Independent Commission on Multilateralism
"The Impact of New Technologies on Peace, Security, and Development"
Keynote address by David Kirkpatrick
October 23, 2015

I'll start by surveying the big picture of the landscape we're in, and I hope we can have a very interactive conversation afterward. We will be dazzled by the technologies that are soon to come. They present enormous potential for creating better lives for all the people of the planet. But adapting our lives and our institutions to them will present enormous challenges.

These technologies almost universally will not fit neatly into the social and political orders that preceded them. People are going to be living new lives, with more power and authority at the ground level, and that will require enormous adaption by all countries, companies, and institutions in the multilateral system.

What is called for is a renewed focus on connecting everyone into the global communications grid. Pragmatically, what leaders like yourselves need to embrace is the need to market your visions using these new tools.

The bottom line reality is that the players have shifted. Whether you like it or not the UN doesn't matter as much anymore. That is the way to think about how technology is changing the landscape for peace, security, and development.

Top down structures are not reinforced by modern technologies. Rather, individuals are empowered. This is a wholesale shift in the functioning of society.

Bill Gates and Paul Allen began Microsoft with the goal of putting "a computer on every desk and in every home." Mark Zuckerberg, 25 years later, wanted to "make the world more open and connected." Jack Dorsey, inventing Twitter, wanted to "Make people more aware of the world around them."

These visionary entrepreneurs have all succeeded. Pretty much everyone in developed societies has a computer. They use it to connect to the Internet. Those people who don't have a computer increasingly have a smartphone. Projections are that 5 billion people will have them by 2020. They use them to connect to the Internet. Now most of them are joining Facebook and becoming connected to their friends. Now they are very aware of the world around them. This is a very good thing.

But the UN and multilateral institutions, just like every large company and organization in the world today, must step back and rethink their roles in the context of the changed landscape.

Here's another way to think about the way the environment has changed and it is something I thought about deeply in the writing of my book *The Facebook Effect*. In the old days, before about 2000, media was in the hands of adults—people who were respected authority figures.

In the U.S., Walter Cronkite was the paradigm of the type—a wise man who had achieved his stature and influence over years of practice of the art of journalism. When he was appointed anchor of the

CBS Evening News it was an anointment to power. There were very few such anointed broadcasters in each country. They spoke one to many.

Today we are all broadcasters. Broadcasting has become democratized.

One of the most central shifts that Facebook brought about in the landscape was it gave all its members the trivially-easy ability to broadcast to their friends.

The way this broadcasting works on Facebook is not that someone says, "turn on the broadcast functions of this software." Instead, broadcasting is intrinsic to how Facebook works.

To use it, you simply indicate who your friends are and connect with them inside the service. But the way the service's software works is to insure that when you simply do something—write a post, put up a video, post a photo—it gets routed to your friends.

Facebook is performing the role that the expensive transmitting towers formerly played for television stations. Now it is cheaper, and we don't even realize we are broadcasting. We are simply doing things and saying things on Facebook. The software distributes our ideas for us.

One central problem that comes along with this changed landscape is that the restraining structures of countries, national laws, historic past practice, and even traditional decency are now thrown out the window. People are operating globally, unbound by the protocols and community standards of the past. They are aggregating online with people who share their biases and views.

On balance, in my view, this is a good thing. I think that on balance, it will militate towards more peace and more security. When I opine on whether or not all this connectedness is a good or bad thing, I am making a statement about my fundamental view of human nature.

Now all our human instincts and impulses are facilitated by rapid electronic sharing. Whether you think all that sharing and expression results in progress or chaos will ultimately reflect whether you think people are, on balance, good or bad.

But we have to realize, people are in charge. They will not be guided, repressed, controlled, or restrained by what their leaders say. They will do what they want.

Facebook's 1.5 billion users are interconnected in a web of mutual freedom of speech and mostly friendly concord. However, there are frightening outliers even within Facebook and across the Internet generally. Interconnection and the widespread social sharing or broadcasting of media by young people can be very destabilizing as well.

The shocking freedom of ISIS to recruit members globally is a clear example of how the old restraints no longer function. ISIS is a master of social media. It gets into the bedrooms of our children and speaks to them. There is little we can do to stop it, except inculcate in our children fundamental decency and humanity that will inoculate them against messages of hate.

Another very recent and equally shocking example is the current uprising among Palestinian youth in Israel. This is a spontaneous revolt. Its leaders cannot be negotiated with, because there really aren't any traditional leaders.

