INTERNET GOVERNANCE : THE SHIFT FROM MONOPOLY TO MULTI-PARTY

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Started as a military project in Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) during late 1960's, within the U.S. Department of Defence, internet steered forward in a quick phase and there was no looking back. Since its inception, internet has always been a global commodity, providing its service across borders irrespective of language and cultural differences. In fact, it has been a true channel of globalization and has drastically reduced the size of the world, virtually. Despite its popularity and global usage, not much attention was given to the governance of the same, until recently, when the global community realized that with the growing usage and chaotic nature of internet, some kind of governance is essential.

What is Internet Governance? While the definition of the term is still under debate, an UN-initiated 'World Summit on the Information Society' (WSIS) held in Tunis, Tunisia in June 2005 gives the following definition:

"Internet governance is the development and application by Governments, the private sector and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet."[1]

While this definition may not be accepted by people who endorse multi lateral form of governance, it can still be considered as a form of definition for this paper. This brings us to the next question of who runs the internet. Though it is widely believed that internet is not governed by any one organization, institution, agency or government, it is governed by a series of non-governmental agencies in a hierarchical framework. This framework at the higher level includes 5 Regional Internet Registrars, Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA), Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), and National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA).[2] The NTIA is a sub organization of U.S. Department of Commerce which in turn is a department in the United States Federal Government. In spite of the fact that ICANN, IANA and the 5 RIRs have multi-stakeholder representatives in their decision making bodies, the highest level of decision making is however left on the behest of U.S. Federal Government. (See Fig.1). In simple terms it can be said that at present, the U.S. Federal government is responsible for the functions and also administering and governing the operations of internet therefore it indirectly enjoys a monopoly over the global asset.

It is for this reason, the global community has been insisting on the setting up of a multiparty internet governance body which would remove the monopoly of the US government over the governance of internet and will give way for real global governance. In this regard, there have been various global summits and conferences held in various venues around the world, in order to come to a consensus for setting up a global governance framework and body. The United Nations World Summit on the Information Society which was held in Geneva and Tunis in 2003 and 2005 respectively were conducted on these lines which focused on internet related policy issues.[3] Despite of numerous summits

the National Security Agency (NSA) since 2007. The surveillance was conducted on various government and non-governmental targets around the world including high profile targets like foreign missions, government houses, critical infrastructures, office of heads of the states of various countries and it even trickled down the level of spying on personal digital data of few heads of the states like the one on Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff.

Fig.1: Understanding Internet Governance

Source: http://www.cp80.org/solutions/technology

When the PRISM program of mass surveillance was revealed in June 2013, it created a pool of shockwaves across the globe where everyone expressed their voices against the break of trust and the technological exploitation of the US for their own intelligence gathering. The immediate reactions from various countries condemning the US actions were not only confined to the expressions of anger but also focused on the issue of governance of Internet. Nations suddenly realized the issue of governance of internet and floated many new ideas, like building new trans-oceanic cables surpassing the US (courtesy Brazil), establishment of servers in various countries to maintain digital data confined to that country other than maintaining them in the US based servers, and also establishment of a global multiparty internet governing body to take over the governance in order to counter the US monopoly in the governance of internet.

and conferences, the global community was unable to achieve a common consensus with regards to global governance of internet due to their differences in their claims, conditions and stand. It can also be stated that due to the everlasting difference of opinions, the global community remained dormant for some time on the issue of internet governance until the recent revelation of the mass surveillance program by the US.
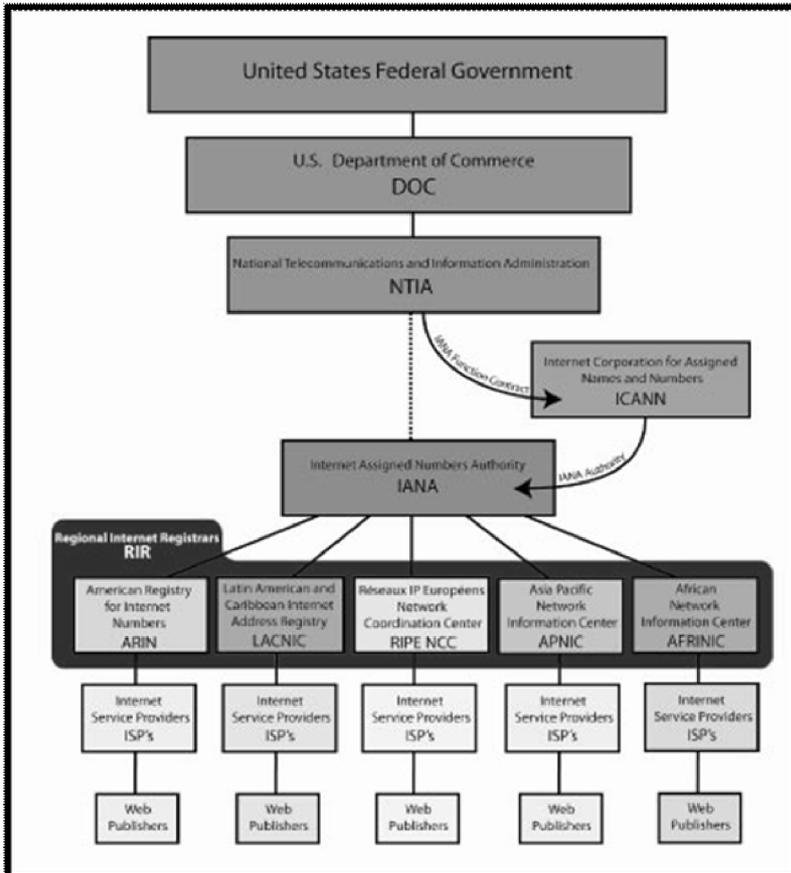
The Stimulator

