

RETHINKING INTERNATIONAL

COMMUNICATIONS

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RETHINKING INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS

By William H. Read

The Arab oil embargo of 1973 taught us not to take basic resources for granted. It also brought about popular acceptance of a unifying concept long understood by physicists, but one that had yet to be grasped by either the public or their elected officials. The concept is summed up in a single word--energy. As became painfully apparent, that concept encompasses a set of intertwined resources--oil, coal, nuclear, and so on. Quietly, without as yet the publicity of a crisis, a similar change has been taking place with respect to the production, distribution, storage, and processing of information.

Today the interests of AP and UPI in information are quite similar to those of Exxon and Chase Manhattan. The routine information for all these organizations travels around the world in common conduits and the contents of that information, while routine, is the lifeblood of each. For news agencies the stakes in information are rather well known, while for business they are less apparent but just as real. At the outset of Storm over the Multinationals, Raymond Vernon puts it this way: "Along with the spectacular improvements in communication came the development of the computer. For the multinational enterprise, the importance of the computer lay in the fact that the routine data needed for the direction and the control of global operations could be transmitted in vast quantities and could be retrieved and regrouped with lightning speed."

Information then--both conduits like satellites and computers, and contents like headline news and business data--is an essential resource

today for news agencies, multinationals, and other organizations, including governments, that engage in so-called transnational activities.* In fact information is a basic resource for practically every activity of a highly connected, if not altogether interdependent, world.

Among those who argue that information is a basic resource is IBM. Obviously the giant computer company has a stake in promoting this idea, but its self-serving interests are not fatal to the thrust of its proposition that "information [is] a resource that's helping us manage our other resources better." It is simply true that in the struggle to manage food and fuel supplies as well as monetary, military and other resources, "information is proving to be an immensely valuable ally," as IBM puts it. It is also true, as IBM claims, that "rapidly advancing information technology [to record, to process, to communicate, to store, and to retrieve information] has become a vital resource in its own right."

Like energy then, information is a unifying concept for a basic resource. The concept intellectually brings together a set of vital resources which in practice have become intertwined as in the example of news stories and business data being bundled in computerized communications systems. Such practices obviously have policy implications. Governments have responded with national privacy laws, telecommunications conventions and other regulations aimed at controlling either information contents, conduits, or both. A less obvious, but nonetheless significant instance of communication policymaking is the verification provision of the SALT agreement. The agreement sanctions the use of "national technical means," a

* Samuel P. Huntington has written that "The increase in the number, size, scope, and variety of transnational organizations after World War II makes it possible, useful, and sensible to speak of a transnational organizational revolution in world politics." Huntington, "Transnational Organizations in World Politics," World Politics, Vol. XXV, No. 3, April 1973, p. 333.

euphemism for sophisticated information technologies like spy satellites. So policies are made, but for the most part they are formed in isolation of each other. Thus there is neither an obvious nor a single answer to the question, "Who makes international communications policy for the United States?" Yet the policy analogs of food, money, and energy all suggest that, when a basic resource is neglected, there can be risks of considerable consequences. With occasional exceptions, as in the intelligence field,* America's information resources are being neglected by the architects of U.S. foreign policy. The reason is that information and communications matters have long been seen as mere parts of the international environment, not as principal matters themselves. Cold war programs to promote the American image abroad and the more recent initiative to organize the INTELSAT system fit the perception of a supporting, not central role for information and communications in world affairs.

As applications of satellite, computer, and other electronic technologies dramatize, the conditions of communicating information across borders are changing, and changing radically.** Yet there are few indications

* That both information contents and information conduits are seen as vital resources in the field of intelligence is indicated by recent testimony of former CIA Director William E. Colby to the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (June 8, 1977). "Information advantage today," Colby testified, "does not consist of a few quiet secrets but of masses of data which must be distributed broadly throughout government staffs in order that they may make their contribution to national policy."

