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PAPER 2

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INSERT

INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

This insert contains the passages for Paper 2.

Passage 1

1 There aren't many ideas that unite former U.S. president George W. Bush and his successor, Barack Obama. But one safe topic for conversation would be Internet freedom and the power of technology to foment democratic revolutions. In mid-April Bush welcomed to his new think tank in Texas six dissidents who used Web tools to oppose dictatorships, applauding them as examples "of how the Internet can be effectively used to advance the freedom agenda." Obama, meanwhile, has made Internet freedom a centerpiece of his foreign policy, and in a speech in Beijing late last year hailed "access to information" as a "universal right."

2 This kind of talk taps into a wide vein of techno-utopianism that has been around since at least the dawn of the Web. The Internet is disruptive by nature, rapidly overturning business models and mores, so it was natural for tech-savvy foreign-policy thinkers to believe that dictatorships, too, would fall with the click of a mouse. That, of course, didn't happen. In fact, quite the opposite is true, say a growing number of cyberskeptics. Autocrats have "mastered the use of cyberspace for propaganda," says Evgeny Morozov, one of the smartest and best-known cyberskeptics. Worse, they've learned to mine online information, such as Facebook profiles, for intelligence purposes. "The KGB used to torture to get ahold of this data," says Morozov. "Now it's all available online." In short, say the cyberskeptics, the Internet will lead to the entrenchment of dictatorship, not its end.

3 But that is a shortsighted view, and one predicated on the trend line over the last few years, in which autocracies appear to have gained the upper hand against democrats. If it seems as if they have, it's because the hardliners are playing catch-up – they've finally recognized the existential threat posed by the Internet. The color revolutions in former Soviet republics, the post-election protests in Iran, the saffron revolt in Burma, and smaller-scale Chinese demonstrations against pollution and corruption – all prominently featured the use of online tools and mobile phones to organize protesters and project their message around the world.

4 The cyberskeptics are right that this is not a one-sided fight; Iran's Basij militiamen can use Facebook, too. But the Internet represents "the largest increase in expressive capability in human history," as the writer Clay Shirky puts it, and because of its open, decentralized architecture, it is biased toward open, decentralized systems, i.e., democracies. For instance, the use of Twitter by protesting youths in Moldova last year to create a flash mob in the capital city of Chisinau illustrated just how powerful an organizing and communicating tool the Internet is, even when limits are placed on it. And when dictators fight back against it, they're pushing against a wall of water. "It's a cat-and-mouse game," says Daniel Calingaert, the deputy director of programs at Freedom House – each new government restriction is met with an inventive workaround, which prompts new restrictions. In Moldova the government blocked cell-phone reception in the square where protesters had gathered. So the protesters simply walked a couple of blocks away to post tweets, then returned to the square. Their tweets dominated the micromessaging service for days.

5 Of course, there is a logical end to any cyber cat-and-mouse game that goes on long enough. During Burma's saffron rebellion in 2007, the junta maintained its heavy-handed Web censorship tactics, blocking many foreign sites and e-mail programs, but protesters easily circumvented them and managed to post photos and firsthand accounts of the regime's brutality, including a video of a soldier shooting a Japanese reporter dead. On September 29, the junta decided it had had enough and simply shut down the country's two Internet service providers. To the techno-utopians, this was a splash of ice-cold water to the face, suggesting that the government in power virtually always holds the trump card. But in one way the junta's extreme reaction actually revealed the futility of its censorship. Their choice was a binary one: accept that the Web cannot be controlled, or eliminate it altogether. Choosing the latter sets a nation on a path to becoming the next Hermit Kingdom, a decision that almost every nation is unwilling to make.

6 The cyberskeptics also forget that the path toward democracy is a long one, and that the Internet is, in many places, less than 10 years old. The late political scientist Samuel Huntington once remarked that the wisest democratic reformers "tend to be leery of simple solutions and of revolutions." Massive protests and toppled statues make for great TV, but most of the hard work comes well before and lasts long after the putsch. It's during that long process – which academics such as Huntington call "democratic consolidation" – that the Web's impact will be most felt. Mobile banking and e-commerce are helping more people join the ranks of the middle class, typically the first group to agitate for freedoms. Bloggers and tweeters are fulfilling the watchdog role in places where the mainstream media is muzzled. Election monitoring can now be performed by anyone, thanks to open-source platforms like Ushahidi, which facilitate anonymous reporting. In other words, Presidents Bush and Obama are right to agree on this issue: the digital masses trump the despots.