The leader of one day's revolt is whichever kid posted an inflammatory video the night before, ostensibly showing the abusive behavior of an Israeli soldier or some other topic of potential outrage. It will be impossible to negotiate away the power of that kid, or the next kid, or the next one.

I am afraid the net impact of this kind of landscape can be less security, if security is the ability to protect what we have and insure it is not disrupted or undone. One of the many consequences of the empowerment created by social media is that a small percentage of evildoers can have a disproportionate negative impact on social harmony and order.

We now live in an atmosphere of chronic instability, rendered that way by the ability of individuals empowered by technology to do anything at any time, prompted by their relatively spontaneous impulses.

If someone's rage happens to resonate with the zeitgeist of their online community, it can very quickly ignite a powerful collective expression of anger or disruption.

How did the Arab Spring arise in 2011, first in Tunisia then in Egypt, Libya, the Gulf, and eventually Syria? It was because teenagers and twenty-something youths broadcast their dissatisfaction to their friends on Facebook, and later to the wider world on Twitter.

It is also what happened with the gigantic youth revolts in Spain and Israel in 2011, in Brazil and Turkey in 2013, and in Hong Kong in 2014. In each of those countries, vast hordes of mostly young people simply moved into the streets to express some form of dissatisfaction with the government at the time. They coordinated these events largely spontaneously, using social media. There were never clear-cut leaders making decisions for the masses of demonstrators. The people simply made their move. In each case they achieved some small amount of political movement and then melted away.

In Spain, the net result was concrete—the creation of Podemos—one of the country's most powerful political parties even still. In Turkey, the net result was quite different—a much harsher response from the government and the stifling of further collective dissent and complaint by the citizens.

In Brazil, the uprising forced Dilma Rousseff's government to be much more attentive to this day to the breadth of dissatisfaction with the cost of public transportation, government corruption, and the inadequacy of education and health care systems in the country.

The environment is mostly calm now, globally. But the people will rise up again. Just wait until the next famine, or drastic water shortage, or weather disaster that is not properly responded to by a local government. They will speak out and they will speak out strongly.

But the good thing is that it is not only rage and dissatisfaction that can quickly resonate with an online community. It can as easily be love and empathy. The world's collective response to the benign words of the Pope in the last couple years is a reassuring sign that positive vibrations can spread as quickly and powerfully as negative ones.

When you look at this set of forces I'm describing, be careful not to think you understand them. Nobody does. They are just too new.

For instance, the next phase of interface for our mobile devices is likely to be augmented and virtual reality. This means we will be able to either overlay digital imagery on the real world we see in front of us, or else gain the sense we are really completely somewhere else. The reason Mark Zuckerberg bought the company called Oculus is because he believes that the future way that Facebook's members will relate to one another is by entering shared spaces together.

If you think it is hard now for established institutions and leaders to retain control over their populace, imagine how hard it will be when their shared experience is so completely virtual that it feels like real life.

Will people join virtual mobs to express racist reaction, or will they gather in virtual space to meditate and pray for peace? Most likely both will happen. Such is the range of human experience. Tech is merely an amplifier.

The challenges to governance of the Net that have emerged in recent years show on the one hand that finally national governments have recognized the power of a connected society. Many of them are responding to the unsettling implications of these trends I'm describing by wanting more and more to restrict and control access to the Internet. The idea that top-down structures will be harder to maintain is not something many leaders want to accept.

So in Turkey and India and China and Russia and many other countries, national governments have introduced restrictions—sometimes harsh and broad-ranging restrictions—on what information individuals can see.

One of the great global battles of the coming years will be over whether or not we will continue to have one uniform connected global Internet with information generally flowing freely around the world. I frankly don't believe that it can be stopped, but I believe many nations will go to great lengths to attempt to stop it.

But people who get a taste of the Internet do not like to give it up.

Remember the fascinating lesson that Hosni Mubarak learned during the Arab Spring uprising in Egypt. As the crowds of protesters grew in the streets, he figured out that people were getting most of their information from Facebook and Twitter, so he ordered Vodafone to turn off the Internet across Egypt. But what did that lead to? Far more people streamed into the streets, because no longer could they find out what was happening on their computers and phones. The massive protests only grew larger. And in the end Mubarak was overthrown.

As one sage writer noted, "You can shut off the public Internet but you cannot shut off the Internet public."

My friend Andrew Rasiej of the Personal Democracy Forum notes that there is a new type of person arising globally—a person for who connected experience is completely central to their lives. It is important to them emotionally, culturally, spiritually, and politically.