** A central, as opposed to supporting, role for information and communications has been attested to by John F. Magee, President of the international consulting firm of Arthur D. Little, Inc. In testimony to the Foreign Relations Committee on June 10, 1977, he said: "By the traditional yardstick, telecommunications follows industrial development, rather than precedes it. This is now an outmoded thesis... There is growing recognition today of telecommunications more as a precondition than as a consequence of industrial and social development."

that foreign policy generalists are updating their traditional assumptions about the communications process. Indeed there is little evidence that the flow of information is widely perceived in anything other than influence terms. Influence, it is generally assumed, is the reward for those who effectively engage in cross-cultural, diplomatic and other forms of international communications.* Influence notions are fascinating, but unfortunately they are of little help in trying to understand the implications of computer-to-computer "transborder data flows," or of spreading "multinational media," or of "electronic eavesdropping" in a foreign country, or of other recent developments which are yielding high stakes in the field of information communicated internationally. There is then more than just a practical question of how to deal with some slippery new problems. There is a conceptual barrier that needs to be overcome, too.

What's to be done? Recent experiences with other basic resources suggest that the United States has a choice: it can rethink international communications either with foresight or in reaction to events. What follows is a three-part cut at the former. Part one identifies a set of leading policy problems. It is an agenda of information issues and associated communications policy matters in which more is at stake than just the parochial interests of producers and suppliers; stakes, that is, which transcend the self serving concerns of, say, media merchants and

* How much influence ever results from activities ranging from diplomatic "signalling" to governmental attempts at winning hearts and minds abroad remains an open question, despite all the attention given to the subject. Human beings are complex and sophisticated and they have defied every effort so far to find a definite cause-and-effect connection in communication. In the absence of being able to firmly establish an input-output psychological theory for the communications process, concepts like public diplomacy do little more than to identify certain kinds of informational activities.

telecommunications carriers. The setting of a "high politics" agenda is followed by part two: the information resource concept. In part two it is argued that the time has come to free ourselves of old paradigms and to adopt the concept of information as a basic resource--a resource that is central to the conduct of international relations. Finally, in part three, comes a call for innovative thinking about the process by which the United States formulates and implements international communications policies.

Only a few years ago, energy matters played the same role in world affairs as most communications and information matters still do. They were adjuncts, items added piecemeal at the lower end of the U.S. foreign policy agenda. They were, moreover, items of concern mainly to a few policy specialists and, of course, to producers and suppliers of energy resources. Not until the oil embargo of 1973 did foreign policy generalists become concerned with energy. Not until the embargo were basic assumptions re-evaluated and serious attempts made to approach energy as a whole.

So far no crisis, or to borrow a phrase from William James, no "coercive fact" has brought about a similar wholesale change with respect to information communicated across borders. Yet, already, a number of communications issues have crossed the threshold into the realm of high politics. Crossovers have occurred in each major arena of international affairs: east-west, north-south, and intra-west. In each arena are found three leading elements of what might be called "information relations". They are satellites, news, and know-how.*

*Satellites, news, and know-how are not the only items on the U.S. international communications policy agenda. See George Kroloff and Scott Cohen, The New World Information Order, A Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Washington, November 1977. Whether all the issues discussed in that report have crossed the threshold into the area of high politics, the author of this article is not prepared to say.

A stable order for space satellites today embraces stakes beyond those of scientists who conduct experiments in space or of COMSAT and other communications common carriers. So-called "sentries" in space collect the vital information needed to verify compliance with arms control agreements and to monitor other strategic activity as well. Furthermore, communications satellites are used by the Pentagon to transmit command and control information worldwide, and by multinational enterprises for the communication of economic intelligence and other business data.

At one time satellites were thought to be invulnerable. Now two threats are developing. The Soviet Union has been testing hunter-killer satellites, and within the Third World there is serious interest in writing new international laws to govern satellites. President Carter has sought bilateral talks with the Soviets to negotiate a ban on hunter-killers; Third World countries are preparing for a multilateral meeting next year in Geneva that is shaping up as a "Law of Communications Conference."* Meanwhile, in the intra-west arena, the U.S. and West European telecommunications authorities have reached an impasse over whether to lay another undersea telephone cable in the North Atlantic or to place further reliance on communications satellites to carry the decision-making information of transatlantic commerce.

