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**The Internet, Transnational Networking, and
Regional Security in South Asia**

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New York, New York

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**The Internet, Transnational Networking, and Regional
Security in South Asia:
Some Possibilities for the Near Future**

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The Internet, Transnational Networking, and Regional Security in South Asia: Some Possibilities for the Near Future

Chetan Kumar

The little academic work that has been done on the impact of information technology on international relations has focused on one of the following two themes:

Analysts have raised the possibility of increased turbulence in the world system as the flow of information becomes democratized, as information becomes broadly available outside previously narrowly defined areas of expertise, and hence, as hierarchies tumble.

Others have focused on the impact on military security of the increasingly sophisticated means available to both rival states, as well as groups that challenge states, for changing and disrupting the flows of information and the information systems on which modern militaries are so heavily dependent. A subset of this literature has raised the specter, without presenting credible evidence, of the Internet allowing a proliferation of both terrorist organizations, as well as of technologies such as bombs and other weapons that such organizations might use.

A third possibility has received little academic attention: The growing use of information technology, particularly the Internet, by non-state actors might actually create new communities and forms of interaction that are conducive to international peace and security. This could happen in two ways.

First, the Internet offers the potential for closed networking among elite groups of professionals, analysts, and policy makers for sharing information and testing ideas that may yet be too controversial to be launched publicly. Such networking speeds up interaction among members of critical policy communities and reduces the need for frequent physical gatherings.

In a recently completed survey for the Program in Arms Control, Disarmament, and International Security (ACDIS) of the University of Illinois, the Ford Foundation, and the International Peace Academy (IPA) of the possibilities of using the Internet in furthering the cause of arms control and security in South Asia, I presented a model of such networking to a number of senior analysts, researchers, and former policy makers. The responses, while largely favorable, differed in terms of the kinds of security issues that would be best addressed by such networking, and the problems that would have to be dealt with before such networking would become possible.¹

Second, the increased use of the Internet by civic organizations around the world to network, share resources and ideas, and develop common strategies not just within countries, but also across the boundaries of countries, in a number of issue areas—human rights, environment, nuclear nonproliferation, arms control, and so on—strengthens democratic functioning and helps create more responsive governments. Citizen diplomacy, therefore, does not just build confidence across state boundaries, but also reduces insecurity among the civilian populations within state boundaries and hence, enhances the local capacity for managing incipient conflicts.

In a doctoral thesis completed in 1995,² I examined some of these possibilities through a comparison of transnational networking focused on the following four issues: (a) the environmental damage to the Amazon basin in Brazil, (b) the Chiapas insurgency in Mexico, (c) the potential environmental damage from large dam projects on the Narmada River in India, and (d) the insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir in India. For each of these

1. Appendix 1 at the end of this paper lists the individuals with whom I conversed during this survey. Because all conversations were strictly off-the-record, none of the comments and observations presented in this paper can be attributed to any one of these individuals.

2. See *It's Virtually Politics: Information Technology and Transnational Activism in the Developing World*, dissertation defended with the Department of Political Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1995 and submitted in 1996. Dissertation adviser: Professor Stephen P. Cohen.

issues, I examined the role that information technology played in allowing networks of individuals and organizations to promote common agendas, develop joint campaigns, and ultimately influence policy processes.

In this brief paper I will examine the possibilities that the Internet in particular, and information technology in general, provide for enhanced peace and security in South Asia. This exercise should offer useful comparative lessons (despite the uniqueness of each individual region) to other organizations attempting to promote electronic networking in the area of international peace and security in the world's various regions. Examples include the Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development, which sponsors the Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network, and the International Peace Academy's Program in Conflict Management in Africa, which is attempting to increase networking among civil society organizations in Africa in the interests of enhancing the contribution of such organizations to conflict management.

This examination will draw upon my recent survey tour of South Asia and from the relevant sections of my doctoral thesis, and will address both the issue of the Internet as a networking tool for elite groups, as well as the role of information technology in promoting transnational civil society networking.

The Internet and Elite Networking in South Asia

Commentators on diplomacy have conventionally identified two "tracks" of diplomacy: the first track involves official contacts among diplomats representing formally-constituted governments. The second involves transboundary contacts among a number of non-official actors, including nongovernmental organizations, research institutions, and so on. Given the changing landscape of contemporary diplomacy, however, one can ideally identify at least five tracks:

Track one would involve meetings among diplomats representing formally constituted governments.

Track two would involve meetings among diplomats of at least two countries over a violent dispute between a formally-constituted government and a nongovernmental challenger. The February, 1997, talks in South Africa between the Zairian government and the rebels in Eastern Zaire that were mediated by the United States and South Africa would fall in this category.

Track three would involve the objectives of either track one or two, but would not be focused on actual negotiations. Instead, with the unofficial blessings of official actors and the participation of experts who would suggest new strategies for breakthroughs, this track would involve preliminary explorations with the intent of preparing the ground for an eventual formal negotiation. This is the track where parties can informally explore ideas and positions that political compulsions would prevent them from developing in public. Examples of such "back channel" diplomacy include the prelude to the Middle East peace process, and the prolonged series of contacts between the Frente da Libertacao de Mocambique (FRELIMO) and the Resistencia Nacional Mocambicana (RENAMO) that were hosted by the Community of Sant'Egidio, and which preceded the negotiations that ended Mozambique's civil war.

Track four would involve what has conventionally been considered as being track two discussions among organized representatives of civil society over ways of building bridges and reducing tensions among countries that might be in conflict, or over reducing conflict across a region or subregion. This track would not involve official actors, but may generate ideas and strategies that could be fed into policy making.

Track five would involve educational and cultural exchanges including musical performances, art shows, and film screenings that would allow the cultures and peoples of two or more states to understand more about each other, and thus help remove the stereotypes and ignorance that can fuel conflict in the long run.

While several of the tracks mentioned above might proceed simultaneously, these tracks form a rough continuum from track five to either track two or track one in terms of an ascending order of the intensity of exchanges between two parties that might have been in conflict.

The networking model that I presented to experts in South Asia in my recent survey lay somewhere on a continuum between tracks four and three. The model can be summarized as follows:

A group of fifty selected individuals from academia, government, media, and think tank circles from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka would be networked on an experimental basis for about twelve months via an e-mail list, a file server, and the BBS. These individuals would analyze information on a set of critical security issues provided to them via the network, bounce opinions and ideas off each other, and

work toward deriving policy options from their discussions. This dialogue would also involve especially selected participants from the United States and China, and would be conducted with the help of some institutions, both within the region and without, that would serve as network mobilizers. In other words, these institutions would devote staff time to selecting and preparing information for the network, for coordinating and editing the contents of the e-mail list and the BBS, and for prompting the network participants toward being timely and targeted in their responses.

This project would initially be supported by funds from foreign donors, and would hopefully generate enough momentum within its experimental phase to be largely sustained locally after the first year. Support toward this end would be sought from local businesses and nonprofit organizations.³

The networking project presented here would not necessarily be created to serve as a prelude to “track-three” type of diplomacy. However, given the changing circumstances of the region, it could serve the following two functions:

It *could* end up serving as a prelude to a track-three, or even a track-one, negotiating process, particularly if it garners the attention, and hopefully the participation, of currently serving policy makers.

Alternately, it could proceed parallel to a track-three or track-one process (with perhaps even components of track two, given the insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir), and serve as a source of ideas and fresh thinking for this process. It could also perform the independent function of creating a strong support base for a peace dialogue among those of the region’s intellectuals who are focused on security and strategic issues. The ideas and support of these intellectuals would undoubtedly be required to implement any conclusions or agreements reached on any of these tracks.

The participants in this survey were questioned regarding both the substance of this model, as well as the practicality of implementing it in terms of resources and logistics. Several common parameters of thought, with varying degrees of adherence to each parameter, emerged from the conversations:

The Substance of the Model

Surprisingly, all of the participants agreed that a networking project of this nature would contribute positively toward enhancing regional peace and security. Many participants felt that a network of this nature would address both the need for the availability of the most current information (a need not so easily met throughout most of the developing world), as well as the need to be able to brainstorm, co-create, and share ideas with peers and colleagues on an active and continuous basis.

