

Opening Remarks

by

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at the
India Think Tank Forum

Session III
on
“The New Cold War: Information and Cyber Wars”

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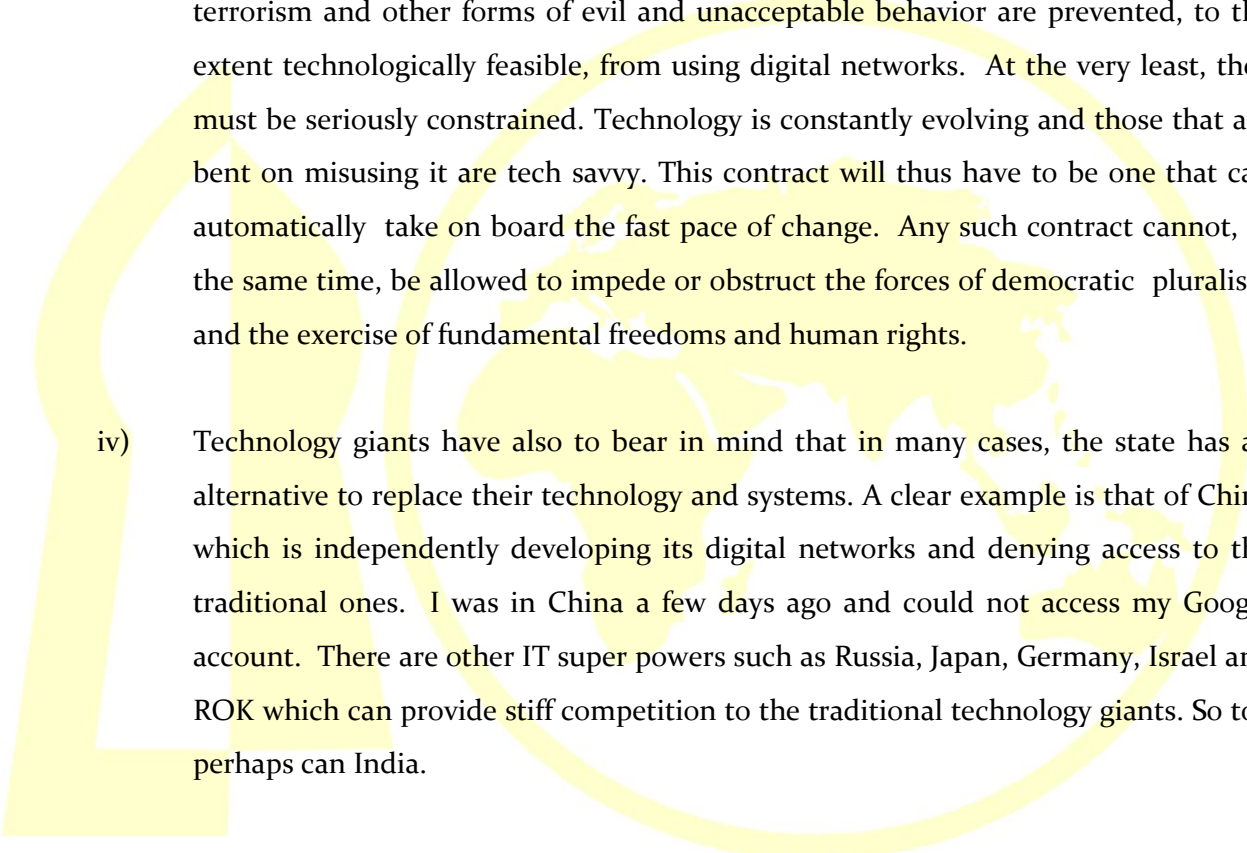
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Three thoughts arise from the content proposed for this Session. First, how digital networks affect the traditional role of the state in securing its borders. Second, content providers and disseminators coming under the political scanner and third, cooperation to tackle terrorism in this fast growing digital era.

These are huge subjects which are of enormous contemporary importance. The signs of the digital world being misused are all around us. Their scope for misuse seems unlimited. In his article entitled "The Paradox of Power in the Network Age" written by David Rothkopf (Foreign Policy, October 2015), the author wrote about 'the Net's ability to swiftly transfer power from node to node or to enable ad hoc alliances to emerge quickly as actors seek strength through collaboration.' He went on to write and again I quote 'Contradictions are themselves an essential aspect of this new era and should inform us as we seek to command a virtual landscape, one that we have made but whose form keeps shifting and whose horizons we cannot see.'

