Foreword

As we enter the second decade of the 21st century, cyberspace has emerged as a leading sphere of contestation between largely democratic forces seeking to use the Internet and related "liberation technologies" to expand and enhance freedom, knowledge, and connectivity and autocratic states eager to stifle that potential. This volume is the most compelling and informed account and analysis of the new contestation in cyberspace that is now available.

The Arab Spring highlighted the importance of new social media networks, which were vital tools used by activists in mounting the historic revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. But as we know, the Jasmine Revolution also caused dictatorships to tighten their controls. It is important to bear in mind that the ultimate outcome of the Arab Spring and similar uprisings will not be determined by technological factors alone, because authoritarian regimes also appreciate the political potential of cyberspace to advance their own objectives. Indeed, there is more than ample evidence of the sharpening contestation in cyberspace, from the Egyptian government's crude wholesale closure of the Internet during the Tahrir Square protests (following a precedent set by Burma's ruling junta during the 2007 Saffron Revolution) to the Syrian and Iranian regimes' more sophisticated use of Facebook and other social media to identify, monitor, and repress activist networks.

Similarly, as this volume details, with the Internet's center of demographic gravity shifting to Asia, China is adopting proactive approaches to contesting cyberspace by supplementing long-established filtering, censorship, and surveillance techniques with more aggressive measures, including cyber attacks on dissident Web sites. Pakistan's use of blasphemy laws to ban Facebook, as well as Bangladesh's blocking of access to YouTube because of politically embarrassing video footage, demonstrate that regimes are using regulation as a pretext for restriction, replicating the backlash against terrestrial civil society in cyberspace. Governments are striving to suffocate the liberating potential of cyberspace through the monitoring of Internet café users, "just-in-time" targeted Internet blocking, and the establishment of "national cyber zones" to ensure state control.

As the editors of this volume make clear, cyberspace is "now considered a domain equal in importance to land, air, sea, and space as the medium through which commerce, education, hobbies, politics, and war all take place." It is "an object of geopolitical competition" between democratic and autocratic forces, in which Asia is proving to be one of the most contested and strategically significant terrains, principally because of the role of China—host to the world's largest cohort of Internet users and its most sophisticated censorship and monitoring regime. Beijing's ruling Communist authorities censor or deny Internet access because of its proven benefit in enhancing freedom of information, expression, and association. The regime is also an increasingly proactive player—employing its "50 Cent Army" to monitor and counter its critics—in what Rebecca MacKinnon calls "networked authoritarianism."

The country-based and issue-specific case studies in *Access Contested* provide an indispensable guide to the politics of Asia's contested cyberspace. The volume also provides a valuable historical overview of the four phases of cyber regulation:

1. The "open commons" phase—up to 2000—during which it was expected that the Internet would inform, empower, and liberate citizens "in a noisy but robust web of support for global civil society."
2. The "access denied" phase—from 2000 to 2005—in which states like China and Saudi Arabia erected filters to block access to information,
3. The "access controlled" phase—from 2005 to 2010—in which states developed more variable, sophisticated, and aggressive interventions, including registration, licensing, and identity regulations to facilitate online monitoring and promote self-censorship.
4. The current "access contested" phase—in which cyberspace is becoming normalized as a terrain on which states, companies, citizens, and groups conflict, compete, and even collaborate, as evidenced by the militarization and attempted "nationalization" of cyberspace.

This current phase has also witnessed the emergence of coalitions like the Global Network Initiative, which convenes activists, academics, and companies like Google, Yahoo!, and Microsoft to help ensure that Internet regulations safeguard access, privacy, and basic rights.

The current dynamics and forces at play in contesting cyberspace provide grounds both for concern and optimism.

Worryingly, the threat to cyberspace's liberating potential is not only coming from authoritarian states but also from democracies. France is leading calls for the G8 to impose tighter regulations, while Turkey's new Internet regulations establish a surveillance system under which citizens are only allowed Internet access via one of four state-regulated filters and citizens can be monitored via a compulsory online profile.

On the other hand, as the editors of this volume note, the contestation of cyberspace has a silver lining: "What was once an arcane discussion restricted to engineers, intelligence agencies, and a small segment of policymakers is being broadened into public policy and popular circles." With the constitution and rules governing cyberspace still to be determined, it is imperative that democratic states and global civil society mobilize to counter the authoritarian tendencies among its would-be "founding fathers." *Access Contested* will be an invaluable source of instruction and inspiration in this seminal struggle.

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Access Contested

Security, Identity, and Resistance in Asian Cyberspace

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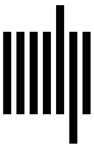

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