There was general concurrence among the participants that the proposed network should tackle not just the nuclear issue (that predominates on the minds of most regional and Western security analysts), but a broad range of causes of insecurity in the region. The underlying presumption was that the insecurity that might necessitate the use of nuclear weapons emanates not just from the possession of nuclear weapons, but from a range of factors that make both the states and the societies of the region insecure. The following areas were the favorites as potential targets for a networked dialogue:

Issues of governance, particularly in the context of the impact of globalization on South Asia, and ethnic and parochial responses thereof on the part of the affected populations;

The question of South Asia’s nuclear future; business and trade links among South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) members, and their relationship, if any, with security issues;

The impact of environmental degradation in the form of resource scarcity and the resulting conflicts (particularly over water).

Those participants who wished to keep the dialogue limited to nuclear issues alone argued that while the other areas were important in the long term, the short-term issue of the greatest import, and the one that could most concretely be targeted by a group of senior analysts, was the nuclear question.

3. Key elements of this model were suggested by Dr. Thomas Graham of the Rockefeller Foundation. The Rockefeller Foundation has sponsored activities in the Middle East and the Korean peninsula that have focused on the use of the Internet in promoting regional security.

Participants who wished to conduct this narrow dialogue were in a minority, however. From the arguments made by both sets of proponents, however, it was not clear that any one set of issues would benefit more from elite networking than any other set of issues.

The vast majority of the participants agreed that the critical determining factors in the success of the network would derive from the participants and from the overall framework of the network. These factors would be as follows:

- commitment of the individual participants to sustaining the dialogue, and to proposing and discussing concrete ideas with each other;
- creation of a common set of questions at the beginning of the dialogue that would serve as the basis for discussion, and that could then be further refined and added onto during the course of the dialogues;
- establishment of concrete markers for the dialogue—the periodic release of summaries of key conclusions or recommendations arrived at by the participants via a web site, for instance—that would provide for some goal-oriented discipline.

The vast majority of the participants, including even former government and military officials, were hesitant about involving active government officials in the dialogue. Their reservations were based on the following grounds:

- Previous networking and confidence-building exercises that had largely focused on government officials obtained little apart from allowing government officials to avail themselves of free travel; most officials in the region, particularly in the India–Pakistan context, tended to speak past each other rather than to each other.
- Given the highly secretive and hierarchical structures of the South Asian bureaucracies, there was little chance of active officials being able to say anything, even on a closed network, that had not been approved by their various departments. This would only slow down the network's deliberations.
- While there were some extremely capable incumbents among the foreign minister and foreign secretary positions within the region, these functionaries would simply not have the time to participate in a networked dialogue. Junior officials, on the other hand, might not be able to say much.

Despite these constraints, a number of participants agreed that it would be useful to have some government officials participate in the network. While these officials would most likely be passive participants, it would be useful to have them receive the contents of the e-mail list through which the participants would conduct their dialogue. This would ensure that they remained attuned to the issues being raised within the dialogue, and received full information about any conclusions or recommendations derived therein. It would also preempt any incipient suspicion or hostility on the part of the officials that would cause the extremely security conscious governments in the region to block Internet access for the respective participants.

Several participants raised the issue of whether it was worthwhile to conduct a dialogue that simultaneously embraced all of the region's states. These participants pointed out that both intellectually and practically, the concept of South Asia as a region was becoming increasingly nebulous. India was actively casting its sights eastward, toward the Asia–Pacific region, in search of investments and alliances, whereas Pakistan was seeking the same from Central and West Asia (and increasingly within the context of a pan–Islamic identity). While Pakistan's nuclear posture remained consequent upon India's, the latter's own nuclear posture derived greatly from its apprehensions about China's nuclear ambitions and its relationship with the international community on the issue of nuclear nonproliferation, particularly with the United States. Hence several Indian participants saw greater utility in letting India and Pakistan continue their reorientation away from each other, and instead conducting the proposed networked dialogue between India and the United States alone (an idea also favored by some in the United States) and keeping it focused on nuclear issues.

This viewpoint, however, was actively countered by a majority of the other participants, who pointed out that, with the exception of Afghanistan, Pakistan's attempts to garner greater commercial and diplomatic influence with the rest of the Islamic world had foundered. Central Asia remained primarily engaged with the rest of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and relations between Iran and Pakistan had worsened over the Shia–Sunni divide. All contemporary evidence pointed toward a continued Pakistani engagement on the Kashmir issue. On the other hand, while India had had success in engaging the attention of the Pacific Rim states, primarily because of its huge internal market, it had also taken steps toward engaging its neighbors. The

recent landmark water-sharing agreement among the states of the Eastern Himalayas subregion was a good example. All these factors pointed toward the continued relevance of a dialogue centered on the concept of South Asia as a region.

An important substantive issue that was raised by a number of participants related to the fact that, as in the rest of the developing world, the Internet was an elite technology in South Asia. While Internet access was now widely available in India, and broadly available in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka (with both Pakistan and Nepal catching up rapidly), its use remained limited to an elite group of English speaking, largely westernized subscribers, mostly from among the scientific and professional communities within the private sector. This was in contrast to the United States and most of the West, where the Internet, while being initially launched by the U.S. Department of Defense, had subsequently grown organically because of the ragtag and largely anarchic efforts of a broad cross section of intellectuals, activists, and professionals. This difference could have two consequences for the proposed networked dialogue:

There was some risk, however minor, that Internet access might be seen as a plaything of a young elite, and therefore not as a new forum for substantial dialogue. This factor, however, would disappear over time as the networked dialogue jelled into place.

A second, more substantial risk, is that Internet access might seduce people to the wonders of the World Wide Web, without fully appreciating the extent to which simple, conventional e-mail can serve as a powerful networking tool. One participant pointed out that an attempt to establish the first indigenous language bulletin board had foundered in Bangladesh as Internet access had become more broadly available and participants in the prospective BBS had been drawn toward surfing the web or establishing web sites on their own instead of joining in a collective dialogue. This risk, however, could be minimized by ensuring that selected institutions made the latest information from the World Wide Web rapidly and equally available to all network participants.

Several participants were apprehensive about the fact that many analysts in South Asia hesitated to openly share information and ideas with their peers and colleagues. This was because of either the fear of unwarranted public attention or ridicule (particularly because most security issues in South Asia are cast in jingoistic terms in public discourse), or because of the fear of new ideas being appropriated without due credit being given (notions of intellectual property in South Asia, while improving rapidly, unfortunately remain tenuous). Participants suggested that the proposed network be launched with a workshop that, among other goals, would also seek to assuage whatever apprehensions various individuals might have about the Internet in this regard. For instance, it could be pointed out that a restricted access e-mail list would be an ideal networking device in that it would keep the content away from the public eye, even as it allowed individuals to simultaneously present their ideas to a select group of peers and colleagues, thus reducing the risk of someone else being able to claim those ideas.

Most participants agreed that the initial dialogue should be conducted for an experimental period, perhaps a year, and that the subsequent dialogue should be developed on the basis of the lessons learned from the first year. The majority of participants agreed that now was a propitious time for launching the dialogue because of the following factors:

The overwhelming majority obtained by Mr. Nawaz Sharif in his election as the Prime Minister of Pakistan gave him a much broader leeway to pursue a resolution of the contentious Kashmir issue than had been enjoyed by his predecessor. This leeway was also backed by an overwhelming desire on the part of both the civil society as well as the military officer corps in Pakistan to prioritize putting Pakistan's internal (particularly economic) house in order.⁴

Continuing economic liberalization and political decentralization in India meant a foreign policy that was increasingly driven by a pragmatic blend of idealism and necessity, and directed toward mending fences with neighbors. The recent water-sharing agreement involving Bangladesh and the overtures toward China and Sri Lanka were indicative of this. Perhaps some ideas on a possible rapprochement with Pakistan that would not trip over the twin 800-pound gorillas of weak governing coalitions at the center and the Bharatiya Janata Party's strident parochialism would be welcome.

4. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan and Prime Minister H. D. Deve Gowda of India have authorized the resumption of official dialogue between the two countries at the Foreign Secretary level after a break of three years. See Michael Drudge, "India/Pakistan," *Voice of America* (3 March 1997). Available from gopher://gopher.voa.gov.

