THE INTERNET AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The Internet offers enormous opportunity for people around the world to exercise their rights to free expression and free association, but access to the Internet must become truly universal. The U.S. traditionally has viewed the Internet through the narrow lens of E-commerce, rather than seeing its broader policy implications. Building on new initiatives flowing from the G-8 summit, the next Administration, with relatively modest policy, resource and bureaucratic adjustments, should make the U.S. a leader in advancing the human rights potential of the Internet.

What distinguishes the Internet from traditional media is its interactive nature. Each user chooses what information to access and what information to author. Since there is no hierarchy of information when the Internet is unrestricted, it is a largely democratic medium. The Internet allows any individual with access to a gateway and a computer to communicate worldwide, in near-real time.

By greatly enhancing the possibilities for inexpensive and global communication, the Internet allows for networking, organizing and information-sharing on a scale never before possible. The Internet also interacts with traditional media, becoming a forum for re-transmitting communications, often through third parties (“mirroring”). In many countries, the Internet can be used to overcome traditional press censorship.

The Internet has profound implications for governments wishing to restrict freedom of expression and related human rights. Civil society organizations can become more potent domestically, advancing rights and demanding accountability and transparency, and they will be linked to a global network of similar organizations. Citizens can have greater access both to legal and factual information, and also to competing interpretations of news and events within their country and worldwide. Individuals who have feared or been unable to speak out may find their own voices—and one another. Even those who must still
communicate clandestinely can find means of protecting their anonymity through the Internet. These features of the Internet are critically important for strengthening democracy.

The Internet is particularly important for human rights work. Human rights activists were among the first to make use of the Internet to coordinate actions, make contacts and communicate privately; to post and obtain information; to expose and publicize human rights violations; and to solicit action to address specific issues. E-mail lists are an extremely economical, fast and effective means of disseminating information; information can also be posted through Usenet and other organizations; and increasingly human rights groups around the world have their own web sites.

What a Difference the Internet Makes

Wei Jingsheng, a pro-democracy activist in China, was first arrested in 1979 for mimeographing copies of his pro-democracy magazine. In 1982, Wei used the ancient method—a message in a bottle—to alert the world to his fate. Unfortunately, it was not until 1993 that the bottle found its way to Xiao Qiang, who became executive director of Human Rights in China.

In contrast, Chinese dissident Lin Hai was arrested on March 25, 1998 for providing 30,000 Chinese e-mail addresses to a U.S.-based on-line magazine called VIP Reference. Within months, 20,000 e-mails arrived at Chinese media and government offices to protest his incarceration; many observers believe that his sentencing was more lenient than might otherwise have been the case. VIP Reference compiles articles from Chinese-language newspapers in Hong-Kong and Taiwan about subjects usually censored in the mainland government-controlled media (e.g. Taiwan, Tibet, human rights and democracy movements). The compilation is distributed to 200,000 e-mail addresses on the mainland—a process simple enough that one person can run it.
Freedom of opinion and expression is both a core human right and a bedrock American value. Article XIX of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” Assuring the free flow of information has long been seen by U.S. policymakers as a strategic tool as well as a moral imperative. During the Cold War, for example, the flow of information was an integral part of U.S. strategy. From the Voice of America to Radio Free Europe and Radio Martí, to programs supporting independent media in the early post-Cold War era, U.S. policies have stressed the importance of communicating directly with audiences in closed societies. Exposure to Western broadcasts—and by extension Western perspectives and lifestyles—was believed to hasten the Cold War’s end.

The Internet’s potential to advance U.S. interests remains significant. Many new democracies are imperfect and fragile. Some recently proclaimed “democratic” governments exhibit proclivities toward censorship and centralization of power. Recent trends toward democratization in formerly repressive countries and the desire to achieve economic gains have created an unprecedented opening for the spread of the Internet worldwide. Moreover, these trends can be mutually reinforcing as economic growth nurtures a stronger civil society in developing countries. The U.S. should seize this moment and foster the expansion of Internet access and use.

