



THE DITCHLEY FOUNDATION

Will we still have a single global internet in 2025?

17-19 November 2016

Chair: Mr John Higgins CBE

As issues of how to manage big data responsibly, and of the right balance to strike between security and privacy, continue to dominate public discussion of the internet, the underlying issue remains of the survival in its present form of the globally connected network of networks on which so much in the virtual world rests. The wide collaboration and cooperation holding the internet together has to continue if fundamental principles of open standards, re-usable building blocks, integrity, permission-free innovation and global reach are to be preserved. The risks to this are growing, partly from repressive governments which regard internet freedom as a threat, partly from those who want to insist for privacy reasons that information about them must be kept only on the soil of their country of residence, and partly from the unresolved tensions between the cross-border nature of the internet and national legal systems based on territoriality of jurisdiction. The role of ICANN in controlling domain names, for example, particularly given its original links back to the US Department of Commerce, has long stirred concerns outside the US. The demand for multilateral, not multi-stakeholder, management of the system is increasing in some quarters. The idea of self-contained sovereign internets has its supporters.

Other risks which may lead to Balkanisation are also growing. Cyber attacks are now part of daily life for most companies and governments, not to mention individuals, and the temptation to try to wall off parts of the system is growing with them. The jurisdictional issues raised by data movements are becoming steadily more complicated and difficult. Ownership of data is becoming ever harder to establish as machines communicate directly with each other. Overall the technology continues to evolve much faster than governments and regulators can keep up with, and security measures for organisations and individuals are bumping along behind.

These issues are being considered by many international organisations and more informal groupings. There is broad agreement that traditional intergovernmental mechanisms are failing to provide appropriate solutions to the problems of preserving the global nature of cyberspace while respecting national laws fighting abuses of the internet and protecting human rights. There is also a widespread view that addressing successfully issues of internet governance means transnational cooperation among all stakeholders. The keys are likely to be policy standards, not international treaties, and issue-based governance networks. However translating all this into action is far from straightforward.

This conference will aim to take a broad look at where all this discussion and activity might go next. How will ICANN reforms unfold, for example, and to what extent are they necessary to fix the system, as opposed to a smokescreen for wider geopolitical manoeuvring? Where are the common elements in what governments and international organisations are saying, and where are the big differences and the likely logjams? Where might decisions on net neutrality be taking us? We will aim to bring together a diverse group from international organisations, governments, platform providers, operators, civil society, and academia experts to look at the problems in the round, and to try to identify ways to ensure that the core openness and global reach of the system are not jeopardised as technology advances and sovereignty and security concerns increase.