Permit me now to make seven basic points which may be germane to our discussion:

- i) Digital networks are fast replacing traditional written and electronic media. The mobile phone and its potential new incarnations are now probably the most effective medium for disseminating and receiving news, (fake, half truths, opinions or simply facts) & responding to an audience that is virtually unlimited in size. Hence, the demand, more often than not, for instant responses or comments to set the record right or to communicate an alternative thought process.
- ii) The media has traditionally played an important role in foreign policy formulation and analysis of international events, be they political, economic, military or strategic. It has been a major source of information for foreign policy planners. It seriously impacts on any government's ability to secure its borders especially where borders are contested. Besides, even where borders are settled, nontraditional security threats have demonstrated their utter disregard for the sanctity of such borders. The role of the media in maintaining domestic peace and stability is no less important. Indeed, in the fast growing digital world, the role of the media has become even more critical.

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- iii) Technology giants that today dominate digital networks are not intrinsically inimical to the desire of any state to protect its sovereignty, borders and interests. They are aware that terrorists, drug peddlers, human smugglers, promoters of child prostitution and other purveyors of evil need to be stopped. But, often on account of bottom line considerations, legal provisions and the dynamics of evolving technology and hacking, these evil forces are not being contained. This is clearly not acceptable. Hence, the need for a new social contract among governments, business, civil society, technology providers and the courts to ensure that the forces of terrorism and other forms of evil and unacceptable behavior are prevented, to the extent technologically feasible, from using digital networks. At the very least, they must be seriously constrained. Technology is constantly evolving and those that are bent on misusing it are tech savvy. This contract will thus have to be one that can automatically take on board the fast pace of change. Any such contract cannot, at the same time, be allowed to impede or obstruct the forces of democratic pluralism and the exercise of fundamental freedoms and human rights.
- iv) Technology giants have also to bear in mind that in many cases, the state has an alternative to replace their technology and systems. A clear example is that of China which is independently developing its digital networks and denying access to the traditional ones. I was in China a few days ago and could not access my Google account. There are other IT super powers such as Russia, Japan, Germany, Israel and ROK which can provide stiff competition to the traditional technology giants. So too perhaps can India.
- v) There are legitimate issues of privacy involved; not to mention intelligence gathering by states and commercial organizations. Given the current nature of state craft and economic espionage, this is not something which can or will stop very easily. In many democratic countries, the courts are becoming arbiters of what constitutes a legitimate violation of privacy or whether intelligence gathering is consistent with constitutional rights. This process has only started and its future direction is still not clear. There is, however, need to evolve an early international consensus on

guidelines guaranteeing privacy and intellectual property rights versus the need for ensuring security and greater access to technological progress.

- vi) Many multinational businesses today are larger than many national economies. They run complicated transnational production and communication systems. They are developers of technology and knowledge based products.

New technological developments are putting traditional economics on its head and economists and social planners are looking for new ideas to respond to these challenges so as to ensure a fulfilling and productive work life for citizens all over the world. The alternative is even greater social alienation than at present with all its attendant downsides. Business thus has to be a part of the solution and not part of the problem.

- vii) Finally, I believe that the word 'Cold War' is much abused today. I do not believe that we are in a midst of a new Cold War as the topic of this session would suggest. The challenge of Information and Cyber technologies being misused is one that the international community must jointly address. At the same time, it has to be borne in mind that states have always used technological advance to further their domestic and international interests. This is also true of businesses. That will not change given the present structure of international governance. But, digital networks by their very nature cannot be circumscribed beyond a point. Even in China, there are ways in which you can go around firewalls erected to ban sites.

The world will have to change with the extremely rapid technological advances taking place across a huge swathe of disciplines and activities. The international community must harness this change for the betterment of society all over the world and not simply to pursue narrow national interests. Terrorists and other purveyors of violence and evil must not be allowed to benefit from these technological advances. This will require very close collaboration among governments, business and civil society networks. In the interim, states will have no option but to devise ways and means to defend their borders, citizens, economies and societies. And, these measures will seldom be optimal.