Such an approach also would support American security interests. Democratic nations that respect human rights are less likely to experience internal violence that might have international repercussions. A growing number of democracies will, in the view of many international relations scholars, promote peace because democratic societies are less
prone to conflict with one another. Moreover, countries with political freedoms tend also to enjoy economic freedoms that create prosperity and enhance stability.

When Serbia raided independent radio station B92 at the time of NATO’s bombing campaign, a new “HelpB92” support group used Internet technology to enable B92 and all other banned independent media in Yugoslavia to broadcast and defend their right to speak freely. B92 (now B2-92) is joining with other stations such as Radio Belarus to form ANEM, an infrastructure project to use the Internet to broadcast if the physical radio station is no longer free.

The Internet gives countries some of the tools—access to information and electronic commerce—to link more cheaply and directly into global commerce and thereby progress to the next stage of economic development. While Internet access may rank low on a nation's list of overall development priorities in the face of other major challenges such as clean water or the eradication of disease, the point here is that states that prohibit Internet access will become increasingly marginalized in the world economy.

As the Internet enhances integration into the global economy, it also gives states a greater stake in the rules and mechanisms that regulate trade. The U.S. ultimately benefits as global commerce is expanded and the rules governing trade are further legitimized. In addition, because the U.S. private sector remains a leader in all aspects of information technology, American firms are well positioned to provide the infrastructure, hardware, software, and training needed as Internet use expands. Wider Internet access and use is good for U.S. economic and commercial interests.

To advance American security, political, and economic interests, the U.S. should focus greater attention upon fostering the expansion of foreign Internet access and use, particularly in nations that are economically marginalized or struggling to solidify democracy.
The Internet is a tool, not an end in itself. While the Internet evades centralization and promotes the diffusion and diversity of information, it can also be used to track and compile information surreptitiously. The Internet can facilitate the sale of child pornography and connect hate groups just as efficiently as it can promote other ends. There has been a rich discussion within the human rights community regarding the extent to which new technologies can be used both by governments and by individuals to suppress and restrict human rights.

### Restrictions on Internet Freedoms

#### Internet Censorship

Governments can hinder access to the Internet by imposing high taxes on computer products, supporting telephone monopolies that keep rates high or failing to support low-cost community-based Internet access.

More active censorship represents another, sometimes complementary, approach. Many countries have developed sophisticated filtering devices and maintain a monopoly over the distribution of telecommunications. The Chinese government has started cracking down on online material by creating “Internet police units” to monitor Internet bulletin board services 24 hours a day. Saudi Arabia imposes prohibitive user fees to control access but also uses an elaborate filtering system (employing commercial U.S. software) which is updated daily, screens all requests and blocks access to sites it deems off-limits.

Some Net experts argue that efforts to control online content will be a losing battle in the long run as individuals and organizations become increasingly expert at bypassing filtering and monitoring devices. This may be why the most authoritarian regimes such as Burma and North Korea categorically deny access. In Burma, the possession of an unauthorized modem is an offense punishable by up to 15 years in prison.
Other states that demand the Internet’s economic contributions but still fear its political implications may resort to extreme measures to monitor and control Internet use. Reporters Sans Frontières judged that a total of 45 countries “severely restrict” the Internet by forcing users either to filter content, subscribe to a state-run Internet Service Provider (ISP), or register with authorities. Nations may also monitor e-mail communication, prohibit the proliferation of privacy-guarding encryption technologies and create national “intranets” from which selected, “seditious” web sites such as CNN or Human Rights Watch are omitted.

Democratic states also have concerns about the ends that the Internet might serve. They justify restricting or intervening in Internet access by citing threats to national security, use of the Internet to commit crime and issues of public morality. Most governments already have existing laws against terrorism and other crimes even if perpetrated on the Internet, but this debate is not easily resolved.

Historically, governments often have responded to the emergence of “new media” with restrictions. Efforts to assert control over electronic media risk violating civil liberties recognized by international human rights agreements and embodied in the U.S. Constitution. Both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights enshrine the right to freedom of expression and access to information “regardless of frontiers,” a phrase particularly pertinent to the global Internet. The right to privacy is similarly protected under these documents. Privacy is becoming increasingly important for citizens in the information society. In the human rights field, privacy can be particularly critical for protecting sources and witnesses. Since unencrypted email can easily be intercepted, securing electronic communications is an important issue for human rights work.