The satellite picture is further complicated because it is linked by a number of Third World countries to the issue of who controls the worldwide flow of news. This issue too involves stakes higher than those of only western news organizations. Indeed it goes to the very heart of north-south relations. By controlling the movement of information via satellite, some

* See William H. Read, "Coming: A Law of Communications Conference", The International Lawyer, Fall, 1977, Vol. 11, No. 4, pp. 713-722.

poor countries hope to rectify the imbalanced flow of news that originates in the rich countries. This issue, joined at UNESCO, goes beyond the better known economic concerns of the less developed countries. It goes beyond a simmering political controversy between Third World leaders, who feel that foreign media are trying to run their countries, and western journalists, who worry that denial of access to information in poor countries makes for an ill-informed world public.* At bottom there is an emotional question of human dignity. That question springs from a neocolonial feeling of always being talked to, of always being on the receiving end of the communications process, of always having to accept the news judgments as well as the cultural values of western countries. The depth of feeling on this matter has been expressed well by President Carlos Andres Perez of Venezuela. "Our peoples," he has said, "are continuously subject to the uncontrolled invasion of news that inculcates in our masses alien values which threaten our national identity." The Soviet Union came close to successfully

*The nature of the quarrel between Third World leaders and western journalists about news is exemplified in these remarks:

"...banning or exclusion is one side of the coin. More serious is the problem of access to the news, getting the information which in Time magazine--domestic and international--reaches 20 million or so Americans as well as 5 million largely non-American readers abroad." (From a statement by Andrew Heiskell, Chairman of Time Inc., June 9, 1977, before the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.)

"...the governments of most of these countries have come to feel that, for whatever reason, events there are not being reported fairly, that their policies and actions are being misinterpreted or misrepresented in the western news media." "...while [foreign journalists] think governments are trying to run the press, governments think that the press is trying to run their countries." (From an address by Carlos P. Romulo, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, The Philippines, before the Hong Kong Foreign Correspondents Club, March 28, 1977.)

exploiting this discontent at the last UNESCO general conference. The Russian representative introduced a draft resolution that would have replaced the human rights principle of free flow of information with one of "information sovereignty". A temporary standoff was barely achieved by the U.S., but the issue has far from disappeared. It was on the agenda of the Belgrade talks on implementing "basket three" provisions of the Helsinki Accords. And the UNESCO general conference later this year is certain to face the issue of free flow of news versus information sovereignty again.*

It is worth noting that the same issue has an intra-west dimension, too. The Canadian government has acted in recent years to curb the effects of alleged "cultural imperialism" that are claimed to result from the importing of mass media from the United States. American publishers and broadcasters reacted in part by contacting their congressional representatives who in turn flooded the Secretary of State with letters. Henry Kissinger is quoted as having said he received more mail from Capitol Hill on the media issue than any other issue in U.S.-Canadian relations.**

Inevitably, discussion of the free flow of information question gets linked with other valuable forms of information besides news. A graduate student from Brazil once asked me, in all seriousness: "If the United States

* If the north-south dialogue is to be a "dialogue with dignity" then something will have to be done about the one-way flow of news from rich to poor countries. For the U.S. government to act will require imaginative proposals because of the constitutional limitations of the First Amendment. One possibility is for the Public Broadcasting Service to coproduce with Third World broadcasters a series of programs on topics of mutual interest. True coproductions, like the much acclaimed "The Arabs and The Israelis", could make a helpful contribution, at least symbolically.

** For a detailed examination of U.S. stakes in international media issues, see William H. Read, America's Mass Media Merchants, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

truly believes in the free flow of information, why does it oppose the transfer of nuclear data to my country?" The question, which makes a theoretically objective connection, springs from an issue known as technology or know-how transfers. It too cuts into all arenas of world affairs. Moreover, what is at stake no longer revolves around the usual political squabbles about foreign aid.

A policy memorandum signed by Defense Secretary Harold Brown has replaced emphasis on restricting the export of strategic goods in favor of safeguarding "design and manufacturing know-how." The latter are "the key elements for control of strategic technology," according to a high level Pentagon study.* But controlling the export of knowledge may very well present the United States with policy choices every bit as difficult as trying to respond to demands from the Third World for the transfer of know-how. Those demands, voiced in vague language at UNCTAD and elsewhere, have at times turned out to be specific requests for access to proprietary information owned by free enterprise industries.

At the OECD, meanwhile, proprietary information and the movement of that information by multinationals has become a matter of concern. Speaking at an OECD meeting in 1977, a French magistrate, Louis Joinet, remarked: "Information is power and economic information is economic power. Information has an economic value, and the ability to store and process certain types of data may well give one country political and technological advantage over other countries. This, in turn," the French official concluded, "may lead to a loss of national sovereignty through supranational data flows."

