

Wiley Rein's David Gross Testifies on Future of Internet Governance

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Ambassador David A. Gross, chair of Wiley Rein's International Telecommunications Group, testified today at a joint U.S. House subcommittee hearing on efforts by some countries to expand international regulation of the Internet.

Although the most radical Internet-related proposals were not adopted, it is "very troubling" that a new global telecommunications treaty—signed late last year by 89 countries including China and Russia—seeks to create a new Internet governance role for the United Nations' International Telecommunication Union (ITU) regarding "spam" and to legitimize government inspection and blocking of Internet communications, Amb. Gross told members of two House Foreign Affairs subcommittees and the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications and Technology.

Amb. Gross, who served as the U.S. State Department's Coordinator for International Communications and Information Policy from 2001-2009, was a member of the U.S. delegation that rejected the treaty at the December 2012 World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT-12) in Dubai. The U.S. was among 55 countries that refused to sign the treaty.

"Looking ahead, it is important to recognize that, although many believe that WCIT failed because 55 countries—including the United States, virtually all of Europe, and other Internet-leading countries such as Japan, Kenya and India—did not sign the revised treaty, in reality WCIT is an important early chapter in the critical global process of discussing the political and policy future of Internet networks and services—and in turn, the technical and economic future of the Internet," Amb. Gross said at the hearing.

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The revised International Telecommunication Regulations (ITRs) adopted at WCIT-12 will not take effect until 2015 for the 89 countries that signed the treaty, Amb. Gross said. In the interim, U.S. engagement at international forums, such as a conference the ITU will hold in Geneva in May, can be "particularly important," he said.

"Regardless of the venue, there is much work to be done to convince the world that our Internet vision benefits people regardless of where they live because it is a key to better lives globally," Amb. Gross said.