To advance American security, political and economic interests, the U.S. should foster the expansion of foreign Internet access and use in nations that are economically marginalized or struggling to solidify democracy.
Recently, a new community of cyber-liberties groups has emerged. These organizations are devoted to combating government restrictions on speech, or access to the speech of others, which would violate basic freedom of expression protections (see, for example, the following web sites: http://www.privacyinternational.org/survey/; and http://www.cdt.org/gilc/report.html). These groups oppose governmental interference in the Internet, particularly requirements to block, monitor or filter Internet information, and they advocate the dissemination of strong encryption technologies to protect individual privacy. They warn that government decisions about the design of technology (computer “coding” that is virtually invisible to the non-expert) may undermine the Internet’s greatest strengths. For freedom of expression on the Internet, the Global Internet Liberty Campaign argues that “The Internet requires the adoption of a true international standard of review, one that must look to consensus rules generally.” Because of the Internet’s global reach, it offers a greater potential than any other medium for the realization of universal norms regarding expression and access to information.

Freedom of speech and privacy rights regarding the Internet are still debated within the United States. Congress has twice enacted censorship laws (the 1996 Communications Decency Act and the 1998 Child Online Protection Act) that have been ruled unconstitutional. The U.S. government has required that national telecommunications systems be designed to accommodate government surveillance requirements, and its Echelon surveillance system has been criticized for having the potential to abuse civil liberties. While the U.S. government has recently softened its opposition to the sale of
encryption technology that is crucial for protecting the privacy of internet communications, debate about balancing privacy and security concerns continues.

This paper focuses on the historically less prominent issue of global access. Even so, it is important to note that civil liberties guarantees embedded in both technology and law will be critical to maximizing the Internet's benefit to individuals and to minimizing its use as a tool of government control. Cyber-rights organizations have provided an enormous service through their research and advocacy regarding the Internet, urging the U.S. and other nations to promote free speech principles and not restrict electronic communication.

The United States should more forcefully promote free speech principles regarding the Internet in multilateral and bilateral contexts. To its credit, the State Department's Annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices now reference electronic print when evaluating freedom of speech and freedom of the press, and the reports discuss limits on access to the Internet. Unfortunately, the analysis is spotty and anecdotal. While the State Department faces severe resource constraints—which help explain why the Department itself lacks sufficient connectivity to the Internet—the Country Reports' coverage of Internet freedom should strive to be more thorough and consistent. The report should contain clearly defined criteria for judging Internet freedoms. The United States should place Internet freedoms on the agenda of bilateral dialogues on human rights. Finally, the United States should press more forcefully in multilateral political and economic fora for an end to political restrictions on Internet. Such a policy would complement U.S. efforts to create a free economic environment in which the Internet can flourish.

There is likely to be a constant competition between governments trying to exert control over the Internet and Internet users working to circumvent those controls. Many observers believe that the Internet's fluid and flexible nature ultimately renders it uncontrollable by central authorities. The key challenge, they argue, is to create the infrastructure and local access that will make the Internet an integral part of the national communications system before repressive governments realize that they ultimately will lose their struggle to control it.
While cyber-liberties groups have raised and documented effectively many important issues related to unimpeded use of the Internet, the reality is that a vast majority of the world's population does not have the luxury of these problems. Most people lack access to even telephones, never mind Internet access. Access to the Internet is comprised of both the existence of infrastructure capable of providing Internet connectivity as well as the availability of equipment and affordable telecommunications links. For the last of these, the cost of connectivity generally decreases as the competition in providing access expands. Basic connectivity has been achieved in much of the world, but there are notable exceptions, particularly in Western and Central Africa, Central Asia and the Caucasus, and the Middle East. Universal (or even provincial) access remains a severe problem even in nations whose capitals are connected. Moreover, even within the United States there is a significant “digital divide.”