* See "A Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Export of U.S. Technology," (Washington: Office of the Director of Defense Research and Engineering, U.S. Department of Defense, February 4, 1976).

What all of this adds up to is an agenda of high politics issues in the field of information communicated internationally. How the U.S. deals with these issues will determine to a considerable extent how well Americans live in the years ahead. As things now stand, however, the abilities of the U.S. to formulate sensible policies and then to effectively implement them are constrained. The major constraint is a conceptual one. In the age of specialists, it is perhaps difficult even for a journalist to see much commonality between the news flow issue and the satellite concerns of the military. A few years ago, an equally high conceptual barrier no doubt existed between coal mine operators and atomic scientists. Unlike in the energy field, no events of such magnitude as the oil embargo and quadrupled petroleum prices have served to bring about the sharing of a uniform concept that helps to explain just where the United States stands in the field of information.



By now there is universal acceptance of the fact that the once narrow scope of international relations is forever gone. There not only are new players on the chessboard, but as Stanley Hoffman has said, there are new chessboards too. Crises in food, money, and energy, to name a few, have painfully molded the new perception. Today the trick that policymakers hope to perform is to identify what might be called "forces in action" before they erupt into crises. The trick is not an easy one, for as Vernon has commented: "It is difficult to say which has been harder to assimilate... the sweeping away of some of the familiar political assumptions prevalent in the period after World War II; or the intrusion of new elements in the

mix of international forces, institutions, and practices. In any case," Vernon concludes, "the analysis and understanding of relations among nations are being complicated by both kinds of developments."

Of the two, the sweeping away of familiar assumptions is a greater complicating factor in understanding the role of information in international relations than is the related intrusion of new elements like advances in electronic technology. This is not to underestimate the significance of technological achievements. They have been fundamental, for instance, to the rise of global telecommunications which in turn is the very nerve system of global interdependence.*

While few revisionists or reformers have been spawned from within the established circle of communications specialists, some fresh insights have come from outside. In the early 1960s, Fritz Machlup, a Princeton economist, brought attention to the soaring growth of knowledge in modern societies. A few years later Zbigniew Brzezinski, then at Columbia, evaluated the impact of electronic technology on international relations. This work, while filled with insights, was flawed to the extent that Brzezinski's "technetronic age" emphasized, as a computer scientist might say, hardware over software. The software perspective was brought into sharper focus a short time later by Daniel Bell with his work on post-industrial, or information societies. One attempt by government to catch up with academe is a recent

* The impact of telecommunications on the condition of international interdependence is examined in Oettinger, Berman, Read, Information Resources for the '80s (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Press, 1977), pp. 195-235.

nine-volume report by the Department of Commerce which offers measurements of the U.S. "information economy". Among the Commerce report's major findings was this: the percentage of the U.S. labor force employed in the information sector of the economy rose "to over 40% in 1970."*

The upshot from all this is clear: the production, distribution, storage, and processing of information have assumed a new place of importance in today's world. The ability to put information to use, as one stakeholder points out, "has become critical, not only to the essential production of goods, but to the efforts to provide a better life for the individual, as well."** Certainly there are implications here for foreign policy. What is less certain, however, is how this new situation should be approached.

My colleague at Harvard, Anthony G. Oettinger, has offered some useful thoughts. He argues for acceptance of a unifying concept as has occurred with respect to energy. If a single word is needed, then he says that that word ought to be information. The information concept looks beyond barriers and boundaries that have separated once distinct activities, and places under one umbrella all the resources used in these activities to produce, distribute, store, and process information. Once these resources were

* "The Information Economy: Definition and Measurement," OT Special Publication 77-12 (1), (Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office, May 1977), p. 8.

** This quotation is taken from an IBM national advertising campaign during 1977 keyed to the theme of an "information age".

IBM's stakes in the communication of information are discussed in "Ma Bell Goes to War", Milton R. Benjamin and William H. Read, The New York Times Magazine, November 28, 1976.

scarce and inflexible; now they are abundant and versatile. This change in condition opens up a wide range of choices, and combination of choices, for those who have stakes in information. The choices, however, like those between oil and coal, or between supertankers and pipelines, are influenced by many factors, not the least of which is government policy. And if governments are to make sensible policies, Oettinger contends that they first ought to recognize that information is a unifying concept and then analyze information issues in resource terms.

