Two principles, from history ? and forward

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Abstract

History, recent and past, teaches two principles for Internet governance. Then the opposed camps who have so far stalemated movement can, individually, build from these principles to devolve a framework and roadmap forward.

Document

Principles

Sound principles grow from human experience and history. Let us suggest that history promulgates two seminal principles, for Internet governance. From these two starting points, then further guidance may become clear.

The proximate history spans the recent couple decades, beginning as the world stirred, to account the growing Internet phenomenon. Much longer human history has given us hard-won wisdom, for governance that suits our natures.

***** The recent decades have been punctuated by, first the US Clinton administration's incorporating a names-and-numbers actor, then a decade ago the two WSIS summits, and recently WCIT. Stretching back prior to any formal steps, two implacably opposed camps have, over these couple of decades and to this day, frozen a stalemate.

***** Meanwhile, much longer history teaches some governance fundamentals.

From this summation, two principles arise:

One, the first principle: *Governance must be democratic.* The Englishman Churchill said it succinctly, "Democracy is the worst form of government – except all the others that have been tried." (Namely, all the others as result of which man has died, over eons, to escape.)

That requires, specifically, governance by democratic states, duly elected and – most especially – faithfully responsive to their citizens. With the Internet global, that means governance by regional and global democratic mechanisms. Thus in the case of the Internet, democratic governments, together and in concert, regionally and globally, are to exercise policy discretion and then execute policy for the Internet.

Pointedly, this *precludes* "all stakeholders on a common footing." Arising from the compromises that drove WSIS, some provisions in the Tunis Agenda proved to need tidying up, going forward.

All stakeholders, over long history, have played their manifold roles in a society. The present coining of the notion, multistakeholderism, helps highlight the importance of society-wide contributions to a process of policy formation. Following on that process, democratic states then decide policy, and implement.

Two, the second principle: *Free expression must be inviolate.*

History has taught:

***** Free flow of information is the fundamental enabler for innovation. In particular, freely flowing innovation gave birth to the Internet and could continue to propel its cornucopia for a better life. Around the world, for all, if not stymied.

***** Free flow is necessary for the medium to connect all mankind, around the world, for the possibilities that a world connection may catalyze. With perhaps the prospect for consensus where it matters.

***** Not least, free expression is linchpin for the fluid community dialogue that necessarily underpins democracy.

Roadmap

While this piece begins as a dialogue about principles, for NETmundial, the two principles also set the stage for a framework, for evolution. To begin a roadmap toward governance mechanisms that embody the principles.

As the two principles derive from history, they also offer guidance for the two camps who presently stalemate evolution.

***** For the camp that has so far enshrined multistakeholderism: Only democratic states govern suitably, including for Internet governance. History insists.

***** For the camp that has degraded free expression: History rejects the practice.

Note that acknowledgement – individually, within each camp – of each camp's separate mandate, as derived above from the two principles, can free up progress toward a

framework. If each camp acts on its separate mandate, as above, each may accommodate, and perhaps find the possibility to join with, the other camp.

Ultimately, the principles devolve to global mechanisms for Internet governance that serve both camps and, more to the point, that will serve all.