There are various reasons why Internet access may be limited. Often the constraints are imposed by national telecommunications monopolies that fear threats to their lucrative telephone receipts and prohibit competition in Internet provision. In some cases barriers are political, as discussed above. Some observers argue that the free market ultimately will ensure access everywhere except in the handful of regimes that flatly prohibit its use. But current trends indicate that economically marginalized and rural areas are unlikely to participate fully in the Internet revolution in the foreseeable future. In such places, capital investment requirements are high and the potential economic returns are not sufficiently attractive to the private sector without added government incentives.

There are major government initiatives underway to address the digital divide within the U.S., focusing on the creation of community access or community technologies centers for individuals who lack Internet access at work or home (supported by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration and the Department of
Education). As part of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, the Schools and Libraries Universal Service Fund (E-Rate) grants up to $2.25 billion annually to provide affordable access to the Internet to eligible institutions. In April 2000, President Clinton urged the private sector to help address the domestic digital divide and announced a variety of corporate and government initiatives to expand high-speed access.

At the time this paper originally was written and discussed at an experts meeting in Washington D.C. (fall of 1999), the U.S. government had done very little to acknowledge or publicize the problem of the global digital divide. The U.S. has since implemented a number of the paper's original recommendations via initiatives flowing from the G-8 summit in July 2000. These include expanding the Internet for Economic Development Initiative and overseas credit availability, the creation of a high-profile public-private partnership, and enhanced coordination of international efforts to enhance international access. These are welcome developments. The ultimate success of the G-8 initiatives depends upon moving beyond rhetoric and good intentions. The U.S. cannot abdicate its role to the G-8; continued U.S. attention and leadership will be essential.

The U.S. Digital Divide

Households with incomes of $75,000 or more are over 20 times more likely to have access to the Internet than others, and nine times more likely to have a computer at home; Americans in rural areas lag behind in Internet access, regardless of income; whites are more likely to have Internet access from home than blacks or Hispanics have from any other location.

The Global Digital Divide

The United States has more computers than all other countries combined. Approximately 35% of Americans have access to the Internet at some location, 25% of those at home. In the European Union, as of the Spring 1998, about 12% of the population had access to the Internet, with access ranging from 3% in Greece to 35% in Finland. There is a sharp decrease in Internet access in other regions around the world. South Asia has 23% of the world’s population and less than 1% internet connectivity, and sub-Saharan Africa has 9.7% of the world’s population, but only 0.1% has access to the Internet. Coupled with the problem of access to telephone lines (40% of people in developing countries do not have access) and high illiteracy rates, the digital divide is growing exponentially.
This section discusses some of the key current United States policies and programs that pertain to the Internet overseas.

**Access**

Many U.S. foreign policy and assistance programs today focus on upholding the rule of law and promoting democratization. Yet most of these programs seem curiously divorced from the Internet—one of the most potent (and cost-effective) mechanisms for achieving the objectives of current U.S. foreign policy. The United States sends experts to foreign nations to train judges, translate documents, or provide election advice. The Internet can complement and maximize the impact of such efforts, making information and training available to a far broader range of individuals. The Internet can do far more than provide U.S. (or South African or Norwegian) political and legal models to interested individuals. It can strengthen the very rights and behaviors that underpin vital democracies.

Until very recently, foreign Internet access or use was viewed within the U.S. government primarily as an economic development issue addressed by USAID or as a subset of E-commerce policy. In the late 1990's, while developing E-commerce policy, a high-level White House group began stumbling across development-related Internet initiatives that had sprung up independently at other agencies. The E-commerce policy review sought to bring these efforts under a coordinated umbrella policy. Ultimately, the “Internet Economic Development Initiative” emerged from the White House's E-commerce efforts. This initiative essentially repackaged ongoing efforts and brought their directors together on an interagency basis as a subcommittee of the E-commerce policy working group. When the government looked at global Internet promotion primarily through an E-
commerce prism, it could not take advantage of promising foreign policy opportunities and linkages.