It all started again with whistleblower Edward Snowden's revelations about the USA's mass surveillance program (PRISM) being conducted by

Spearheaded by the growing powers of the world, especially, Brazil which was one of the worst affected country by the US PRISM program, after the spying on its President Dilma Rousseff, the debate on Internet Governance gained its momentum and is now being discussed at all levels. The countries of the world have agreed on the policy of setting up a multi party framework for governing the internet.

Recent Developments

As a precursor to the transfer of governance from the US to the global body, the NTIA announced on March 14, 2014 that it intends to transfer key internet domain name functions to the global multi-stakeholder community. Therefore, as a first step it has asked the ICANN to convene global stakeholders to develop a proposal for the transition of the current role played by NTIA in coordination of the Internet's Domain Name System (DNS).[4] While the work for convening the multi-stakeholder community is under progress, NTIA will remain in its current position until the transition takes place.

Simultaneously, the global community has begun discussing on how internet should be governed highlighting the various other issues by setting up a multi-stakeholder community. As part of these discussions, a two day global summit on Internet Governance, "NETmundial", was held in São Paulo, Brazil, on April 23 & 24, 2014. The main goal was on elaborating the principles of Internet governance and making proposal for a roadmap for future development of internet governance ecosystem.[5]

With the participation of more than 800 people from more than 97 countries, representing various sectors of the society including the government and civil society, 'NETmundial' can definitely be termed as a 'global' summit. NETmundial was supported by High-level multi-stakeholder committee, comprising of representatives from ministries of 12countries (Argentina, Brazil, France, Ghana, Germany, India, Indonesia, South Africa, South Korea, Tunisia, Turkey and United States of America) along with 12 members of the multi-stakeholder international community.[6]

The summit was successful in identifying the internet governance principles and in proposing a roadmap for future development of internet governance ecosystem and the same was documented in the "NETmundial Multi-stakeholder Statement" which was released after the summit. According to this document, the identified common principles of internet governance are:

· Human Rights and Shared Values,
· Protection of intermediaries,
· Culture and Linguistic diversity,
· Unified and Unfragmented Space,
· Security, Stability and Resilience of the internet, and
· Open and distributed architecture.[7]

The document also highlights few issues related to the future of internet governance, institutional improvements, and also some specific topics like security, surveillance and capacity building which are related to governance of internet in the future.

Conclusion

Although, it showed a lot of promise, the pressing fact here is that the summit supported a "Multi-stakeholder model of internet governance" which is the option of the US and West, but there is a proposal for another form of governance i.e. multi lateral model; which would be on the lines of United Nations (UN) where government representatives from different countries would form the governing body unlike in the multi-stakeholder model where civil societies and private parties would also be a part of the governing body along with government representatives.

Nevertheless, countries like Russia, India and China are supporting the multilateral model which creates a debate in the global stage regarding the governance of internet. While the multi-stakeholder model looks appealing, there are many unanswered questions for instance, Who are the civil society agencies? Who are the private parties? Who do they represent? and, How do we believe

that these civil societies and private parties are not the puppets of big powers?

On the other hand, the countries which support the multilateral model of governance face an issue of equality of power in governing the internet that is to be shared by all the countries of the world for which the opposition is from big powers, mainly, the US and the West. Apart from this issue of governance model, there are more issues which have to be addressed in the future for effective governance of internet. They are fragmentation of internet and net neutrality.[8]

While many countries are trying to reduce their reliance on American infrastructure, it is feared that the internet might get fragmented and borders might arise in the virtual world in the near future. Also, the cyber society is skeptical about the neutrality of internet in the future which if achieved would save the users from prioritized traffic, targeted information, etc.

With all these and many more issues lined up, internet governance is not an easy task for the

> **Internet governance is not an easy task for the global community. But, the global community has to sum up a better solution in the near future which will not only secure the users in the cyber/virtual world but will also safeguard the stability and security of the cyber/virtual world.**

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Notes:

[1]Châ teau D e Bossey, " *Report of the WorkingGroup on Internet Governance*", United Nations, June 2005, pg 4.

[2]http://www.cp80.org/solutions/technology,accessed on April 29, 2014.

[3]"Internet Governance", Wikipedia, in

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_governance, accessed on April 30, 2014.

[4]"NTIA Announces Intent to Transition KeyInternet Domain N a m e F u n c t i o n s ", P r e s s R e l e a s e , N a t i o n a l Telecommunications and Information Administration, United States Department of Commerce, March 14, 2014.

[5]http://netmundial.br/about/, accessed on April 30, 2014.

[6]http://netmundial.br/blog/2014/04/20/netmundial-announces-list-of-registered-participants/, accessed on April30, 2014.

[7]"NETmuldialMultistakeholder Statement", Summit Document, April 24, 2014.

[8]Srivas, Anuj. "Governing the Internet",*The Hindu*, April 28, 2014.