

The Global Internet: Approaching Critical Inflection Point

by [Leslie Harris](#) [1]

March 15, 2011

Each year CDT holds an annual dinner attended by so many of Washington's technology savvy policy makers, activists, innovators, entrepreneurs and corporate executives that it has been dubbed by the media as "the Tech Prom." The theme of this year's dinner was an "Internet without borders," a timely subject given the historic events unfolding throughout the Arab world today.

My dinner speech this year focused on that theme, providing a frank assessment of the Internet today and tomorrow, and CDT's essential role in steering it toward openness, innovation and freedom.

Here is an excerpt from this year's speech:

CDT has always understood the power of this medium to support democracy. Right now, with great speed, it's giving voice to democratic movements around the globe.

Much has been said about the important role that social media has played in the so-called Arab Spring. But it is fair to ask what would social media look like today without CDT?

Imagine, for a moment, an Internet:

- Where intermediaries are liable for the content they carry;
- Where broadcast like content rules apply;
- Where strong encryption does not exist.
- And where citizen political speech is highly regulated by the FEC.

Together we have written the history of the global Internet and there is ample reason to be proud. But the story of the Internet is still being written. Its future is not preordained. And we find ourselves fast approaching a critical inflection point.

Billions of people will join the global network in their next few years. Their governments must decide - whether to embrace the open Internet and its dual promise of freedom and economic growth - or remake it into a tool of control, and even oppression.

At the same time, a truly global Internet requires new approaches to Internet governance that transcend borders? How do we forge new agreements and new institutions to find global agreement on critical policy challenges that do not lead to a slide---if not a race to the bottom?

These are challenges in which CDT must engage.

Our global Internet also requires new policy thinking at home. U.S. Internet policy has impact far beyond our borders. If we want to support Internet freedom around the world, we must look at our own proposals through a wider lens.

Can the US harness the global domain name system for law enforcement--- without the rest of the world following suit?

Can the US mandate new surveillance back doors for communications applications---- without undermining privacy and cyber security everywhere?

And, can the United States give the President new powers to control networks in a cyber- emergency and at the same time, denounce those who shut down the Internet for their own ends?

On these challenges too, CDT must engage.

The Internet's inflection point is CDT's as well. For 17 years, CDT has convened, consulted and collaborated with all of you to shape the policies and practices that support today's open Internet. In the past five years, CDT has grown its capacity, deepened its expertise and expanded its influence.

Now, in the next 3 years, we must sustain that growth – and, at the same time, strive to be an organization with a fully global capacity.

What would global capacity mean for CDT?

It means that when the OECD convenes this summer to discuss global Internet policy principles, CDT is there. It means that when human rights and Internet activists seek CDT's help to advance Internet freedom, CDT is there. And it means that as new institutions and new agreements are forged to govern the global Internet, CDT is there as well.

So how does CDT move from vision from action? It starts with resources – the resources to lead, to be entrepreneurial and nimble as we engage in global challenges.

That is why tonight I am announcing a Campaign for CDT's future to establish a new growth fund. In the coming months, we will reach out to all of you for your help – and in turn ask you to bring others into the campaign.

-
- [global Internet freedom](#)
- [global internet](#)

Copyright © 2013 by Center for Democracy & Technology. All rights reserved. CDT can be freely copied and used as long as you make no substantive changes and clearly give us credit. [Details](#).

Source URL:

<https://www.cdt.org/blogs/brock-meeks/global-internet-approching-critical-inflection-point>

Links:

[1] <https://www.cdt.org/personnel/leslie-harris>