Prior to the G-8 summit, the U.S. had taken encouraging, if modest, steps to expand access through the Agency for International Development's Leland Initiative, begun in 1996 (http://www.info.usaid.gov/regions/afr/leland/). It has encouraged developing nations to undertake Internet-related economic and political reforms. When those states demonstrate a willingness to do so, the U.S. has assisted in the process of Internet-related regulatory reform and infrastructure development. The Initiative invests $3 million annually over five years to prime the pump of Internet connectivity for 21 African countries. But the aid is only provided if governments commit themselves to ending long-standing monopoly practices in favor of private-sector Internet service providers. The Initiative helps implement government reforms and provides training and equipment for establishing gateways for satellite links. The Leland Initiative is now branching out from major cities into the secondary cities of some countries and working with national universities to provide dedicated gateways. Leland provides the private sector with advice on pricing structures and training to facilitate entry into the market. The Initiative has been a modest effort, hampered by Congress' lack of support and congressional constraints on the program's flexibility. Nonetheless, the Leland Initiative has helped 10 countries change their telecommunications policies, significantly reducing Internet access line cost.

USAID has other related initiatives to facilitate access to the Internet in Africa: AfricaLink is experimenting with wireless networking for remote sites and facilitates communication among African scientists; the Southern African Regional Telecommunications Restructuring Program helps states modernize their information
infrastructure. Efforts to facilitate telemedicine, distance learning, and micro E-commerce all offer great potential.

These relatively low-cost efforts demonstrated that the right policies, supported by targeted investments in infrastructure and training for users, could stimulate supply and demand for Internet access. The Clinton Administration's Internet Economic Development Initiative (flowing from E-commerce policy directives) essentially called for Leland-type efforts to be offered to a broader range of countries, but required only "a demonstration of successful models for development," and provided no additional funding for this purpose.

At the G-8 Summit, the Clinton Administration announced that it will invite 7 additional developing nations to join the Internet for Economic Development Initiative. Securing adequate funding and ensuring success for the next tranche of states should be a priority for the next Administration.

The Clinton Administration's 1998 E-Commerce Executive Order called for creating a public-private partnership, but until the G-8 summit there had been little evidence of progress. Meanwhile, the UN had recruited Sweden's Ericsson Corporation to provide equipment and expertise for a Disaster Response Programme. CISCO Systems joined with the UN Development Program to create NETAID (using information technology to share and disseminate knowledge about development), demonstrating that key Internet industry leaders indeed see their longer term interests being served by making the Internet more relevant to the developing world.

At the G-8 summit, the U.S. issued a "Global Call to Action" to encourage the U.S. private sector to get involved in expanding international Internet access. Endorsed by key high-tech companies and non-profit institutions, this effort should be fostered and expanded during the next Administration.

The U.S. should push existing investment and trade promotion resources to help American businesses promote foreign information infrastructure expansion and exploit technologies that might enable developing countries to leap into the next generation of communications systems. If the private sector were to take on some of the projects currently undertaken by non-profit organizations, U.S., international or non-governmental
organizations could focus on the even greater challenges of rural access or access for educational institutions.

President Clinton in 1998 had directed that the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) promote the spread of the Internet and E-commerce, but little changed with this general mandate. At the G-8 summit, the President directed OPIC to establish a $200 million line of credit for E-commerce and Digital Divide projects in developing countries. This should help encourage private sector actions, but the USG should continue to monitor the program with an eye to ensuring that it expands access, not just E-commerce. President Clinton also announced at the G-8 summit that the Export-Import Bank will accept credit of states and subsovereign entities in many emerging markets, a policy change the Administration hopes will expand access to U.S. information technology products and services. Again, the next Administration should monitor how this policy is implemented to evaluate whether additional efforts are needed to direct change toward expanding Internet access abroad.