Finally, after years of mordancy, the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) had shown some signs of life, particularly in the areas of trade, business, and cultural exchange. Recent ideas like a bulletin board of South Asian businessmen, and the SAARC-Net (a South Asia-wide version of India's Educational and Research Network (ERNet)), both to be hosted by SAARC, augured well for regional cooperation in general and the future of electronic networking in the region in particular.⁵

Implementing the Model

A clear pattern that emerged from discussions with the participants was that while private sector professionals and analysts at nongovernmental think tanks often enjoyed access to both e-mail and the Internet, their counterparts within academia and government funded research institutions were singularly deficient. The exceptions to this were those government funded institutions that focused on technology (particularly defense related), or on providing commercial services. Any networked dialogue in South Asia that involved academics would therefore have to involve some initial expenditure in ensuring that all the participants had comprehensive e-mail access.

A related issue was that of cost. As with most of the developing world, e-mail access in South Asia is costed on the basis of dialup time. Service providers now provide comprehensive e-mail services and Internet access in India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh at reasonable rates. In Pakistan, however, costs remain comparatively high, and Internet access is still provided only by the government. While the costs for large volumes of e-mail traffic that would undoubtedly be generated by the proposed network would be the highest in Pakistan, it was clear that none of the prospective participants in the network from the other countries would be able to handle the costs of large volume e-mail on individual e-mail accounts without some external financial support. Many participants concurred that individualized e-mail access would be preferable, though, to access through large institutions. Several participants pointed out that the prospect of trying to access e-mail within a short time period in a public environment would be daunting to some, particularly to the more senior participants. Hence individualized e-mail access was crucial. The best placed, of course, were those participants whose institutions were blessed with a local area network (LAN) that had LAN-wide e-mail and Internet access. These participants had the best of both the worlds: individualized access through an institution that bore the costs.

The network would need at least five to six institutions—one each in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal—and at least one, but perhaps two, in India, Pakistan, and the U.S., to act as “network mobilizers.” Ideally, these institutions would be the ones that had e-mail as well as Internet access. In addition, these institutions would need to provide the following services:

The services of a library assistant, who would cull both hard copy literature as well as the Internet for the most recent relevant information, and make that information available to the network participants for analysis and discussion;

The services of an editor, who would monitor the e-mail list for format, and would caution the participants should the traffic become too heavy as to cause a jam, or to impose astronomical costs on the participants.

Staff at one of the institutions that might serve as a network mobilizer offered the following as a model of the costs that might be incurred by such an institution:

Part time e-mail list editor: Rs. 5,000 per month;

Full time library assistant: Rs. 15,000 to Rs. 20,000 per month;

Full Internet access: Rs. 15,500 per month (for 500 hours worth);

Ethernet for providing LAN access to Internet: Rs. 3,000 (one time hardware purchase)

New computer to act as a file server: Rs. 75,000 (one time hardware purchase)

These figures are stated in Indian rupees, which currently convert at the rate of Rs. 35–36 (approximately) to a dollar.

Several participants pointed out that the best means of servicing the information needs of the network would not be through a bulletin board, but through file servers. Given the costs of dialing among the different countries in South Asia, participants would run up horrendous costs trying to access a common bulletin board.

5. See the inaugural issue of *Spectrum*, the magazine of the SAARC Secretariat, 1 (1) June 1996.

An alternate, and far less expensive, option was to have the information that was to be made available to the network participants stored on one, or even several, file servers from where the participants could retrieve information via FTP through their e-mail accounts. These file servers could be hosted by the network mobilizers.

An important issue with foreign donors looking to fund such networking activity is that this activity should be sustainable locally beyond a reasonable point in time. However it is unlikely that any regional donor would agree to fund in its entirety a dialogue that involved only nuclear issues. As several participants pointed out, that would be a sure way of obtaining unwarranted suspicion and attention from security agencies in both India and Pakistan. However, local support might be more forthcoming for a broader dialogue. Several possibilities in this regard already exist in India, where the country's new status as a rapidly emerging market has seen the modest growth of domestic philanthropy. Similar possibilities might exist in Sri Lanka also. However, in both Bangladesh and Pakistan (and perhaps in Nepal) the promotion of the Internet has occurred largely on the heels of international organizations—governmental, nongovernmental, and private sector. Several individuals working with such organizations in Pakistan expressed interest, individually and on behalf of their organizations, in supporting such networking activity on the grounds that it benefited both Pakistan and the region. These possibilities could be developed further.

A Plan of Action

Based on the conversations conducted during the survey, I drew up the following plan of action for parties interested in backing a networking project in South Asia:

First, the institutions that would serve as network nodes or mobilizers (one each for Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bangladesh; two for Pakistan; three for India; two in the United States) would need to be identified. These institutions would be asked to do a costing of their participation, and also assist in preparing a preliminary list of participants. Great care would have to be taken in selecting participants that would remain committed to making active use of the network to create dialogue and circulate ideas. However, some active policy makers would undoubtedly have to be involved for reasons mentioned earlier, even though they might not be able to contribute actively to the dialogue.

Second, attempts would have to be made to enlist some commitment from the private and the nongovernmental organizations (NGO) sectors in the region to sustain this network beyond its one year experimental phase.

Third, the initial group of participants would have to be brought together in a workshop where they will determine the format of the dialogue, the issues to be addressed, and the questions to be asked within each issue area. Also, those individuals who do not have institutional e-mail would have to be provided with the relevant capabilities. After the first experimental year, discussion topics that remained in favor could be continued into the next year (with the nuclear issue being the perennial topic for each year), and so on. (Several participants advised against having Kashmir as a topic in the very first year itself because of the contentious nature of the issue might derail the networked dialogue at its inception).

Fourth, the network mobilizers would have to proceed with acquiring the resources that would allow them to activate the network.

The Internet and Civil Society Networking in South Asia

As mentioned earlier, a doctoral thesis defended by the author in 1995 examined the subject of transnational networking with regard to two cases in South Asia—the Narmada River and the insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir—and two others from Latin America (from Mexico and Brazil). Further information on such networking is in order here.

Transnational Civil Society Networks

In early 1995, a study by two researchers of the International Policy Department of the RAND Corporation became the subject of considerable debate over the Internet, the global computer network that links researchers,

universities, and professionals worldwide.⁶ The RAND study suggested that the information technology revolution led to the proliferation of a new type of conflict around the world—netwar—in which the primary weapon seemed to be electronic networking. Netwar not only pits states against other states in an ever sophisticated use of electronic media, but also nonstate agencies ranging from terrorist organizations to advocacy groups against the state and against each other.⁷ According to the RAND study,

Netwar refers to information-related conflict at a grand level between nations or societies. It means trying to disrupt, damage or modify what a target population knows or thinks it knows about itself and the world around it. A netwar may focus on public or elite opinion, or both. It may involve public diplomacy measures, propaganda and psychological campaigns, political and cultural subversion, deception of or interference with local media, infiltration of computer networks and databases, and efforts to promote dissident or opposition movements across networks.⁸

Commenting on “netwar” between governments and nonstate organizations, the study suggested that “it may be waged against the policies of specific governments by advocacy groups and movements involving, for example, environmental, human rights, or religious issues. The nonstate actors may or may not be associated with nations, and in some cases they may be organized into vast transnational networks and coalitions.”

Whereas the RAND study subsequently focused on netwar among states, my thesis focused on networks of nongovernmental organizations and raised the following questions:

First, what factors allow transnational networks to influence policy processes at the governmental and the intergovernmental level?

Second, what factors allow them to overcome any restraints or coercion that states might bring to bear upon them in order to limit their activities?

Third, what role does information technology play in allowing networks to influence policy and resist government pressure?

Despite their considerable range, networks are limited in their activities by several important factors. In order to build successful coalitions with local agencies and activists, they have to operate in an information rich environment, where access to information technology is fairly easily available.⁹ Also, the policy process in countries that they operate in should be fairly decentralized and heterogeneous so as to permit them to make inroads into it. In that transnational networks seek to bring international pressure to bear upon target governments by mobilizing worldwide constituencies, these governments should be susceptible to such pressure. This susceptibility can take several forms: Governments might need to present an image of being democratic and internally stable in order to attract foreign investment; they might be dependent for continued economic growth on active participation in the world economy, thus making them susceptible to international sanctions, and so on. Given these factors, networks would operate with great difficulty in countries that are poor, isolated, and run by totalitarian governments.¹⁰

6. See Jason Wehling, “Netwars’ and Activists’ Power on the Internet,” (cited 25 March 1995). Available from ACTIV-L@mizzou1.bitnet; jason@ee.pdx.edu.

