

Nov 04, 2016 by [Tori Horton](#)


United States Wages 21st Century Statecraft Part II: How Does It Work? ^[1]

The U.S. State Department has been using the term 21st Century Statecraft to describe policies and activities promoting a networked society. 21st Century Statecraft has become an important policy issue; it is included in many of the other State Department initiatives including women's rights, crime prevention, landmine reduction, and banking, as these projects develop an online presence to compliment traditional public diplomacy methods.

The U.S. State Department has made a commitment to advocate for freedom of expression online as a human rights issue. While there are some who might disagree with this premise, it is nonetheless a stance the State Department has decided to take. I previously posted a blog examining the implications of making such a bold declaration.

Part II

In terms of public diplomacy, proclaiming the U.S. policy to assist citizens in other countries to obtain open access to the Internet as well as freedom of expression, gives a voice to dissent within oppressive governments. It provides credibility to the efforts of the United States and also creates internal pressure for more tolerant freedom of expression. By being forthcoming in the funding and activities supported by the State Department, the U.S. has opened a window to support activists while maintaining open relationships with other governments.

As USC Professor of public diplomacy, Nicholas Cull outlined in a report on tools for public diplomacy, public diplomats should find ways to support individuals in target countries who might share values. Clinton's strategy, to "promote the connectivity of target audiences," is a savvy example of persuasive public diplomacy. Online activists who support democracy in repressive societies represent the kind of individuals the State Department would do well to support. 

Reinforcing a vision of open expression through online engagement, Clinton and the State Department support public diplomacy projects that share American values. In an effort to encourage independent voices, Clinton has spoken often of projects that fund and protect activists:

November 3, 2009: Forum for the Future

"So the United States is launching an initiative called Civil Society 2.0. This organized effort will provide new technologies to civil society organizations. We will send experts in digital technology and communications to help build capacity."

January 21, 2010: Internet Freedom

"We are also supporting the development of new tools that enable citizens to exercise their rights of free expression by circumventing politically motivated censorship. We are providing funds to groups around the world to make sure that those tools get to the people who need them in local languages, and with the training they need to access the Internet safely

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February 15, 2011: Internet Rights and Wrongs

“The United States continues to help people in oppressive internet environments get around filters, stay one step ahead of the censors, the hackers, and the thugs who beat them up or imprison them for what they say online.”

The U.S. State Department now lists eleven 21st Century Statecraft programs including their Tech Delegations, Anonymous TipLine in Mexico, Apps for Africa Competition, and Landmines in Columbia. These programs, and others, are aimed at making tangible changes to societies through media, although they have been reported to be of varying success.

In addition, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) within the state department has been specifically assigned the task of both advocating and tracking online freedom of expression. In an interview on July 21, 2011 with a U.S. State Department Official, four goals for the department were outlined.

1) Circumvention

The official noted that, at first, this was what much of the work at the state department was about. Back when they started really moving this concept forward, it was about China and helping people navigate around the way China blocks access to the Internet; however, since then, “we’ve seen that it’s not just about blocking content, it is also a platform to express your own voice; it’s about empowerment.”

2) Enabling Expression and Association

Giving activists tools to express themselves and facilitating associations among others can build networks with exponential results. These spaces and associations are the platform for civil society and can impact the social fabric of what people expect from their government and communities.

3) Training Programs

Based on the level of interest, as well as in recognition of the risks individuals face when speaking out on some of these topics, the bureau has taken an active role in training activists to be safe while online. As one Egyptian blogger recently expressed to this state department official, “We’ve always had freedom of speech, we just don’t have freedom after speech”.

In a background briefing given by a Senior State Department Official it was noted that the bureau has “trained over 5,000 activists around the world -- one of the things about these training sessions is that they end up being, what I would call, kind of these underground railroads to distribute not only technology, but also know-how.”

4) Research and Development

This piece is just now developing, however, part of this includes bringing together a burgeoning community of actors to challenge closed communities. It includes activists, techies, as well as diplomats, who each have a different role to play but are critical to building out cohesive projects.

Based on these four areas of focus, the department funds Internet Freedom Grants. They are in their fourth year of funding and recently accepted over 60 applications. All in all, 70 million dollars will have been dedicated to this programming by the state department with a small amount also coming from USAID. The bureau’s funding for this comes from a congressional

mandate and appropriations that were made in 2008.

And while the State Department won't talk much about the specific projects being funded, for the protection of those receiving the grants, one project titled, "Internet in a Suitcase", has been confirmed as a recipient of the Internet Freedom Grant.

Created under the direction of the New America Foundation, Internet in a Suitcase has made it possible to set up and operate an internet connection when access to local connections are either not available or safe.

These types of projects are not covert operations; the State Department has publicly announced this funding in every major speech about Internet Freedom. In addition, they have politically advocated for open access to the Internet as well as the freedom of expression by individuals from within closed societies.

In terms of creating a cohesive policy around freedom of expression, communicating that policy and incorporating that policy into meaningful activities, the State Department has been coordinated and thorough in it's design and development of a public diplomacy strategy. While the premise of the Internet Freedom Policy, not to mention the ramifications, have been quite controversial; the strategic implementation has been successful.