The U.S. should play a leading role in promoting better international coordination in expanding global Internet access. The 1998 Executive Order on E-commerce directed that the U.S. should “seek the cooperation of the World Bank and other multilateral organizations” in initiating its Internet Economic Development programs, but once again that directive appeared to have had little practical impact. The lack of coordination among governments, international organizations and NGOs has meant that potential synergies have been lost. The U.S. has a new opportunity to help exploit these synergies through the G-8’s newly formed Digital Opportunity Taskforce or "dot force" which is to report back to G-8 leaders within a year on its progress. Its charter is promote coordination among governments, the private sector, foundations, multilateral and international institutions to meet the access needs of developing countries. The dot force could become a significant force for expanding Internet access. Serious engagement and leadership by the U.S. government could make the difference between a symbolic dot force and a dot force that will begin changing the pattern of how the world is digitally linked.
In concert with such technological efforts to bridge the international access gap, the U.S. should make government resources and commercial media information more readily available in foreign languages and should facilitate the provision of indigenous content so that the Internet is a mechanism for mutual benefits. Even where Internet access exists and is affordable, language can remain a barrier. Because English is the predominant language on the Internet, non-English speakers, many from developing countries with limited educational opportunities, are at a disadvantage in seeking to use the Internet.

Training and Technical Assistance

Human rights organizations have a variety of mandates and tasks, which means that their information technology interests correspondingly will vary. Not every group has a great need for the Internet; others require it for very different purposes. Many human rights organizations have special concerns about the secrecy and authenticity of their communications. They may need particular assistance with anonymous browsing, signing and verifying email messages, remailing and encryption.

The U.S. government is not the only vehicle available to provide technical assistance to human rights organizations, and in many cases it would be ill suited for this purpose. Even so, basic weaknesses with the government’s approach can be identified. Ongoing U.S. democratization and the rule of law programs in other nations are largely divorced from technology assistance efforts, and emerging Internet training programs appear focused predominantly on economic development.

Within the government—primarily at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and at the Department of State’s Office of International Information Programs (the former U.S. Information Agency)—Internet technical training programs geared toward commercial application have begun to spring up.

- The U.S. Agency for International Development has begun a pilot project in Jamaica to train a new group of Internet users. As currently conceived, the Jamaican government selects individuals for a distance-learning initiative focusing on E-commerce skills. The
program plans to address legal, property, and privacy issues as a subset of E-commerce training. The technical training offered undoubtedly would benefit sectors of society other than the purely commercial.

- **The Department of State** has a new low-cost initiative, the Global Technology Corps (GTC), linking volunteer private-sector technology experts with overseas efforts to develop and support information technology projects. This laudable “clearing house” concept relies on requests primarily from U.S. embassies and posts. In just over a year, GTC has undertaken two dozen projects ranging in duration from 3-6 months. ([http://www.globaltechcorps.org](http://www.globaltechcorps.org))

- **The Peace Corps** volunteers have begun pilot projects in Ghana, Kenya and Zimbabwe to provide computer training to rural resource centers. Even this type of modest initiative can yield significant benefits for training recipients and for the U.S. The programs hinge on the initiative of the local Peace Corps program.

- **The Federal Communications Commission** has an extensive outreach and training program for international regulators to help them restructure their information technology systems.

These are useful programs. Relatively inexpensive, they offer private sector and other forms of partnership and draw on American strengths. However, these programs have two key deficiencies. First, they rely primarily on requests from the mission or country at issue; there is no prioritized U.S. strategy to push these programs to places or sectors where they are most needed. The second challenge is the narrow focus of much training. The USG should conceive such programs to benefit a broader range of society, including representatives of civil society such as human rights, legal, and democracy actors. An additional emphasis on training trainers might increase the reach of such programs. The
U.S. government should offer Internet training in accordance with the fundamental principle that the Internet's benefits not be limited to the economic realm.

**Crisis Management**

In addition to longer-term initiatives for training, the United States is developing approaches to make better use of information technology to address foreign humanitarian crises.

The U.S. government has initiated large-scale, standing, information sharing initiatives for use during crises. For example, ReliefWeb, an Internet-based clearinghouse conceptualized by the United States and now run by the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, provides daily information updates on humanitarian emergencies (http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf). The United States is the driving force behind the effort to create the Global Disaster Information Network, which will harness information technologies (from the Internet to remote sensing) to create an integrated network for information exchange during all phases of disaster management. These permanent information-sharing initiatives have great potential, but cannot satisfy the requirement for connectivity.