For the makers of foreign policy, the fact that information can be viewed in resource terms should be a welcome one. A policy planner can begin work by asking a standard set of questions: Who has the resource? Who wants the resource? And what are the terms of exchange? The last of course directly involves policy, in this instance communications policy since the exchange of information across borders is regulated or facilitated by the communications policies of governments. At first glance the resource approach may seem overly simple, indeed inappropriate for some matters by now well conditioned to low politics, on the one hand, and to influence notions, on the other. This approach may appear to offer little towards resolution of technical issues at the International Telecommunications Union or towards improving the prospects for peace through mutual understanding. Yet a reexamination of just one situation--satellites--reveals that a resource analysis is the key tool for communications policymakers.

Communications satellites are conduits, thus their importance is relative to the contents that flow through them. In applying a resource analysis, an analyst would first want to know what information is flowing, for whose benefit, to whose detriment, and at what costs or risks? Through the same satellites of the INTELSAT system flows command and control

information of the U.S. armed forces, know-how and decision-making information of multinationals, and dispatches of news agencies. From a policy perspective all those information flows, often bundled in the same satellites, can be affected by international technical standards on encryption, by reaffirming or repealing the human rights principle of free flow of information, by national privacy laws, by international telecommunications conventions, by de facto acceptance of electronic interception or de jure rules prohibiting the practice, or by deploying or banning hunter-killer satellites. The point of course is that for any communications policy to be sensible the policymaker must appreciate all the information stakes. To do that requires, in the first instance, an understanding of the information concept and, in the second instance, an understanding that beneath that conceptual banner are an assortment of abundant and versatile resources.

The policymaker who comprehends both is better able to see a pair of significant relationships. One is the intertwining of information resources as illustrated by the satellite example. The other is that policy action in one area of communication tends to have effects in other areas, too. The Brazilian who made the connection between free flow of news and restricting the flow of nuclear data has gained a perspective that many a Washington bureaucrat acquired in discovering the conflicting connections between the Freedom of Information Act and the [Information] Privacy Act. In many countries abroad, governments are better organized to make such connections because they have ministries of communications, and in some cases ministries of information. This is not to recommend that the U.S. ought to have a Department of Communications. It is to say, however, that the U.S. cannot long afford to intellectually, or institutionally, blind itself to

seeing relationships among information resources as well as among communications policies.

For some, no doubt, any new concept will be either unappealing or too hard to digest. Acceptance probably will be particularly difficult for those who cling to narrow perspectives, or are responsible for special interests. For national decision makers, however, no better alternative is at hand than to accept the unifying concept of information and to undertake the planning of communications policies by doing resource analyses.

The United States has long tended to be complacent about its vital resources. It too often has required the scare-headlines of a "crisis" to get Washington to act on what should have been identified much earlier as an important policy planning issue. But despite the obvious risk and undesireability of leaving critical policy decisions to be made by some future crisis manager, the problem of not-so-benign neglect of America's information resources remains. Little is yet known about the foreign policy making problems in this area, largely because little has yet been done toward the making of policy. Nonetheless in a few recent instances of policymaking activity both the impact of change in information resources, as well as the relationship among communications policies can be seen.

Besides taking steps to prevent the CIA from again exceeding acceptable bounds of conduct, the Carter administration seems to have done something else, too. Published reports indicate that full account was taken of the fact that the trenchcoat spy is today but one of many means of collecting intelligence. Thus a further illustration of a point made earlier: information resources have become abundant and versatile, offering choices and combinations of choices for carrying out almost any information task.

In another area of policymaking attention--safeguarding strategic know-how--there are some revealing insights, too. If the Pentagon's recommendations are followed, the administration would face a welter of moral, political, not to mention practical questions:

++How would the U.S. monitor and control "the use of U.S. citizens as consultants for key technologies by Communist countries?"

++How would the U.S. monitor and control "the participation of U.S. citizens as principals in firms established outside the U.S. and engaged in transferring embargoed technology and products to Communist nations?"

++How would the U.S. monitor and control "the training of citizens from Communist countries at the more significant laboratories of U.S. technical institutes and universities?"

Obviously any answer to these difficult questions will involve policies that cut across jurisdictional boundaries, and that in itself presents another problem--a problem made none the easier by the fact that the U.S. government is hardly organized to formulate communications policies in a coherent fashion. One of the best illustrations of just how poorly organized the government is came in the publicized case of Soviet eavesdropping on the American telephone network.* A policy forum had to be improvised by setting up a special panel at the White House. No other appropriate mechanism existed then, or now.