7. The United States Department of Defense is conducting its own studies of netwar. According to a report prepared by the Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, “The political process is moving onto the Internet. Both within the United States and internationally, individuals, interest groups, and even nations are using the Internet to find each other, discuss the issues, and further their political goals. The Internet has also played an important role in recent conflicts.” See Charles Swett, “Strategic Assessment: The Internet,” (Washington D.C.: Department of Defense, 1995).

8. See John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, “Cyberwar is Coming!” *Comparative Strategy*, 12 (2): 141–65. The quote is from page five of the study’s electronic version.

9. Past campaigns demonstrated an ability on the part of transnational networks to get around this obstacle. For example, the Burmanet mailing list promotes a worldwide campaign on the behalf of dissidents against the military dictatorship in Burma, even though there is no access to the Internet in Burma, particularly not in the jungles where the dissidents hide out. A network of underground activists brought the dissidents’ views and communiqués to India, Thailand, and other neighboring countries that enjoy Internet access. The results of the electronic activity generated on the Net by these communiqués were then obtained in hard copy and smuggled back into Burma to the dissidents. See Grant Peck, “Activists Take to Cyberspace,” (22 April 1995). Available at lipton@clarinet.com; Associated Press.

10. For instance, the amount of traffic in Haiti on the Internet increased considerably following the international attention that came with the ouster of the Aristide government, the UN resolutions against the military junta that succeeded him, and the drama of international sanctions and the U.S. “invasion”. The result was a newly-formed network observing and reporting every human rights infraction in that country to a worldwide audience of activists.

It was no coincidence that the four campaigns I studied involved three countries—Brazil, India, and Mexico—that have been described as being among the three most promising “emerging markets” in the world. In recent years, these countries have seen extensive economic liberalization programs that have increasingly integrated their economies with the global economy. Furthermore, they all have highly decentralized political structures characterized by a division of power between the central and provincial governments, numerous and overlapping bureaucratic structures, and competing elites. Most importantly, economic liberalization has brought in an influx of information technology as these countries have sought to develop and train workforces that can operate in the global economy. Riding on the backs of this technology, the networks have arrived, which have, ironically, challenged these governments at every step as they have sought to implement rapid modernization schemes. And the most important element of this challenge is that in generating and disseminating information, these networks appear to be one step ahead of the governments that they target.¹¹

A year before the publication of the RAND study, an article in *World Watch* explained how, “in the race to create a sustainable society, a global ‘network of networks’ of personal computers may offer the first real hope of vastly accelerating environmental communications worldwide.” This network of networks is the Internet, which has become the primary weapon of the nonstate organizations in netwar. Referring to Econet, Peacenet, and other computer networks linked through the Internet, *World Watch* pointed out the following:

Networks are making activists better informed, better organized, and better able to react quickly to developments around the world. Consider for example the quotes at the beginning of this article. The first is from an Econet conference—a sort of an electronic bulletin board—on rain forests. It appeared two days before the first appearance of the same news in the *New York Times*, and three days before its first mention in *The Washington Post*.

The bulletin on the Yanomami murders catalyzed a flurry of international organizing. Within hours, and long before the story showed up on the traditional news media, additional bulletins provided addresses and fax numbers of senior Brazilian officials for those who wanted to express their concern and outrage. Protest vigils at Brazilian embassies and consulates in several cities were quickly organized, and dozens of environmental and indigenous rights groups put together a joint letter of protest to the President of Brazil.¹²

This account reveals two of the most important features of netwar—the speed with which information is transmitted, and subsequently the rapidity and the level of organization of the response that this information generates around the world. Whereas traditional media forms and government institutions have hitherto commanded the heights of organization and information throughout the world, their authority in these matters has been severely undermined by netwar. This does not imply that the net warriors have developed effective institutional alternatives to the traditional ones. However, as my thesis demonstrated, their activities do demonstrate an extremely intense, but informal and therefore not easily seen, level of organization that, in numerous issue areas and regions around the world, has helped create popular alternatives to the more traditional forms of governance.

For instance, on 21 September 1992, *The New York Times* carried an advertisement sponsored by twenty-seven organizations. The advertisement was addressed to U.S. citizens, and urged them to use the accompanying coupon to lodge a protest with the president of the World Bank against the Bank-funded Sardar Sarovar Dam project in Central India. The rationale for doing so was provided by the advertisement’s leading statement: “Your tax money—funding yet another World Bank disaster”. It also threatened that should the project be continued, the sponsoring organizations would “launch an international campaign to urge taxpayers, donor governments, and environmental and social organizations to oppose the \$18 billion replenishment of the International Development Association (IDA), the division of the World Bank that gives loans to projects like Sardar Sarovar”.

11. Internet activism is already seen as having security implications in India. According to the Associated Press, “With separatist movements active in several parts of India, officials worry about the Internet. They point to rebels in Mexico and Burmese insurgents who use the Internet as a communications tool to spread their views. ‘There are broad security concerns,’ said R. K. Thakkar, the senior bureaucrat in the Ministry of Telecommunications.” See “Cyberspace Catches on in India,” (April 1995). Available from lipton@clarinet.com; Associated Press.

12. John E. Young, “Spreading the Net,” *World Watch* (Jan.-Feb. 1994).

Several aspects of this advertisement could be considered to be of an immediate interest to a student of international politics:

First, the *modus operandi* that the organizations were following was quite similar to the one that had been used by a number of organizations in the years 1984–1986 in order to bring the World Bank-funded Northeast Regional Development Program, POLONOROESTE, in Brazil's Amazon region to a halt. NGOs had networked with legislators and public advocacy groups in the United States, the bank's primary contributor, in order to bring pressure to bear upon the bank¹³. The campaign had been so effective as to result not only in the curtailing of the project, but also in a reevaluation of the lending policies of multilateral development banks. This reevaluation, in turn, had led the World Bank to incorporate environmental criteria into its funding process, and to carry out a thorough shakeup of its environmental monitoring procedures¹⁴. The participants in this campaign, as well as the methods that they employed, overlap considerably with those involved in the Sardar Sarovar campaign. And overlaps can also be seen with campaigns involving projects in Indonesia, Malaysia, and East Africa. This overlap of organizations and methods among the campaigns suggests the existence of a transboundary interorganizational network in the issue area of environment conservation. The function of this network appears to be to prosecute an agreed upon agenda every time a policy that is contrary to this agenda crops up with respect to a certain issue. Given the repetition of methods that have been successful previously, this transnational network seems to be as capable of long-term learning behavior as more conventional organizations or governments.

Second, campaigns of the type described above lead to outcomes that go beyond the initial input or impetus they provide, as well as beyond the overall strategic capabilities of the parties involved. The campaign against the development project in Brazil did not just lead to its termination, but also to a shakeup at the World Bank; this happened despite the Bank's resources and capabilities, which far exceeded those of the transnational network involved. Such a "nonlinear" outcome, where the output is disproportional to the input provided, is made possible by the occurrence of "cascades" in the world system, whereby the increasing interconnectedness of the various components of the system leads to the effect of single events being multiplied several times over.¹⁵

Third, the Sardar Sarovar campaign represents a new variety of interaction in the world system because of the fact that the organizations involved have carried out their activities at all levels of the world system. At the transnational level, they have interacted with each other despite their governments and the boundaries of their respective countries. At the international or intergovernmental level, they have tried to influence international governmental organizations such as the World Bank and the IDA. At the national level, they have tried to simultaneously influence the decision-making processes of both the donor as well as the donee countries. And finally, at the subnational level, they have tried to provoke the civic populations of both the donor as well as the donee countries on behalf of their agenda. Action at all these levels has not occurred in a chronological sequence, which might suggest the progressive growth of the power of the individual organizations involved. Instead it has occurred simultaneously at all four levels, and has not been marked by an increase in the physical capacity, or any objective measures of the power, of any of the organizations involved. This action thus challenges the traditional understanding of power among students of international politics, in that the progressive increase in the ability of an agency to generate outcomes is not matched by a progressive increase in its power.