Barrett Sheridan, "The Internet Helps Build Democracies" (Newsweek, April 2010)

Passage 2

1 When Google announced earlier this year that it would shut down its China search engine after hackers allegedly broke into Chinese human-rights advocates' Gmail accounts, the activists, editorial boards, and commentators lauded the company. In doing so, they echoed an argument made by many technophiles and politicians since the late 1990s: the Web, and new communications technology in general, will open up closed societies and hasten the demise of authoritarian regimes, with freedom-loving Internet companies leading the charge. Bill Clinton said as much at the time. He told Chinese leaders that they stood "on the wrong side of history."

2 But the idea that the Internet will spark the decline of autocrats has been proven false. In the past four years, Web penetration has grown in most authoritarian states, yet overall the number of free societies worldwide has declined in that time period, according to annual reports by monitoring organization Freedom House. Online activists in many places have much less freedom than they did four years ago as well. In Vietnam the government has rounded up most of the leading online activists and sentenced many to jail; in Thailand, a soft-authoritarian state, the government recently arrested an editor of one of the most respected and vibrant online news sites. In China the government has shuttered thousands of blogs and sites in the past year alone.

3 Authoritarian regimes have undermined the potential power of the Web in several ways. Like China, many have developed highly sophisticated methods of monitoring and filtering Web sites. These autocrats increasingly are learning from each other's filters: Vietnam has sent officials to Beijing to study the "Great Firewall of China," while China has exported its technology and Internet-control strategies to Saudi Arabia and Burma, among other countries. These governments also use state-backed commentators to control online discourse and threaten political opponents. China reportedly has some 250,000 state-backed commentators weighing in on popular forums, and the Kremlin has its own funded "Web brigades," which attack liberals and praise Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. And rather than just put portals in the hands of Western companies, savvy autocrats are creating their own. China is launching state-backed versions of Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook, all of which surely will not include content about controversial topics like the Tiananmen crackdown or the Dalai Lama. The Kremlin reportedly may launch a government-backed search engine as well, which will create headaches for Google in Russia as well.

4 Worse, much of the public in countries like China and Vietnam has no idea how much news and information they are missing out on in their filtered Web universe. Since these states allow just enough online freedom to perpetuate a fiction of a free Internet, while quietly blocking politically hot sites, users often think they are seeing the same Internet as someone in the U.S. or Japan or another free country.

5 In some ways the Internet and other new communications technology make it easier for authoritarian regimes to monitor political activists. Relying on technology to organize can lead activists to ignore old-fashioned on-the-ground political networking, critical for massing street protests or getting bodies to a polling booth. And by creating their own personal Web pages or Facebook pages, activists in countries like Iran are building the kinds of dossiers of information about themselves that, in the old days, government security services had to work hard to piece together. It also has become easier for the security services to follow dissidents, since they can track groups of them online rather than having to infiltrate meetings of dissidents in people's homes or in bars. When the Chinese government wanted to crack down on the creators of Charter 08, an online petition calling for the rule of law and greater freedom, it could find most of their details online; many Iranian Green Movement protestors think Tehran used protest leaders' Facebook pages and other online identifiers to find them and their friends after last summer's antigovernment demonstrations.

6 Those supposedly beneficent Internet companies, dedicated to open networks and free expression, also have turned out to be, well, companies – interested first and foremost in the bottom line. Nokia and Siemens allegedly helped produce technology for Iran's state telecommunications company that the Iranians then used for monitoring phones and other communications. Yahoo helped Beijing find and arrest a Chinese journalist and prominent rights activist. The largest Chinese Web sites, like local search-engine giant Baidu, employ teams of Web monitors who look for and remove anything in their traffic banned by China's propaganda department. And though Google may have made an ethically responsible choice in China (though it had only a small slice of the search market in China anyway), in the days after its decision there was a deafening silence from other big technology firms with China operations. "We have done business in China for more than 20 years and we intend to continue our business there," a Microsoft spokesman told the press after Google pulled out. Turns out, these companies didn't want a free and uncensored Web that badly. And once the hype over Google's exit fades, the companies will go back to business as usual. And the countries in which they operate will crack down once again.

Joshua Kurlantzick, "The Web Doesn't Spread Freedom" (Newsweek, April 2010)