

Computer Science 82 – Synopsis 1

Assigned Readings

1. Who Will Control the Internet? *By Kenneth Neil Cukier*
2. Who Should Govern the Internet? *By Nanda Kumar and Abbe Mowshowitz*

Summary and Opinions on the Readings

Background Info:

Foreign governments want control of the Internet transferred from ICANN to an international institution. The ICANN in their view is an instrument of American authority over cyberspace.

On June 30th 2005 the U.S Department of Commerce issued a single paged document announcing that the United States planned to retain control of the Internet indefinitely. It was received abroad with anger, setting the stage for further controversy

Functions of the ICANN (Technical Aspect):

The ICANN provides oversight and coordination to operate the ‘domain name system’ of addresses, which is divided into four critical areas

The four Areas are:

1. Domain Names- Require assignment of suffixes such as .com, .net, .cn
2. Internet Protocol Numbers- Assigned to each machine on the network to be recognized by other machines
3. Root Servers- Matches domain names with their corresponding Internet Protocol numbers in a matter of milliseconds
4. Technical Standards- Ensures the Internet’s interoperability

International Opposition to the ICANN (Social Aspect):

Foreign critics think a shift to multilateral intergovernmental control would mark a step toward enlightened global democracy; Washington thinks it would constitute a step back in time, toward state-regulated telecommunications.

The following points list the Pros and Cons of ICANN as seen by the US and Foreign Governments-

ICANN Pros:

- As the internet has not been controlled in the private sector it has led to low cost of access, innovation and freedom of speech- unlike the government run telecommunication system
- It has taken a liberal approach in keeping with liberal values and ensured that the network operates smoothly. There is no guarantee that an intergovernmental system would continue on such a course

ICANN Cons:

- Poor accountability and lack of transparency
- Too much power in the hands of the US. It could knock a country out of the internet by deleting its two-letter moniker from the domain name system
- The ICANN controls the master root file that can disrupt the operation of ccTLDs.

Future of the ICANN (Ethical Aspect):

The US position is unsustainable over the longer term. Other governments can not do much to rebel now. But, in the long term countries could set up a parallel naming and addressing system to compete with ICANN sanctioned domains. This could lead to dangers such as different addressing systems on the Internet not interoperating perfectly and would create chaos. To preserve and extend the benefits the internet currently brings, Washington will have to come up with some way of sharing control with other countries without jeopardizing the network's stability or discouraging free speech and technical innovation.