Not only do such interactions pose new challenges for the students of international relations, they also obfuscate the old distinctions among the various "levels of analysis" at which a student might theorize. These distinctions cannot be applied effectively to a study of the activities of networks that operate simultaneously at all levels.

Transnational networks are not just active in the area of environment conservation. Transnational interaction can also be seen as playing a visible role in the areas of human rights and nuclear proliferation.

Such networks differ from traditional organizations in that they do not have any vertical structure, that is, they do not have any hierarchy of officials or departments. On the contrary, they consist almost entirely of

13. Bruce Rich, "The Emperor's New Clothes: The World Bank and Environmental Reform," *World Policy Journal*, (Spring 1990): 305–6.

14. Pat Aufderheide and Bruce Rich, "Environmental Reform and the Multilateral Banks," *World Policy Journal* (Spring 1988).

15. For a theoretical exploration of "cascades" and their impact on world politics, see James Rosenau *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Continuity and Change* (Princeton University Press, 1991).

horizontal linkages among their members, with no one member having a greater status or precedence than others. Also, individual organizations rely on accumulating power or influence, and applying that power to whatever goals they wish to prosecute. Networks follow a different method. They seek to create “cascades” of events, whereby an action taken by one member of the network is instantly communicated to all the other members so that they can replicate it, thus creating a sequence of events that can overwhelm the policy process.¹⁶

A real example of a cascade was reported by Reuters on 8 June 1995. Subodh Satyarthi, the leader of the South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude (SACCS), was arrested on 1 June on allegations of defrauding a local carpet manufacturer. Satyarthi, whose group had targeted the manufacturer on the grounds that they were employing workers below the legal work age, was also subsequently allegedly threatened by persons associated with the manufacturer. Whereas Satyarthi himself was released in twenty-four hours, the purported threat to his life prompted a transnational network campaigning against child labor practices into action. Within a week, a hundred Nobel prize winners, including physicist Simon van der Meer, wrote to SACCS supporting Satyarthi. Two U.S. representatives—George Brown, a California Democrat, and Bernard Sanders, an independent from Vermont—had written to the Indian embassy in Washington D.C. expressing concerns over Satyarthi’s safety. Additionally, Bill Jordan, general secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, called upon Prime Minister Narasimha Rao to protect Satyarthi. A senior official of the International Labor Organization (ILO) also called upon the local police officials to demand a stop to the harassment of Satyarthi.¹⁷ On 9 June the Indian government announced that “a government appointed committee of experts would monitor a self-regulatory process set up by the industry-run Carpet Export Promotion Council (CEPC),” the purpose of the process being to limit use of underage labor by the textiles industry. The monitoring committee would also include members of voluntary organizations and also representatives from both the ILO and the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF). The Indian government’s response was partly prompted by a fear of adverse Congressional opinion in the United States (India and its arch-rival Pakistan have been jostling each other in gaining favors from the U.S. Congress), and partly by threats from some countries that purchase Indian textiles, including Germany and the United States, to limit textile imports from India.

Of special note here was the rapidity with which the entire sequence of events unfolded, and also the Indian government’s response. While the latter relented, it did so in a manner that reflected Indian officials’ frustration with techniques through which pressure was brought to bear upon them. Textiles Minister G. Venkat Swamy was quoted by Reuters as saying, “In recent times, there has been adverse publicity about the alleged use of child labor in the carpet industry. Much of the publicity is overstated and reports suggest that some of it is motivated by foreign and domestic vested interests.”¹⁸ Faced with amorphous transnational coalitions, Indian officials have made allegations of “vested” interests targeting India in a number of areas, from environment to human rights and nuclear policy. In fact, as with other countries that have been targeted by networks, there is a pattern of surprise when caught, sullen acquiescence to charges, and then reluctant action on the part of the targeted governments.

Quite often, all this happens before most of the officials of the target government are aware of the incident for which they are being targeted. As they look around for some specific organization that they can target in response, no clear player emerges. This is because networks do not behave like standard organizations: they rely on a number of strategically placed individuals and organizations separately performing their roles. The timing and the coordination of this performance determines the impact of network activity.

16. The term “cascades,” as used in this study, differs only slightly from its usage in its parent discipline, the study of chaos and complexity. In the latter field, cascades that might cause open and turbulent systems to change form or parameters in a very short period of time are generated by one of a series of seemingly large and random number of events. The key event is no different from its predecessors, except in that for reasons that cannot be clearly delineated because of the turbulent nature of the system, it happens to occur in the right place at the right time. Similarly, in a system of network activity, an action taken by one network member might generate a cascade that spreads throughout the network and causes changes in its policy environment, or it might not.

17. Nelson Graves, “World Drive to Shield Indian Child Rights Advocate,” (8 June 1995). Available at clari.world.asia.india; Reuters; lipton@clarinet.com.

18. See “India carpets watchdog aims to stop child labor,” (9 June 1995). Available at clari.world.asia.india; Reuters; lipton@clarinet.com.

In my doctoral thesis, I posited seven characteristics of networks that might explain their ability to affect outcomes. These are:

1. The ability of the networks' constituents to develop information technology options in order to rapidly transmit information and common knowledge bases throughout the network;
2. the ability of the networks' constituents to develop media visibility and immediate policy relevance for their concerns;
3. the ability of the networks to maintain a coherent structure despite the absence of a hierarchical system of organization;
4. the ability of the networks to promote agenda related changes in the existing discourses on key issues;
5. the ability of the networks to promote linkages among diverse issues in both international and domestic arenas in order to build momentum for their agendas.
6. the ability of networks to develop effective strategies for countering entrenched government beliefs and agendas.
7. the ability of networks to combine the intensive networking and organizational skills of the grass root activists with the abilities of the academic and policy communities to promote relevant alterations in the prevailing discourse on a particular subject.

The Success of Civil Society Networks in South Asia

First, let me present here some of the conclusions that I drew in my thesis on the impact of transnational networking on the Narmada Dam issue. Evidence suggested that the network played an instrumental role in generating enough pressure upon the the World Bank and the Indian government, the primary sponsors of the controversial Sardar Sarovar dam, to get the former to drop funding and the latter to retract many of its earlier positions.

The first of the seven factors I examined in my thesis—the ability of networks' constituents to develop information technology options in order to rapidly transmit information and common knowledge bases throughout the network—in turn presumed an ability on the part of the network to develop a common knowledge base, and to have access to the appropriate information technology. Here the Narmada campaign was helped by the considerable scientific work that had already been done during the Amazon campaign on the impact of large development projects on natural ecosystems. The biggest asset for the campaign in this regard, however, was the presence of Indian graduate students and scholars of an activist bent at various American universities, particularly the University of Wisconsin at Madison and the University of Pittsburgh.¹⁹ These activists played a large role in linking the specifics of the various Narmada projects with the worldwide debate on sustainable development and then transmitting these reformulated debates over as wide a cross section of the Internet as possible. As the numerous examples provided in my thesis clearly established, the Internet has not only been extensively used for transmitting information, but also for organizing the various pressure campaigns directed against specific policy makers and officials.

One important characteristic of this networking needs to be pointed out here, particularly in the context of the ongoing debate over the emergence of the so-called “global village” or “global society.” It has been argued that the presence of numerous ethnic diasporas around the world, and the mass movement of populations, has added to the flow of information and communications around the world, thus leading to greater activism.²⁰ This

19. As is obvious from the footnotes to this chapter, most Internet communiqués regarding the Narmada campaign either originate from, or are transmitted via, these two campuses.

20. In a personal conversation on 7 July 1995, Blair Kling, professor of history at the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign, informed me of the History Department's plans for holding a series of seminars on the subject of “the emerging global society” to coincide with the onset of the millennium. A common conception among his colleagues is that the existing and emerging diasporas around the world have played a role in bringing people together. This completely contradicts my own research and experience. Ethnic diasporas have been one of the biggest causes of increased insecurity and conflict at the end of the twentieth century. Far from promoting cross-cultural communication, diasporas around the world increasingly tend to isolate themselves behind cultural barriers, refrain from any progressive activism (technical or otherwise), and often vigorously support militant causes in their home countries. The involvement of Indians living in the United States with the BJP in India, the Irish with the IRA, and various religious groups with their counterparts in the Middle East and elsewhere, are but cases in point.

is definitely not true of the Narmada campaign, where most electronic networkers have by and large been students and scholars *from* South Asia, rather than South Asians born in the United States.