In general, these people distrust hierarchy, which was the very basis for all the institutions of the traditional multilateral system. These people are building networks themselves. And they are eager to build a world that serves their own needs better than the old one has. That new world may or may not include diplomats and traditional institutions.

They generally don't care about nation-states. If necessary, they will create their own new ones. To see what I'm talking about, think of ISIS. That is literally a new nation-state created by people who live on the network. The fact that it is motivated by a creed of hatred and exclusion is tragic. But it shows how much can be achieved by the empowered hordes of the new generation.

Overall, though, because I think most people are well-intentioned, I want them to have this kind of power.

I am a firm believer that connected people will ask for what they want, both guiding policy makers and, when necessary, bypassing them. In my view, the most important thing that multilateral institutions can do to improve the prospects for peace, development, and even security is to advocate for and assist in more fully connecting the world.

I find it shockingly disappointing that in the endlessly-debated Sustainable Development Goals, putting everyone on the planet onto the Internet was relegated to a sub-goal of goal number nine on innovation and infrastructure.

I think if there was one single goal that would boost global sustainable development, giving everyone on the planet access to the high-speed Internet would be it. A vast number of people in the technology sector agree on this. Giving people the Internet gives them the tools to demand and to help build the other tools of society that they need.

Let me wrap up by coming a little closer down to earth.

Many of my statements are strong ones and may seem extreme.

But no matter what you think about the future shape of societies that may be created by people empowered by social media and a networked society, it is inarguable that even in the near term the existence of these new forms of communication means that all of our actions are more scrutinized by the public. All of what we do as diplomats and public servants and even citizens is much more open to public debate and reaction.

The savvy modern politician uses Twitter because whether or not they originate their communications there, that is where their actions will be reflected. Therefore they must take the initiative. They must be socially communicative before their actions are socially communicated by others. Donald Trump is upending American presidential politics because he understands this so well.

The great new political leaders of all ideologies around the world are those who are not afraid of popular reaction to their every word. They expect each word to be scrutinized.

If you are to be effective leaders of multilateral institutions you have no choice but to bring the public on the journey with you. Whether on a local level, a national level, or an international level, what you do will evoke reactions from the public.

Now that they can organize themselves and broadcast their views about whatever actions you take, you have to anticipate that.

Effective leaders of global institutions will take that as a given and deliberately bring the citizens of their country and their world along the journey with them. We all have amazing tools such as Facebook and Twitter and WeChat and LinkedIn and Weibo and Apple and Google and Orange and Telenor and Vodafone and ATT and China Mobile and many others have given us.

This is the landscape in which we all now do our work.

The way the great institutions of the planet have to respond is to become mobilizers and promoters. We must all become more skilled at marketing. There will be no top-down decrees governing how people must respond. They will have to be cajoled, convinced, and educated in how to do what is most beneficial for the society of which they are a part.

If the great institutions of society do not step up to this challenge, the ever-more-powerful companies of technology may step in and do it for you.

Some people say that Google, Facebook, Amazon, Apple, and even Alibaba and Tencent will, over time, have more sway and influence than nation-states. When you see Apple overruling the U.S. government on whether or not private communication should be encrypted and secured from snooping, you see just how real can be the dominance of the tech collossi.

Here's another example: new forms of Internet access may arise from these companies that bypass the ability of nations to control them. Remember Radio Free Europe and how it broadcast into communist countries during the cold war?

Facebook and Google are now building systems based on drones, high-altitude balloons, lasers, and satellites to connect disconnected regions to the Internet. Nation-states may be hard-pressed to restrict the broadcast of Internet connectivity. This is, you might say, today's version of Radio Free Europe.

If you think this is a bad thing, you have to find ways for the existing institutions to function with more recognition of the world in which they operate, with an embrace of the technology realities and the tech tools that the world's citizens have embraced.

Tech holds enormous promise for society's advancement. But to advocate for tech means also to take responsibility for the maintenance of values—how can we remain, or become, a people-centered world of amity and brotherhood as tech transforms everything around us?

Tech has a bad reputation in many quarters. We see the risk of people dehumanized, their privacy undermined, their individuality reduced to numbers, becoming interchangeable cogs on an ever-more-efficient assembly line of production and output.

But I think despite all those often-legitimate fears, we are on the cusp of an era of tech-enabled empowerment, connection, triumph and imagination, a time when tech asserts itself as a truly re-humanizing force. We have to work for it. But tech can be an astonishing tool to draw humankind together.

Nothing great anymore will be achieved by decree. But there is a world of people out there waiting to help make a world that is more peaceful, safe, and affluent.