

trends that help foster growing global transparency are unlikely to be reversed. The widespread accessibility of satellite imagery is emblematic of the diffusion of information age technologies, as well as institutional pressures for revealing information. Rather than expending efforts trying to control the spread of information technologies, the United States is in a better position to help chan-

nel information trends through technological leadership. In terms of satellite imagery, such policies should encourage global access to the diverse benefits of steadily improving commercial and civilian observation satellites while helping to limit the potential risks of hostile states or non-state actors being able to effectively use such satellite imagery data for their aggressive purposes.

NOTES

1 For background on the Corona imaging satellites and the imagery declassification process, see Robert A. McDonald, ed., *Corona Between the Sun & the Earth: The First NRO Reconnaissance Eye in Space* (Bethesda, MD: The American Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing, 1997); and Dwayne A. Day, John M. Logsdon, and Brian Latell, *Eye in the Sky: The Story of the Corona Spy Satellites* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998).

2 Good arguments for both perspectives are presented in Yahya A. Dehqanzada and Ann M. Florini, *Secrets for Sale: How Commercial Satellite Imagery Will Change the World* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000); and Gerald M. Steinberg, *Dual Use Aspects of Commercial High-Resolution Imaging Satellites* (Ramat Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University, The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 1998).

3 Trends in the satellite remote sensing applications are analyzed in Kevin M. O'Connell, et. al., *U.S. Com-*

mercial Remote Sensing Satellite Industry: An Analysis of Risks (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001), 23–64.

4 See the QuickBird image used in John Larkin, "Exposed—Kim's Slave Camps," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (12 December, 2002), 14–18; and the IKONOS image comparisons in "Campaign Poster," *The New York Times, Week in Review* (26 March 2000).

5 For case studies on using satellite imagery for resolving territorial disputes in Central Europe, South America, and the South China Sea, see the various chapters in John C. Baker, Kevin M. O'Connell, and Ray A. Williamson, eds., *Commercial Observation Satellites: At the Leading Edge of Global Transparency* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND and ASPRS, 2001), 295–360.

6 The origins of U.S. policy are assessed in John C. Baker, *Trading Away Security? The Clinton Administration's 1994 Decision on Satellite Imaging Exports* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University, Institute for the Study of Diplomacy Publications, School of Foreign Service, 1997).

War and Peace in an Age of Transparency

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Innovations in information technology have changed the conduct of diplomacy. Some opinion leaders theorize that these innovations also will have dramatic effects on war and peace and, more specifically, that the information age will usher in a more peaceful world. The

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scope of their beliefs ranges from intense optimism to measured hopefulness that greater international trans-

parency will improve political relations among governments.

According to the optimists, information technologies provide more information about the capabilities and intentions of governments, a condition commonly referred to as "transparency."

Greater transparency has the potential to clear up misunderstandings between governments that have often led to conflict in the past. Increased transparency helps governments understand the non-aggressive intentions of their neighbors and aids conflicting societies in recognizing underlying values they have in common. Transparency also provides early warning of impending conflicts and allows outsiders to intervene before hostilities get out of hand. Unfortunately for the optimists, greater transparency is not the unmitigated good they suggest. While transparency may indeed promote international peace and security, its effects are complex and may even exacerbate conflicts.

What is transparency exactly? Transparency is a condition in which information about governments' preferences, intentions, behavior, and capabilities is widely available to the global public.¹ It is a condition of openness enhanced by any mechanism that discloses information, such as the Internet, a free press, or open government hearings. In the realm of international politics, five factors in particular have led to the rise of transparency:

(1) *The Spread of Democracy*: Between 1950 and 2000, the number of democracies in the world rose from 22 to 120.² Democracies generally are characterized by a free press, public hearings, freedom of assembly, competing political parties, and contested elections—all of which facilitate the release of information to

both domestic populations and observers worldwide.

(2) *The Widespread Availability of Information Technologies*: Information technology is revolutionizing global communications, making it easier and cheaper to share information than ever before. As just one indication, there were 580 million Internet users in the world as of May 2002 and more than one billion users are expected by the end of 2005.³

(3) *The Rise of Global Media*: CNN, BBC, DeutscheWelle, and other twenty-four hour news networks provide nearly instant, real-time coverage of breaking news around the world. CNN's ten U.S. and twenty-seven international bureaus deliver news to 78 million U.S. homes and to an additional 212 countries and territories.⁴ Viewers, distressed by what they see on these broadcasts, may pressure their politicians to act and end the suffering they see on television.

(4) *The Spread of NGOs*: Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are growing in both number and power. The Union of International Associations now lists over 15,000 internationally-oriented NGOs, and the growth of informal coalitions is outpacing the growth of formal organizations.⁵

(5) *Increased International Requirements for Information Disclosure*: International organizations often require their members to disclose information to each other and the global public in order to publicly identify, and sometimes punish, those who violate international agreements. Absent formal punishments, offenders may come under fire from other governments, as well as transnational or domestic interest groups.

Although transparency benefits international politics in many ways, it is important to note that transparency can

exacerbate conflicts when states are truly hostile or have real conflicts of interest. In these circumstances, transparency underscores hostility and can even amplify it, making efforts at conciliation politically difficult. When publics on both sides of a conflict voice their animosity, public out-

U.S. military official told the *Washington Post* that the United States would not directly challenge Iraq if it seized Kuwaiti territory, saying, "We are not going to war."⁷ President Bush announced in a televised statement on August 2, "We are not discussing inter-

Transparency can promote better international relations, but it can also highlight and intensify differences.

rage can spark a spiral of hostility that complicates diplomacy and may preclude a peaceful resolution. Even states with democratic institutions can find themselves trapped in cycles of hostile rhetoric, as in the 1898 Fashoda Crisis between Britain and France, and during the prelude to the Spanish-American War. In both cases, parliaments and newspapers on both sides fanned the flames of conflict, even as leaders tried to resolve the conflicts peacefully.