Access to the Internet (and thus to standing web-based information) is often a key challenge in crises. Here, the U.S. could play a leading role if it learns the right lessons from its initial efforts. In April 1999, the then-U.S. Information Agency (USIA) coordinated a public-private technology initiative to help Kosovar refugees, capitalizing on the desire of information technology companies to “do something.” USIA’s efforts initially, through the International Organization for Migration, focused on tracking and registering refugees. The work evolved into establishing Internet access centers to serve Kosovar refugees and supporting an on-line refugee newspaper. By helping meet information requirements for refugee registration, family reunification, and security information, the initiative underscored the importance of protecting refugee rights (embodied in the 1951 Refugee Convention).
However, by focusing on a short-term fix to identification needs in this case, the United States missed an opportunity simultaneously to serve broader longer-term objectives, including sustainable Internet access for a post-conflict Kosovo. A parallel private initiative succeeded in making Internet access efficient, inclusive and sustainable. The International Rescue Committee (IRC), using a satellite dish originally provided for the USIA initiative and other corporate donations, established a wireless microwave network and became an independent service provider to a broad array of organizations. This allowed communications to avoid routing through Belgrade, and provided access at far less cost to each organization—and ultimately at less cost to the U.S. government, which supported so many of these actors directly or indirectly. With the resulting receipts, the ISP was able to provide free Internet access to universities, hospitals and schools, serving the residents in and refugees from Kosovo. Moreover, the self-sustaining infrastructure remained in place after the crisis abated. Operations have been assumed by an indigenous NGO (IPKO.org), which will help promote civil society and economic development within Kosovo over the long term.

Such far-sighted, comprehensive approaches to solving information technology-related crisis should be the focus of U.S. efforts in the future. The United States will be in a strong position to promote such initiatives because it can use its considerable diplomatic, military and economic leverage to encourage information technology cooperation among international agencies, foreign missions and non-governmental organizations. The cost-savings to the relief efforts will ultimately redound to benefit the United States.

The State Department and USAID should develop a more effective and far-reaching policy for providing appropriate information technology in crises and should identify the private sector partners and other resources necessary to implement it. At the same time though, it is important to recognize that the Internet is not necessarily a good, or the best, technology response to all crises or requirements. From the critical role that radios played in Sierra Leone elections to the importance of governmental perspective and priorities are as crucial as funding.
satellite telephones funded by the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh to serve entrepreneurs, different forms of technology will be appropriate in different circumstances. And given the challenges of using intricate systems in often chaotic settings in developing countries, there will also be situations where advanced technology is not appropriate.

As the Commission on Public Diplomacy concluded, the U.S. government's commitment to using information technology is not what it should be for the world's most technologically developed nation. The State Department's own internal information technology needs are left unaddressed by current budgets. U.S. programs, including those of the Voice of America, should increase the numbers of languages in which information is made available. The State Department's provision of on-line information, though improving, should be strengthened and include expanded electronic links to civil society organizations and more indigenous content. Funding constraints have also apparently prevented U.S. overseas posts from offering Internet access to the local public at many of our Information Resource Centers around the world—a basic way to demonstrate American belief in the free flow of information.
Most of the U.S. Internet-related initiatives that existed prior to the July 2000 G-8 summit emerged from the bureaucracy in an isolated, ad hoc manner. Despite the existence of the Economic Development Initiative under the E-commerce policy process, there has been a lack of information sharing and coordination within and across U.S. government agencies. The potential for duplication of effort, inefficiencies in program startups, and competing priorities and procedures throughout the U.S. government has been significant. An Executive Order already had called for agencies to move in the right direction but yielded little visible change. This degree of inertia suggests the need for bureaucratic reform in order to advance an integrated information technology policy, including those U.S. goals reiterated or enunciated at the G-8 summit. Since most of this paper’s recommendations concern relatively low-cost programs, changes in perspective and priorities are as crucial as funding. What is needed is a fundamental reorientation of U.S. policy to deepen the commitment to broaden Internet access and to link that effort to the provision of substantive training and information for diverse elements of civil society.

