

1. Introduction

Conference Rapporteur: Richard Hundley

RAND is embarked on a three-year effort to chart the likely future course of the information revolution throughout the world over the next 10-20 years, in all its various dimensions.¹ This is intended to be a broad, multi-disciplinary effort, employing a mixture of conferences, workshops, and in-depth studies with a broad range of participants from both inside and outside of RAND, covering all relevant disciplines, to lay out a family of possible “futures” describing the likely course of the information revolution as it plays out in various nations and regions.²

The first major step in this effort was a conference on political/governmental, business/financial, and social/cultural trends driven by the information revolution, as they manifest themselves in various nations and regions. This conference was held in Washington, DC on November 16-18, 1999, with participants from North America, Europe, and the Asian Pacific region, covering a broad cross section of intellectual disciplines. This report presents the proceedings of that conference.

The specific aims of this conference were threefold:

- To explore the range of existing views about how the information revolution will influence political, economic, and social conditions and developments throughout the world; how advances in information technology and their applications may create or exacerbate tensions in any of these spheres; and how the consequences of the information revolution in one sphere may be linked to consequences in another.
- To identify some of the factors that may be key in shaping the course and the consequences of the information revolution in different countries.

¹ This effort is being carried out in support of the Information Revolution initiative of the National Intelligence Council’s Strategic Estimates Program.

² We are not trying to predict one “future” for each nation or region around the world, but rather a range of possible futures.

- To lay the groundwork for constructing examples of alternative scenarios of how the information revolution will play out in different countries.

We were most fortunate in the caliber of the participants at this conference: 43 senior-level individuals from government, academia, and the private sector in North America, Europe, and the Asia Pacific region, whose collective breadth of experience and depth of expertise covered most aspects of the information revolution, as it is manifesting itself throughout the world. Among the participants were experts on North America, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and most of the Asia Pacific region (including China, Japan, the rest of East Asia, South Asia, and Australia). The participants' names and organizational affiliations are given in Appendix A.

The conference began with an initial plenary session devoted to broad organizational and social consequences of the information revolution, and to its technology underpinnings.³ Sections 2 and 3 of this report summarize the course of this session. Next came a series of plenary sessions devoted to various dimensions of the information revolution, to explore themes recurring throughout the world. The deliberations of these sessions are summarized in Section 4 (the political/governmental dimension), Section 5 (the business/financial dimension), and Section 6 (the social/cultural dimension).

Following the plenary sessions, the conference began its discussion of the different ways in which the information revolution may proceed in various regions of the world by considering three national/regional snapshots: Japan, India, and Africa. These snapshots are presented in Section 7.

The conference participants then divided into a set of four breakout groups, covering different regions of the world, to address how the information revolution may play out in each of their areas. Section 8 (North, Central, and South America), Section 9 (Europe), Section 10 (the Asia Pacific region), and Section 11 (Middle East, Africa, and South Asia) present the results of these breakout group discussions.⁴

As the reader will see from pursuing these various sections, the conference discussions covered a broad range of topics in considerable depth, and generated a rich set of observations regarding the course of the information revolution

³ This session, and all subsequent plenary sessions, began with prepared talks to serve as a point of departure, followed by an extensive audience discussion period to capture the collective perspective of all the participants.

⁴ The reader will note that each breakout group took a somewhat different approach. We view this as of positive value.

throughout the world. A number of major themes emerged during these discussions. These are integrated and summarized in Section 12.

As indicated earlier, this conference was merely the beginning of a multi-year effort to chart the future worldwide course of the information revolution. Section 13 describes what we expect will come next.

Appendix B presents the complete conference agenda, including the titles and speakers for all of the prepared talks presented at the conference.