Transparency's effects on deterrence may also be counterintuitive. Greater transparency reinforces deterrence if it shows strength and resolve, but transparency can also invite aggression if it shows weakness or a lack of will. For instance, before Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the Bush administration sent Saddam Hussein mixed signals about the strength of U.S. support for Kuwait's territorial integrity. A week before the invasion, State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler noted publicly that the United States "does not have any defense treaties with Kuwait and there are no special defense or security commitments to Kuwait."⁶ Officials repeatedly stressed the absence of a formal obligation to defend Kuwait. One

vention."⁸ These statements may have been directed at a nervous public, but they certainly did not help either to deter Iraq or encourage withdrawal after the invasion occurred.

One hope for greater international transparency is that more knowledge about internal conflicts, especially those that might escalate to genocide, will allow outsiders to recognize and stop conflicts before they get out of hand. When early intervention doesn't occur, publics will pressure their governments to respond to the crises they see on television. While both scenarios are possible, national interests and political considerations are still more influential in determining whether states will engage in preventive diplomacy and conflict intervention. To give an example, we now have ample evidence that the United Nations, as well as national governments like the United States and France, was relatively well informed about the 1994 genocide in Rwanda but chose not to intervene. Leaders feared the political consequences of losing troops in a distant conflict where no clear national interest was at stake. This was particularly evident in the United States, where the Clinton administration took heavy political fire for the vio-

lent murder of eighteen U.S. Army Rangers in Somalia in 1993 and was reluctant to engage in a similar conflict. Despite regular newspaper reports of massacres in Rwanda, the American public did not pressure for intervention until the fighting ended in July—over 3 months into the crisis—and televised pictures of the ensuing refugee crisis moved them to action.⁹ Knowledge of the killings certainly did not guarantee action in Rwanda and greater transparency is unlikely to encourage intervention elsewhere if national interests are not at risk.

As mentioned above, transparency promotes better international relations when it shows that societies share common views and values, but transparency can also highlight and intensify differences. Diplomacy is complex in the age of transparency because public opinion and political rhetoric are evident not just to the primary audience, but also to foreign citizens and their leaders, who may exploit differences in opinion for political gain. President George W. Bush's sometimes harsh rhetoric before the 2003 war with Iraq may have been directed at Saddam Hussein and the American public, but American allies listened, too. This language, intended to show resolve and build domestic support for a war, contributed to a heated debate at the United Nations Security Council over how to deal with Iraq. Likewise, President Jacques Chirac's critical rhetoric regarding U.S. policy towards Iraq was widely popular in France, but antagonized American leaders and many citizens.

The risks of transparency outlined above should serve as a warning to leaders that belligerent statements have consequences and should not outpace policy.

Publics and political players around the world are listening and reacting ever more quickly to what an official during the Fashoda Crisis called "brave words for public consumption." With the spread of democracy, publics don't just listen, they also have the political power to force their leaders to respond.

The fact that greater transparency may sometimes exacerbate conflicts is no excuse for governments to control information. Excessive secrecy allows governments to avoid scrutiny, which can lead to inefficiency, abuses of power, corruption, and pure wrong-headedness. U.S. Senator Robert Byrd, when criticizing the secrecy surrounding tests of anti-missile defense systems, asked "Should this basic information be protected by the cloak of government secrecy? If the tests are rigorous and our anti-missile system is meeting our expectations, would it not be to our advantage to let our adversaries know how effective this system will be?"¹⁰ Conversely, if the tests showed the systems were not meeting expectations, Byrd argued, we would all have an interest in knowing this too. Secrets, in other words, may be counterproductive or held for the wrong reasons.

Greater transparency, in sum, is not the unmitigated good that many of its proponents suggest. Transparency's effects are complex and cross-cutting, especially in issues related to war and peace. Information-age diplomats must understand that increasing global transparency is transforming how governments interact with their publics and each other. Leaders and educated publics need to realize that while a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing, sometimes a lot of knowledge can be dangerous, too.

NOTES

1 Bernard I. Finel and Kristin M. Lord, *Power and Conflict in the Age of Transparency* (New York: Palgrave, 2000).

2 "Democracy's Century," Internet, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/reports/century.html>, (Date accessed: 22 May 2003).

3 See Computer Industry Almanac, Internet, <http://www.c-i-a.com>

4 Wendy J. Williams, "The CNN Effect: The first 24-hour news channel has reshaped the TV landscape," *Boston Herald* (28 May 2000), 6.

5 Quoted in Ann Florini, ed., *The Third Force* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000).

6 "Missed Signals In the Middle East" *The Washington Post* (17 March 1991), W19.

7 Steven A. Holmes, "Congress Backs Curbs Against Iraq," *The Washington Post* (27 July 1990), A5.

8 Miles Hudson and John Stanier, *War and the Media: A Random Searchlight* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 214.

9 *The New York Times* printed 145 articles on Rwanda between April 7 and May 31 and *The Washington Post* ran 77; 25 and 14 of those stories, respectively, were front-page stories.

10 Senator Robert Byrd, "Hearing on National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003," *Congressional Record* (25 June 2002), S5983-S5995.