Yet another important aspect of this networking, as derived from the various examples presented in my thesis, was that most information on the Internet could be divided into two categories that often did not overlap: On the one hand messages on the Internet that carried information of a scientific or a technical nature focused almost exclusively on environmental issues; on the other hand, calls for action aimed at generating cascades of events targeted at specific policy makers all revolved around violations of the rights of specific individuals, or groups of individuals.²¹ This suggested a dual *modus operandi*: While human rights issues were highlighted with the purpose of gaining greater popular visibility for the network's agenda and for pressuring policy makers in the short term, a body of scientific information was also developed over the long-term in order to provide alternatives to the existing policy options. This fact leaves us, however, with a key question unanswered.

In order to establish that electronic networking and the Internet have been crucial in allowing the Narmada campaign to achieve its goals, one must be able to answer the following question in the negative: In the absence of the Internet, would the Narmada campaign have been able to achieve all that it has? A negative answer to this question could not be satisfactorily provided on the basis of the evidence presented in my thesis. Because the network relied to such a great extent on using human rights issues to generate visibility and pressure policy makers, one could argue that publicity in the conventional media provided by violent police activity against demonstrations and sit-ins might in itself have been enough to create the requisite effects. Conversely, the evidence presented clearly pointed to the fact that policy changes on the part of the various agencies involved in developing and implementing the Narmada project all coincided with, or were followed by, intensive electronic networking activity. The World Bank commissioned the Independent Review in 1992 following two years of intensive activity, including voluminous electronic networking, targeted at the United States Congress. Similarly, the Indian government's flexibility on the very similar Tehri Dam project followed an Internet-centered cascade directed at key Indian officials. While there would thus appear to be a positive correlation between electronic networking and policy change, this correlation is not conclusive of the absolute importance of the Internet in the Narmada campaign. There is no clear way of determining whether the policy makers at the World Bank, in the U.S. Congress, and the various agencies of the Indian state were responding to e-mails and faxes generated over the Internet, or whether they were responding to reports in the regular media.

What one could argue, given this contradictory evidence, is that while the Internet might not have been absolutely essential, it did provide for a far speedier campaign than would otherwise have been possible. Electronic networkers worked hard to immediately apprise a wide audience of the developments in the Narmada story as they unfolded, thus allowing a wide variety of individuals and organizations to react simultaneously in the form of a cascade. While these individuals and organizations might eventually have responded thus after they became apprised of the relevant developments through print and other conventional media, the simultaneity of their response facilitated by electronic networking definitely served to create *the impression* of lot more going on than there might actually have been (comments from various Indian officials described in my thesis pointed toward this fact). And in the final analysis, this impression could have made all the difference. As is well known among the students of the social impact of information technology, cyberwar is as much about perceptions and impressions as it is about facts and reality.

The role of the conventional media in all of this brings us to the second factor—the ability of the networks' constituents to develop media visibility and immediate policy relevance for their concerns. In this regard, the network was both successful and, in turn, the victim of its own success. The journal *The Ecologist* has played a major role in communicating to the scientific community worldwide the prevailing concerns over the Narmada project's environmental parameters. Beyond this scientific sharing of knowledge, leading periodicals in India such as *The Illustrated Weekly of India*²² and *India Today* carried regular updates on the Narmada issue.

21. Examples of various Internet-based calls to action presented in my thesis all centered around fasts, sit-ins, and demonstrations by prominent individuals such as Medha Patkar and Sunderlal Bahuguna, or by members of various social movements such as Save the Narmada Campaign or Chipko, and the attempted repression thereof by various organs of the state.

22. *The Illustrated Weekly of India* subsequently folded up, leaving the network without a major source of publicity. Contributors to the weekly included leading Indian environmental activists such as Claude Alvares, Ashis Nandy, Vandana Shiva, and Shiv Vishwanathan (whom I talked to regarding the environmental activities of the Center for the Study of Developing Societies, the think

However, in examining the Indian media's coverage of the issue, I discovered a steep drop in the number of reports filed on the subject following the World Bank's withdrawal of its funding in 1992. The Gujarat government's attempts to complete the Sardar Sarovar project on its own received little attention and the network's attempts to block these attempts was also sidelined. Whereas the media subsequently carried reports on the occasional fasts and sit-ins carried out by activists, its attention soon refocused on other issues such as the Tehri dam, which rapidly acquired the dimensions of the Narmada campaign during its heyday.

A primary factor behind the decline in the media attention focused on the Narmada issue is that the network so heavily transnationalized its campaign, and made the World Bank such a visible target of its activities, that when the Bank eventually relented the issue lost much of its piquancy. In that the federal government in India also informally accepted the Bank's recommendations, the locus of action shifted to the state governments involved. Had the network been able to generate the kind of anti-Narmada fervor within the local media (the vernacular media, for instance, in both Gujarat and Maharashtra have heavily supported the Narmada projects) that it was able to generate transnationally, it might have been in a better position to exert pressure upon the state governments.²³ One can thus conclude that while the media visibility that the campaign developed definitely helped it with agencies at the national and the international levels, it was only of very limited assistance at the provincial level.

To the extent that the network was able to keep the Narmada issue in the picture, and put obstacles in the way of the government of Gujarat in its attempts to complete the Narmada dam, it was because of the manner in which the campaign has been extended to include not just the Tehri project in Garhwal and the Arun Dam in Nepal, but also the Koel Karo project in Bihar and a planned hydroelectric project in Sikkim. This was a tribute to the network's success in being able to maintain its structure across campaigns despite the lack of a formal system of organization (this being the third factor examined in this study). There were three important elements to the network's success in this regard:

First, as pointed out on several occasions, the network made successful use of electronic networking to maintain a coherent and common knowledge base regarding both the various parameters of large development projects as well as the most effective *modus operandi* for opposing their implementation. By using the Internet to make this knowledge available simultaneously to all its members, the network obviated the need for maintaining a hierarchical structure for the generation and transmission of knowledge. At the same time, the common availability of knowledge allowed the network to transfer its efforts rapidly from one campaign to another, primarily because it did not need to create new knowledge and strategies for every new campaign.

Second, the network managed to keep almost all of its more vulnerable members—particularly the grassroots movements and NGOs—in the limelight simultaneously. The targeting of the Tehri dam, for instance, did not mean that grassroots Narmada activists had been abandoned to the tender mercies of the state police forces in Gujarat and Maharashtra, both of which have been quite cavalier in their treatment of the activists. Letter writing, e-mail, and fax initiatives on behalf of the activists have continued, even though the media attention focused on them is not as great. This allowed local members of the network to be able to count on continued transnational support for resisting pressure from the state.

Third, and partly as a result of the second element, the network has been able to expand its membership from one campaign to another. This is because network members, particularly at the local level, saw obvious benefits in continued participation in the network's activities elsewhere, and therefore contributed to other campaigns. The participation of Medha Patkar and Save the Narmada campaign in the Tehri campaign, and

tank with which most of the these activists were associated). *The Illustrated Weekly of India* later returned to the market, but only as a tabloid-type newspaper and not as the venerable features magazine that it had previously been.

23. This fact pointedly reveals the limits of transnational activism within the boundaries of a complex society such as India's. Both Gujarat and Maharashtra are two of India's most heavily industrialized states and prominent examples of the perceived success of conventional strategies of development and modernization, success in which there is considerable local pride, particularly in the urban areas. Because the politics of both states is heavily urban-dominated, the connections that transnational networkers made with the grassroots groups did not help them much. Additionally, while the new epistemology and rhetoric of sustainable developments have permeated through the echelons of the federal bureaucracy in India, many of whom have done stints with international organizations, it has yet to percolate down through the different levels of India's political system. Ironically, in both Brazil and Mexico also, the state governments have proved far more impermeable to human rights and environmental issues than have the federal governments.

the continued participation of Baba Amte and his Movement Against Large Dams in both the Narmada and the Tehri campaigns, are cases in point.