The emergence and continued development of an E-commerce policy will not provide a comprehensive framework for promoting Internet access and use. Fundamentally, the United States needs to assess the political, economic and technical barriers to access and define a strategy to address these barriers. In terms of overseas programs, the U.S. should integrate Internet economic training initiatives into democratization and rule of law initiatives, and develop

*Overseas Internet access and use should be broken out of the E-commerce frame, elevated in profile and given an effective coordinating mechanism.*
an integrated approach in which connectivity efforts are supported by a broad range of training efforts for users, including those in rural areas.

Therefore, the issue of overseas Internet access and use should be taken out from under the E-commerce lens, elevated in profile, and given an effective coordinating mechanism. The situation appears to demand centralized responsibility and the attention of an individual who can see beyond the Internet's commercial implications to its broader contributions to individual freedoms and democracy. The Commerce Department focus is too narrow to accomplish this objective. While the State Department should formally assume primary responsibility for coordinating all State-USAID information technology initiatives with other types of assistance programs, it would face difficulties in coordinating an interagency process that includes an even broader range of actors (in this case, Commerce, OPIC, the FCC, and other agencies).

Implementing a fully integrated and comprehensive strategy therefore requires, at least as an interim measure, designation of a global information technology point person at the National Security Council (NSC). The Clinton Administration considered creating a technology “Czar” but did not, fearing that the mandate was too diffuse to be managed properly. The mandate originally envisioned included addressing many issues not considered in this paper, such as domestic infrastructure security. The issues of access and human rights addressed here are narrower, although they are, as we have seen, sufficiently challenging that without greater attention they will likely languish.

The next Administration therefore should assign a senior member of the NSC staff the global Internet portfolio. The individual could help ensure that G-8 commitments regarding access are built upon and implemented within the U.S. bureaucracy and provide a needed counterweight to those within the bureaucracy who by virtue of their responsibilities (for example counter-terrorism or the promotion of U.S. exports) approach the Internet narrowly—as either a threat to domestic infrastructure or a commercial opportunity. The State Department also may wish to create the position of Ambassador-at-Large for Information Technology, in order to facilitate the coordination of government policy with other nations and regional and international organizations.
A complementary route for the next Administration would be the creation of a Presidential Commission to study the full range of issues described above and bring government agencies and programs together with the commercial and non-governmental sectors.
S
ince most of the measures described above are relatively low-cost programs, the key
ingredient is a change in perspective and priorities to reflect the tremendous potential
for the Internet to promote human rights and democratic values. U.S. policy should be
reoriented to emphasize a commitment to broaden Internet access and the provision of
substantive training and information for diverse elements of civil society. Such a policy
should include:

1. A Presidential Decision Directive or other public directive committing the United States
government to promote free access to and use of the Internet to advance both human
rights and economic development, including the recommendations that follow;
2. Energetic diplomacy in bilateral, multilateral and international fora to press for an end
to governmental restrictions on Internet use;
3. Expanded coverage of Internet freedoms in the annual Country Reports on Human Rights
Practices;
4. An international consensus-building effort on how human rights laws should be
applied to the Internet;
5. Securing adequate funding and support for the expansion of the international Internet
Economic Development Initiative;
6. Reconfiguration of existing Internet training programs to expand their availability for
non-commercial users and public Internet access at all U.S. posts abroad;
7. Increased translation of U.S. and commercial media information into foreign languages
and facilitate the provision of indigenous content;
8. A focus on implementing and expanding a partnership with the private sector
regarding access and training in selected areas, and on monitoring U.S. investment
incentives (e.g. OPIC, Ex-Im) to ensure that they effectively encourage infrastructure expansion to disadvantaged populations;

9. Designation of an NSC staffer as Director for Global Information Technology Internet Access and Use to help implement the Presidential Directive; and

10. Establishment of a Presidential Commission to bring the concerns, expertise and resources of non-governmental entities to these issues.