



Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

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WILL THERE BE A REAL SHIFT IN GLOBAL INTERNET GOVERNANCE?

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“..., India recognizes that all the stakeholders are key and multistakeholderism is perhaps the only way to keep the system integrated, growing and expanding through new innovations and investments.”¹

*- Mr. Ravi Shankar Prasad
Minister of Communication and Information Technology, India*

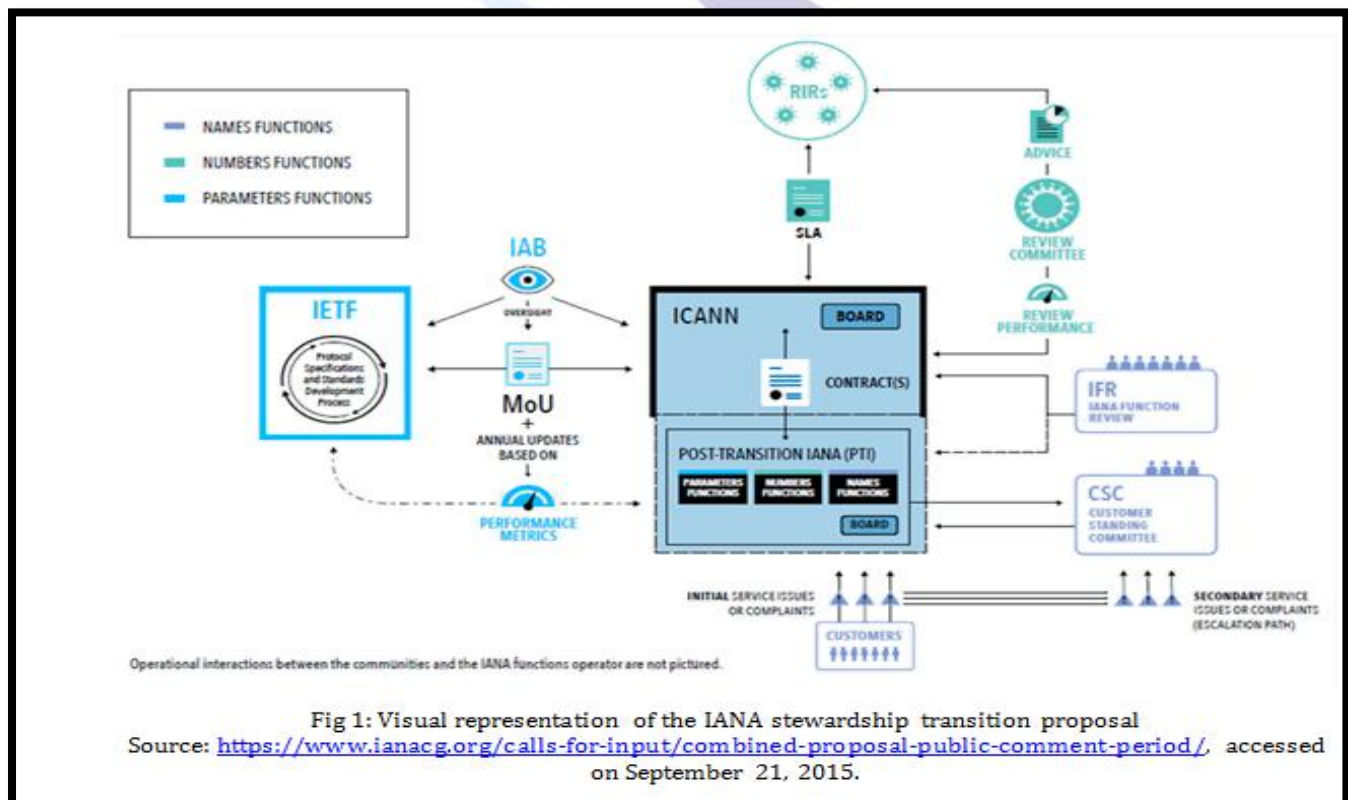
The above statement made by the Minister of Communication and Information Technology of India, Mr. Ravi Shankar Prasad, in his recorded speech to ICANN's 53rd Public Meeting held on June 23, 2015, has brought an end to the long pending question of what would India's stand be on global internet governance. It is now clear from his speech that India has taken a firm stand in support of the multi-stakeholder model of governance which was propagated and promoted by the US and its allies and has rejected the model of Multi-lateral governance promoted mainly by China and Russia.