From this, it would appear that electronic networking played a greater role in allowing the network to maintain its membership, structure, and agenda in the face of state pressure than in bringing about major policy changes.²⁴ What *did* allow the networks to obtain significant policy changes with regard to the Narmada issue was their ability to promote linkages among diverse issues in both international and domestic arenas in order to build momentum for their agendas.

My thesis discussed at length how both the Amazon and the Narmada campaigns successfully linked the issues of human rights and environmental conservation. However, this linkage, while being the primary source of pressure upon the various agencies implementing the Sardar Sarovar and other Narmada projects, did not have all of the desired effects upon the Indian policy process that the network might have hoped for. To the extent that Indian and World Bank policy makers amended or canceled their plans for the Narmada region, they responded to the worldwide furor over the treatment of persons displaced by the projects and the repression of the grassroots organizations representing them. In other words, the key debate in governmental circles was over the human rights issue. In that India has a sophisticated legal framework for the protection of individual rights, judicial activism in this area came to the aid of the Narmada campaign. However, neither the Indian government nor the various state governments have made any pronouncements or policy changes that would indicate a fundamental change in governmental attitudes toward development planning and development project implementation.

While numerous Indian think tanks and private foundations continue to fund research on sustainable and environmentally friendly development²⁵, and federal bureaucrats at least pay lip service to sustainable development in international fora, most Indian development strategies still involve conventional elements such as large dams, widespread irrigation works, and substantial earth moving projects. What this means is that whereas the network successfully used human rights issues as a means for promoting an essentially environmental cause, they were not successful in promoting agenda related changes in the Indian discourse on development.

Having said this, though, one must also point out the fact that the external agencies involved in the Narmada projects—the World Bank, the International Development Association (the Bank's soft loan arm), and the relevant committees of the United States Congress, which is the primary source of funds for the IDA—all appeared to have accepted the network's point of a linkage among environmental degradation, human rights violations, and certain kinds of development strategies. The network's primary failure was in not pushing this linkage in the popular and the governmental imagination in India. And herein lies a key difference between the Narmada and the Amazon campaigns specifically, and between South Asia and other, perhaps more "developed" areas of the developing world. The latter could rely on a popular epistemology of environmental action, and being "environmentally conscious", that the media in Brazil imported from the United States and carried to the urban middle classes. In India, despite the presence of social movements such as Chipko and Save the Narmada Campaign that boast of memberships in millions, there is no concept of being or living "green" in the popular imagination. The grassroots activists in India are often people whose livelihoods are directly threatened by the various projects, and they protest their impending displacement or the socioeconomic disruption of their lives. There is very little interest among these activists in "saving the Earth," or in promoting alternate lifestyles as a part of a revolt against the "system" as is so popular among Western youth.

Similarly, neither the NGOs or the government in India have shown much interest in global environmental causes. While India routinely signs most international conventions on the environment, it does so more to

24. If one appreciates the fact that the number of key individuals involved in developing and promoting electronic networking for the network does not exceed, at the most, a couple of hundred people with a few key organizations such as India Alert and the International Rivers Network, a number far smaller than the size of the World Bank's development bureaucracy alone, then their achievements have indeed been considerable.

25. Key among these are the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation and the Center for the Study of Developing Societies in New Delhi and the Indian Institute for Science in Bangalore. Among foreign foundations active in India, the Ford Foundation has taken the lead in funding research on issues relating to sustainable development.

retain its image as an important member of the United Nations and of the Nonaligned Movement than anything else. Contrarily in Brazil, the federal government is in the process of reformulating its development epistemology and methodology in the context of the furor over the rain forests, and belonging to “green” causes is as chic in the popular imagination as it is in the United States. Given the lack of such enthusiasm in India, the network would have done better to target the vast urban Indian middle class instead of keeping its focus limited to transnationalism on the one hand, and grassroots activism on the other.

While the network may not have done well in this regard, it was able to bridge the gap between grassroots activists on the one hand, and the worldwide community of scientists and engineers focusing on environmental issues on the other. The network’s agenda was informed by a lively scientific debate, the openness and credibility of which has only been enhanced by the non-hierarchical nature of the Internet. This is perhaps the primary factor why, after decades of intractability in this regard, various Indian governments at the federal and the state levels have begun to show greater interest in environmentally correct and decentralized forms of development. Federal bureaucrats who sympathize with the network’s goals, and are placed in key positions in ministries such as environment and rural development, have begun to participate regularly in debates over development planning,²⁶ and their impact has been felt in recent federal initiatives to devolve development decision making to the level of panchayats, or elected local village councils, in several parts of the country. Furthermore, the extensive scientific pedigree of environmental networkers in India has also ensured a greater interest by the private sector in pursuing environmentally friendly business practices.²⁷

Turning to transnational networking on the issue of the Jammu and Kashmir insurgency, one finds that its extent and application have been limited. This networking has largely taken place at the insistence of organizations advocating neither remaining in India or a union with Pakistan, but an independent Kashmiri state. By 1995, this emerging network of Kashmiri organizations on the Internet had not been able to build a broad enough set of linkages to generate the kinds of cascades that have been created by the other campaigns examined in my thesis. In the long run, the Kashmiri activists’ resort to the Internet might actually have hurt them more than benefiting them. The Indian state, which until 1990 at least, had not awakened to the potential of electronic networking, now consistently made its presence felt on the World Wide Web through a series of sites responding to human rights critiques leveled against it by Kashmiri activists and by international nongovernmental organizations. Needless to say, this electronic enthusiasm was limited to an elite section of the foreign policy bureaucracy, but was nonetheless substantive.

One of the factors that limited the Kashmir network was its inability to propose a policy agenda outside of the prevailing rhetoric on human rights violations and the so-called Indian occupation of Kashmir. If it did things right, the network could have made a beginning by identifying, and cooperating with, groups and individuals that the Indian government could in turn talk and negotiate a settlement with. In Chiapas in Mexico, despite the Zapatistas’ revolutionary rhetoric, the EZLN, and the Chiapas network, had reached out and formed links with a number of organizations representing the Catholic church and the indigenous populations such as CONPAZ and CONAI that were willing to participate in negotiations between the rebels and the Mexican government. Drawing upon this lesson, the Kashmir network could have formed links with Indian and Pakistani citizens’ organizations that are interested in a peaceful solution to the dispute, particularly those that included eminent retired civil servants or officials in their ranks. A good example of such a group was the Pakistan–India People’s Convention for Peace and Democracy, co-founded by Nirmal Mukerji, the first head of the Indian civil service, and I. A. Rahman, respected Pakistani human rights activist. The Convention has been engaged in organizing the biggest round of NGO-level dialogues ever held on a host of outstanding issues between India and Pakistan, and includes numerous prominent Indian and Pakistani citizens among its membership. Given the fact that India will never accept a party from outside the region such as the United Nations or the United States as an intermediary on what it regards as an internal matter, the Kashmir network would have done well to form links with South Asian organizations that could play an intermediary role. In that the network failed to do so, it

26. A senior Indian official with whom I spoke in 1992 kept getting interrupted by phone calls during our conversation regarding the expenses for his participation in the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992; an up-to-date IBM computer that sat on his desk testified to the fact that sections of the Indian bureaucracy have become Internet-smart.

27. See *India Today*, 15 March 1995, p. 96.

definitely did not do well with regard to the second factor—the ability to develop a policy relevance for its concerns.

