

Nov 04, 2016 by [Adam Clayton Powell, III](#)

India, Korea, Brazil Now at Heart of Battle for Internet Freedom ^[1]

WASHINGTON --- If you think China and Iran are where the fight for Internet freedom are centered, you may want to reconsider.

According to Bob Boorstin, Google's Director of Corporate and Policy Communications, the crucial battles today are elsewhere.

"India is number one," he said, when I asked which country was at the top of his list. Another is Russia, where he said the problem is the corrupt private individuals who may soon hold the Internet for ransom.

"You may soon be paying large fees to mysterious figures," he predicted, for Internet access there.

Those countries, along with Indonesia, the Philippines and others described as worrisome, are issuing new laws and regulations that may limit free expression online and free access to information. Boorstin singled out two large, industrialized democracies for special attention.

"It has gone past the critical point in Korea; it gives me nightmares," he said. "Brazil always worries me because there are a lot of prosecutors trying to make a name for themselves, and foreign companies are an easy target."

Boorstin described all of these as the countries "in the middle." He explained those are the countries between the very free – he named the U.S. and the Netherlands – and those at the other extreme, such as China and Iran.

"Which way are they going to go?" he asked. "That's the question I'm focused on for the moment."

Ben Scott, Policy Advisor for Innovation in Secretary of State Clinton's office, was another participant at this morning's forum sponsored by the Media Access Project. Scott agreed with Boorstin, mostly, but articulated a different set of criteria for the front lines of Internet freedom.

"Countries with rapid growth rates in Internet connectivity will deal with these questions more rapidly," he said.

According to Scott, some of the most senior, educated people in foreign governments still do not understand the Internet.

"They see it as a problem that needs to be controlled," said Scott, "not a net benefit to humanity."

Asked what would drive the major developments on the Internet over the next 12-18 months, Boorstin and Scott both pointed to 3G- and 4G-equipped mobile telephones.

"The key development is smart phones," said Scott. "More people are connecting to the Internet for the first time, and that will up the stakes. There will be a whole lot more money on the table." And that money, he predicted, would be "pushing for business opportunities."

"Whatever we see in the next 12-18 months will be in the mobile sphere," agreed Boorstin. "Anybody who is looking at what's next on the Internet will have to look toward the hand-held device and what it will allow people to do in everyday commerce, in organizing for political change, and free expression."

Boorstin said he had good news, too, pointing to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Paris, which "got the essence of the open Internet right."

"Anyone interested in where the Internet should go," he said, should look at the OECD, which last month issued a call to "promote and protect the global free flow of information."

"After a long process," he said, "they decided government should not be in charge. When was the last time 35 governments came together on anything and decided they should not be in charge?"

But what about China?

"The Chinese definition of innovation," said Boorstin, "might be interpreted as stealing from other countries."
