of the rule of law, which the Geneva Declaration also recognizes as an essential element of building an

enabling environment for the Information Society. For example, e-government can harness the power of information and technology to make government more open, more transparent and more accessible to all. The United States is committed to working with our partners around the world to demonstrate the benefits of upholding the rule of law and to promote the benefits of greater openness and transparency.

The WSIS recognized that, in building an information society, it is essential to first ensure that the fundamental building blocks are in place. First, governments must focus on creating, within their own nations, the appropriate legal, regulatory and policy environment that encourages privatization, competition, liberalization, and intellectual property protection and enforcement. We should never lose sight of the fact that the private sector is the primary investor in, and innovator of, infrastructure, products and services. A stable legal environment where the private sector can invest and innovate is essential to ensuring a sustainable information society.

Conclusion

The United States is committed to working with other nations to help create an environment that sustains the rapid growth of information and communication technologies. These technologies are creating an information society that liberates and empowers individuals. They are linking the world ever more closely together and accelerating economic growth and the cause of freedom around the world. The World Summit on the Information Society has advanced the international dialogue on how information and communications technologies can advance development. Our challenge now is to move from concepts to action and to ensure that all our people fully enjoy the benefits of the Information Society.

Information and communication technology is a key to the future prosperity of all nations. Prosperity in the United States owes much to this technology. Today the information and communication technology industry comprises only eight percent of all enterprises in the American economy, but it produces 29 percent of U.S. exports, generates high quality jobs, and contributes strongly to our productivity growth in all sectors. An estimated 40% of U.S. productivity growth between 1995 and 2002 has been attributed to information technology. Our ability to seize the opportunities afforded by information and communication technology depends upon a philosophy of shared optimism about the power of individual creativity and entrepreneurship as the ultimate source of economic strength.

These human capabilities are universal. Every country has the potential to develop an information-based economy.

Technical innovation does not occur in a vacuum. It relies on an infrastructure of science, of skills, and of a nurturing environment for entrepreneurial fulfillment. My country is deeply committed to this algorithm of technology-based innovation. We endeavor to be a leader in its application. Our President, George W. Bush, has made continual development of the science and technology infrastructure for ICT a high priority. Our Government today invests more than \$2 billion annually in information technology research and development activities including aspects of large scale and broadband networking, advanced computing, software and information management technologies.

The United States is already demonstrating its commitment to expanding international digital opportunity by incorporating information and communication technology throughout our international assistance efforts. Our Digital Freedom Initiative, for example, launched in Senegal earlier this year and expanded to Peru and Indonesia in November, is helping entrepreneurs make more effective use of information technology, leveraging existing infrastructure to expand connectivity, and promoting pro-growth policy and regulatory reform. We hope to expand the program to a dozen countries over the next five years.

Realizing this potential depends on the cultivation of science, skills and business infrastructure. Innovation in the development and use of ICTs depends on three key principles:

First, domestic policies must encourage investment in research and innovation. This means supporting privatization, competition and liberalization. Private investment is by far the largest source of funds for deployment of the world's communications and information networks, but its power cannot be released without stable and positive social and business environments.

Second, investment in human capacity to utilize ICTs is essential. Infrastructure without people capable of using it is doomed. A trained and well-educated workforce is required to bring it to life. A vital communications infrastructure expresses the full range of cultural imagination, without the divisive barriers of censorship. Uncensored print and broadcast media bring new perspectives on old issues, and stimulate timely responses to emerging social needs. We call upon all countries to affirm and implement Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Third, all consumers, innovators, and producers of content must have confidence their work will not be in vain. ICT products - tools, networks, media content – must be protected to the maximum possible extent. Respect for intellectual as well as physical property is a necessary part of the social infrastructure for success. This is an issue that transcends national

boundaries, but together we can create a global culture of network security that seeks to protect users, no matter where they live.

These are the principles of success. Each nation that applies them will, we have no doubt, advance the prosperity of its people and the quality of its way of life.

The United States believes that this Summit is poised to take a significant step to enable all people to reap the benefits offered by the Information Society. We are committed to close partnership with governments, the private sector, civil society and international organizations to implement the common vision of increased prosperity through information technology.