As the Narmada and the Amazon case studies clearly demonstrated, the longevity of a network, and its ability to hold itself together despite the absence of a hierarchy, depended upon the network's ability to bring together a host of diverse organizations under a common umbrella to prosecute a collective agenda that would benefit all. As was evident from their web sites, members of the Kashmir network defined themselves narrowly in terms of their ideology and their policy stance. All of them proclaimed connections with organizations interested in advocating Islamic lifestyles and beliefs (most home pages appeared to result from the efforts of the various campus branches of the Muslim Students' Association); furthermore all of them, even if they were campaigning for autonomy for the Kashmir province and not secession, used secessionist rhetoric and terms in their bulletins and communiqués. This adherence to a narrow understanding of goals limited extensive membership in the network, and opened them up to accusations of being tools of Pakistani intelligence, or having some narrow partisan purpose. What would have been ideal for the network would have been to include in its membership a growing number of individuals and organizations in both India and Pakistan who are willing to consider autonomy for the Jammu and Kashmir province within the Indian Union under a joint India–Pakistan trusteeship.²⁸

With regard to the possibilities of the Internet loosening up nationalistic discourse, the network's activities only served to harden the discourse in its current channels. Convinced that it faced a major propaganda threat on the Internet at the hands of Pakistani intelligence, the Indian government encouraged an even more extensive networking campaign on the Internet. If all of the information on India-Net's home page, for instance, is taken at face value, the pro-India network is far bigger than the Kashmir network, and might even overshadow the latter. The key point here is that, as in real space, the discourse on Kashmir in cyberspace also coagulated along decades old lines, with a cyberwar *par extraordinaire* being waged between pro-India and anti-India elements. This prevented the Kashmir network from being able to make any significant contributions toward changes in the existing discourse.

The most glaring failure of the network was in the area of building linkages with other issue areas. For instance, research by Indian ecologists into the Kashmir valley's environment had revealed considerably high levels of environmental degradation, mostly prompted by runaway development of tourism related real estate. As a part of a University of Delhi delegation to the province in 1988, I overheard numerous complaints, during casual conversations taking place among villagers at rest stops and road side villages, about the loss of grazing lands for the horses of the hillside populations, and massive erosions of hill topsoil, which made steppe cultivation practically impossible. In that linkages could have been made between environmental degradation and the overall antipathy of the Kashmiri population toward India, the Kashmir network could have drawn upon the sympathies of the global environmental network. In order to do this though, the Kashmir network would have had to do well with regard to the bridging of the structural constraints in its particular issue area.

With regard to Kashmir, the primary structural constraint, as with other human rights campaigns, is that it is the burden of the activist to separate the human rights issues from the national security issues. The Kashmir network was unable to establish an independent Kashmiri agenda separate from the India–Pakistan dispute. This kept many potential sympathizers from joining the network because they are wary of becoming involved in one of the most acrimonious bilateral disputes anywhere in the world today. The primary means through which the network could have overcome this obstacle was through using the same technique employed by the global environmental network—that of acting as an umbrella, and a clearinghouse, for the ideas and ideologies of a variety of organizations that wanted to make a contribution to the Kashmir issue.

Kashmiri *pandits* (or the Hindu minority residents of Kashmir) had recently expressed an interest in addressing some of the state's problems. Leading Kashmiri Hindu politician Karan Singh's organization in Delhi, together with the Green Cross (the environmental organization), had funded initiatives in the state; and

28. These individuals include not just human rights activists, but also retired generals such as Gen. Sundarji in India and Air Marshal Noor Khan in Pakistan. See Chetan Kumar, "A Chronology of India–Pakistan Cooperation, 1947–1995," in Kanti Bajpai and others, *Brasstacks and Beyond: The Perception and Management of Crises in South Asia* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995).

many Kashmiri Hindus accepted that the Muslims were not the only ones who had suffered from the state's mismanagement. There were prominent Hindu advocates of increased autonomy for the state, and they would no doubt participate in any networking activity geared toward that goal.

Finally, the greatest irony of the Kashmir campaign was that instead of changing the equation with the Indian government in its favor, the campaign might actually have made the Indian government more efficient in dealing with Internet politics.

Drawing Some Overall Conclusions

Looking at the information presented so far in both sections of this paper, one would tend to think that civil society electronic networking in South Asia is leaps and bounds ahead of elite networking, which has yet to begin in any substantial fashion. However, if one looks beneath the surface, the possibility exists that should such networking actually take place, it might accomplish far more in a much shorter period of time than civil society networking.

While my thesis only looked at civil society networking in India, the following conclusions would apply to practically all of South Asia's states, given the fact that India has practically more of civil society and more of the Internet than all of its neighbors:

To date, electronic networking does not have the capacity to fundamentally alter existing agendas, or establish new ones. As the relatively successful Narmada campaign demonstrated, transnational linkages might allow international pressure to be brought upon the governments; however, they are able to do so only in the context of agendas that have been established politically at other levels. In the case of the Narmada campaign, this prior agenda was human rights.

Transnational electronic networking also often leads South Asian organizations to perhaps have greater international visibility than substantial linkages with domestic organizations. While this international visibility might help them in obtaining reactions from the government in a knee-jerk fashion because of equally knee-jerk international pressure, it does not lead to fundamental changes in agenda or policy.

Electronic networking among civil society actors remains heavily dependent on foreign resources and cooperation; it is not yet sustainable indigenously. In fact, most of the Internet traffic generated in the two campaigns examined in my study was done so by South Asian expatriates. However, this situation is changing almost daily, and a critical mass of Internet savvy NGOs should soon be reached in South Asia.

The possibilities of any extended civil society networking on almost any security issue are dismally low in South Asia. Examples like that of the Kashmir network show that as far as internal security is concerned, groups that are challenging existing governments are likely to pursue extremely parochial agendas. Highly nationalistic attitudes among the common public ensure that there are few takers for agenda-building or bridge-building as far as security issues are concerned. Outside of an elite intellectual circle, security issues are almost never linked to broader questions of governance, underdevelopment, and resource scarcity.

All of these factors ensure that the possibility of the success of an elite policy network in terms of increasing regional peace and security might actually be higher than those of broad-based civil society networking. Tremendous intellectual ferment is already occurring among the region's elites as far as key security discourses and debates are concerned. These elites include not just members of think tanks, the media, and business, but also numerous retired senior civilian and military officials who retain their personal links with their former colleagues and are now generating an agenda for positive change. These elites are, therefore, in a far better position to conduct an informed electronic dialogue on security issues with the aim of having a policy impact than an assortment of local and international NGOs.

APPENDIX

Individuals with whom I conversed in South Asia between 31 January 1997 and 16 February 1997

Dr. Iftekhar Zaman, Director, Regional Center for Strategic Studies, Colombo (3 February)

John Gooneratne, Associate Director, Regional Center for Strategic Studies, Colombo (3 February)

Varatharajan, Assistant Director (Financial and Information Systems), International Center for Ethnic Studies, Colombo (3 February)

Dr. Deepa Olapally, National Institute for Advanced Studies, Bangalore (5 February)

Mr. Mahesh Kumar, Software Technology Parks of India, Bangalore (5 February)

Dr. Raman Srinivasan, Madras Foundation, Madras (6 and 7 February)

Dr. Arun Elhance, Director, Global Environmental Change Program, Social Science Research Council (New York), New Delhi (8 February)

Mr. Andrew Robinson, Consultant, Ford Foundation, New Delhi (8 and 9 February)

Mr. Terrence George, Program Officer, Governance and International Affairs, Ford Foundation, New Delhi (10 and 11 February)

Mr. Prasanto Kumar Roy, Editor, *PC Quest* and *Computers at Home* magazines, New Delhi (10 February)

Prof. Paul Diehl, Department of Political Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (U.S.A.), New Delhi (10 and 11 February)

Prof. Kanti Bajpai, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi (11 February)

Prof. Amitabh Mattoo, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi (11 February)

Mr. Suparn Vaidik, Chandraprabha Publications and Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi (11 February)

Prof. P.R. Chari, Institute for Chinese Studies, New Delhi (11 February)

Major-Gen. Dipankar Banerjee, Center for Study of Developing Societies and Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi (11 February)

Dr. Abdur Rob Khan, Research Director, Bangladesh Institute for International and Strategic Studies, Dhaka (13 February)

Dr. Humayun Kabir, Senior Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute for International and Strategic Studies, Dhaka (13 February)

Prof. Pervez Hoodbhoy, Department of Physics, Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad (14 and 15 February)

Mr. Vaqar Zakaria, General Manager, Hagler Bailly (Pakistan) Inc., Islamabad (15 February)

Mr. Hidayat Hasan, Hagler Bailly (Pakistan Inc.), Islamabad (15 February)

Mr. Hasan Rizvi, Coordinator, Sustainable Development Network-Pakistan, Islamabad (15 February)