In this context, it is important to analyse the recent developments in the global internet governance. In July 2015, the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA), the organization

which virtually runs the Internet, released their proposal for transition of stewardship of the IANA functions from the US Commerce Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to the Global Multi-stakeholder community. This proposal was the outcome of the US government's decisions on March 14, 2014 to handover the operations of internet from under its legal and organisational oversight to a global multi-stakeholder setup. It should be noted here that this decision of the US to give away its stewardship role was however not voluntary, rather it was a compulsory option as it was in an awkward situation after the strong criticism from the world community following the Snowden revelations of US mass digital surveillance.

The IANA stewardship transition proposal prepared by 'IANA Stewardship Transition Coordination Group (ICG)' is the interim draft which came to public view on July 31, 2015 and the organization requested for public comments on the proposal till September 08, 2015. Without moving into the technicalities of the proposal, if one can put the proposal in simple terms, the NTIA's stewardship role was replaced with a multi-stakeholder Board or Review Committee. Therefore, the IANA and the US claims that if this proposal is implemented there would not be any oversight of the US government as its agency, NTIA, would no longer be in the stewardship role.

for the transition has been extended, there is a widespread concern among the global cyber community regarding the amount of global partnership in the global internet governance. While it has been proposed that NTIA would be replaced by a multi-stake holder Board and Review Committee, the first and foremost question that arises is why the US government does not want to replace NTIA with a global organization like International Telecommunication Union (ITU) or any other special global organization created for this purpose? Although the US says that the global internet should not be influenced by one country or a group of countries, there is still no clear



The initial deadline announced by the US government for this transition was September 30, 2015; however, the deadline has been now extended by one year. Although the time period

answer to the above question.

The second important question is related to the amount of global multi-stake holder participation in this entire transition process.

While it is claimed that the transition process is transparent and the global public, and more importantly the stakeholders, are consulted in all possible ways, the reality looks different. Although the proposals created by the working groups are released for public comments, it is kept as a secret within a closed community although the changes made to the governance eventually would affect each and every user of internet in the future. The amount of public participation in giving comments for the proposals is neither global nor multi-stakeholder in nature. This is evident from the report prepared by ICANN based on the public reports that they received for the proposal of Cross Community Working Group on Enhancing ICANN Accountability¹, which is also part of the transition process. According to this report the proposal has received comments only from 48 organisations and groups and 15 individuals across the world which cannot be considered as global multi-stake holders' participation. Also, the time given for public to comment is very less; in this case it is just 40 days, which is grossly inadequate given the magnitude of the issue and technicalities involved in this transition process.

Third is the question regarding the affiliation of the board members and review committee members who are going to administer IANA in the future according to the current proposal. In spite of the rhetoric that the board and review committee will be constituted with members from among the stakeholders, it is

practically impossible as there are too many stake holders. Also, because this board would be a global autonomous body without any proper legal governance, hence, there is a possibility that its members would behave authoritatively in the future, which might affect the functioning of the internet. The possibility of these members favouring few nations and acting according to the vested interests cannot be overlooked.

Next comes the important issue of root name servers' management. There are totally 13 root name servers in the world which act as the spinal cord of the internet functioning. These 13 root name servers are managed by 12 different organisations, mostly belonging to the US, which are bound under the laws of the US government.² For instance, Verisign Inc. is a private organisation which manages two root name servers and it is legally governed by the US laws. Therefore, unless the management of these root name servers does not go into the hands of a 'multi-stake holder' group the governance of internet cannot be considered global and uninfluenced by any one country.

Therefore, based on the above highlighted issues and more issues which are at stake, it can be said that the drama of transition of internet governance from US oversight to a multi-stake holder group is just an eye wash by the US government in order to erase the frustration it suffered after the Snowden leaks. However, such a transition can also become favourable for the

global community if it truly becomes global eventually, which, only time can tell.

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])

¹ “Report of Public Comments”, ICANN, <https://www.icann.org/en/system/files/files/report-comments-ccwg-accountability-draft-proposal-19aug15-en.pdf>, accessed on September 22, 2015.

² “Root Servers”, IANA, <https://www.iana.org/domains/root/servers>, accessed on September 23, 2015.