* With few exceptions, notably a speech by then Vice President Nelson Rockefeller on the dangers of electronic spying and press conference remarks by President Carter on efforts to alleviate those dangers, the U.S. government has avoided anything like an open public policy debate on the collection of intelligence information by electronic means. Nonetheless, Soviet eavesdropping on the U.S. telephone network and the crash of a Soviet spy satellite with a nuclear power unit aboard have served to publicize this important new dimension of international affairs.

For there to be any improvement will require the gaining of a broader perspective. Otherwise each issue will continue to be treated in isolation, with all the attendant risks of triggering unintended problems in other policy-sensitive areas. It is true that several administrations have attempted to look beyond the confines of individual issues--and they have done so without having accomplished very much. Two studies were untimely. In 1968 a presidential task force on communications policy completed a comprehensive report for its time under the direction of Eugene Rostow, then Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs. It was not finished, however, until after Lyndon Johnson had become a lame duck president. The same fate of political irrelevance befell a similar report prepared by President Ford's Domestic Council Committee on the Right of Privacy. In between, the Nixon administration created a White House Office of Telecommunications Policy. Its association with Spiro Agnew's anti-media campaign, however, was to discredit the office and thus make it an obvious choice for elimination from the Carter White House.

While three previous administrations have unsuccessfully struggled to make some coherent sense out of communications policy, the Carter administration has yet to even seize an opportunity. Indeed it has missed two. In its well intentioned desire to reorganize government, this administration has established a National Telecommunications and Information Administration in the Department of Commerce and an International Communications Agency linked to the State Department. By most accounts, both reorganization plans were conceived just to streamline government; neither was seen as an opportune moment to think through the overall process by which government addresses information issues. In fact, there is no

clear relationship between the National Telecommunications and Information Administration and the International Communications Agency. Meanwhile, a Soviet reconnaissance satellite crashed in Canada thus dramatizing the urgent need for a stable satellite order, something, as we have seen, that involves much more than military security. So far the conclusion that communications policy problems are interrelated seems to have eluded the Carter administration.

That conclusion was, however, confirmed in 1977 in the broadest Congressional hearings ever conducted on international communications and information matters. Senator George McGovern's Foreign Relations Subcommittee on International Operations took testimony from publishers, broadcasters, business executives, scholars, a labor leader and a former CIA director on what Senator McGovern called the "ripening implications" of a new age, an "information age." Three days of hearings produced a record on information issues broader in scope than any previous congressional hearings. In a followup staff report titled "The New World Information Order", several key questions were raised:

++How can the flow of information be increased to better all mankind without impinging upon personal privacy, proprietary data and national security?

++How can--or should--the Second and Third Worlds desire to rigidly control information sectors of their societies be accommodated, while trying to allow free flow of information worldwide?

++How can the U.S. Government organize to protect our security, cultural and economic interests and also help meet the needs--and gain the cooperation--of the developing nations?

The Foreign Relations Committee has begun to ask some of the right questions. It certainly has made a strong case for challenging comfortable assumptions and for analyzing new elements in the mix of forces that affect

communications decisions. As yet the Executive has not acted. However, a number of proposals already have been put forth by academics, interested individuals and some organizations. An Undersecretary of State for International Communications, a special presidential assistant, a Department of Telecommunications, an International Communications Foundation, and a total rewrite of the 1934 Communications Act, still the nation's basic law in communications, all have been proposed.

It is difficult to assess the merits of such proposals in the absence of a thoughtful look at the whole situation. What needs to be examined are not just stakes and issues, but efforts should be made to identify the "forces in action" that are bringing new kinds of communications issues to the top of the U.S. foreign policy agenda. A narrow focus on technology alone, for instance, will miss the interplay between rising communications capabilities and, as an economist might say, the demands of information users. Moreover, we need to approach the whole area of international communications without carrying along all the old notions of how government might influence behavior abroad. Instead we should adopt the unifying concept of information and then ask: "Just how well prepared is the United States to formulate and implement policy that affects America's information resources?" Or, to put the question in a more conventional, if provocative mold, we should ask: "Are this country's information relations with the world getting better or getting worse?" In sum, the U.S. needs to rethink just where it stands with regard to the international communication of information.