

US in tough debate on UN Internet rules

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Terry Kramer, US ambassador to the World Conference on International Telecommunications 2012, speaks in August 2012 at the Information Technology Council in Washington, DC. Kramer, who heads the US delegation for the December gathering of the UN's International Telecommunications Union, said he has seen a number of "surprising" and "worrisome" proposals.

The US faces a tough debate with emerging nations such as India and Brazil at an upcoming UN conference discussing global rules for the Internet, the US delegation chief said Wednesday.

Terry Kramer, who heads the US delegation for the December gathering of the UN's [International Telecommunications Union](#), said he has seen a number of "surprising" and "worrisome" proposals.

The discussions are being held ahead of the ITU's World Conference on International Communications opening next month in Dubai where global telecom rules are to be updated for the first time since 1988.

US officials and lawmakers, along with a number of Internet activists, have expressed concern that proposals from China, Russia and other nations could threaten the open model of the Internet by giving the UN agency a greater role.

Other proposals being floated have drawn fire in the United States because they would impose a "transfer" [payment model](#), requiring companies such as [Facebook](#) and Google to pay data charges, upsetting the existing Internet model.



An Indian designer uses a computer to put the finishing touches to a carpet design at a factory in the Bari Brahmana industrial area of Jammu in July 2012. The US faces a tough debate with emerging nations such as India and Brazil at an upcoming UN conference discussing global rules for the Internet, the US delegation chief said.

Kramer, speaking at a Washington forum sponsored by George Mason University, said the US stance has received considerable support in Europe and "in parts of Asia" but that debate in other areas was ongoing.

"In Africa there have been a variety of proposals that are very worrisome," he said. "In India there are some proposals we found candidly surprising ... in Brazil, the same situation."

Kramer said that some of the proposals "sound innocuous, they sound friendly" but could undermine the basic tenets of a Internet of free-flowing information without [government interference](#).

He said charging a website for data could have a negative impact, not just on big US firms like [Google](#), but on educational and nonprofit organizations.

Gary Fowlie, head of the ITU liaison office to the UN, said the agency is not attempting to dictate the outcome but that updated telecom rules may help extend the benefits of the Internet to those lacking access.

Fowlie told the same forum that the telecom rules can be a "valuable tool to strengthen sustainable development."

He also said that "it could be argued that the Internet would not exist today if we had not agreed to (revised telecom rules) in 1988."

But Milton Mueller, a Syracuse University professor who studies Internet governance, said it's not clear that any new [telecom rules](#) will achieve their stated goals.

"We should probably get rid of them altogether," Mueller said.

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