Chapter 1

The Complexity of Transparency

"No government can control the global information environment."
—Former U.S. State Department official, Jamie Metzl[1]

"Information, whatever the quantity, is not the same as understanding."
—*Financial Times* writer Christopher Dunkley[2]

In November 2002, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) broke out in the Guangdong Province of China. The virus ultimately killed nearly 800 people, and infected approximately ten times that number around the world.[3] The Chinese government initially ignored the disease. However, though the government issued no official reports during the first months of the epidemic, news spread quickly via mobile phone text messages, E-mail, and Internet chat rooms.[4] A regional Chinese newspaper broke the story, reporting that word of a "fatal flu in Guangdong" had reached 120 million people through mobile phone text messages. With the news so widely known, Chinese authorities were forced to acknowledge and respond to the outbreak.[5] Officials were reluctant to report the full number of SARS cases at first, but the World Health Organization (WHO) began reporting its own data, which pressured Beijing to bring its figures in-line.[6] When the government announced that the number of SARS cases was ten times higher than reported earlier, one Chinese student expressed no surprise. "We already knew it was much worse from reading about it on the Internet," she said. "I don't think they can continue to cover up the truth."[7]

More than two years later, on May 9, 2005, *Newsweek* magazine published a two-sentence article reporting that an American interrogator

at the U.S. Guantanamo Bay prison in Cuba had flushed the Koran of a Muslim detainee down a toilet.[8] The story, which *Newsweek* later retracted after an anonymous Pentagon source said he could no longer stand by it, prompted a press conference by a Pakistani opposition party member named Imran Khan. Khan called on his government to request an apology from the United States and announced that "Islam is under attack in the name of the war on terror."[9] Urdu- and English-language newspapers in Pakistan gave the story front-page coverage and the Pakistani parliament debated the matter. The governments of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, and Malaysia issued critical public statements and mass protests followed in Pakistan, Gaza, and Indonesia. Protests in Afghanistan spread to several towns and turned violent, leading to the deaths of seventeen people and injuries of over one hundred more. Though there are numerous credible reports of other cases of Koran desecration, the *Newsweek* story appears to be false.[10]

These events show two faces of rising global transparency, the increasing availability of information around the world. The first depicts the conventional view: authoritarian governments losing control over information thanks to technology, the media, and international organizations. The second shows the darker side of global transparency, in which some of the same forces spread hatred, conflict, and lies. This darker side of transparency is less noted but, unfortunately, it will be at least as influential in the coming decades. Global transparency will indeed bring many benefits, but predictions that it will lead inevitably to peace, understanding, and democracy, are wrong.

The trend toward greater transparency *is* transforming international politics. Greater transparency reduces uncertainty, which can decrease the likelihood of war and increase international security if it shows that nations have neither the intent nor the capability to harm each other. Greater transparency also increases knowledge of other peoples, which can increase tolerance toward others and decrease the likelihood of conflict. When armed conflicts do break out, greater transparency may facilitate grassroots support for intervention. Finally, greater transparency decentralizes global power by breaking governments' monopoly over information and by empowering Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) and citizens. Armed with information, NGOs build coalitions in order to encourage political change, spark public protests when they publicize transgressions, or merely threaten publicity—a phenomenon known as "regulation by shaming."[11] Citizens, for their part, can use information to mobilize support for change and even overthrow authori-

tarian governments. Greater transparency gives citizens and NGOs new tools of influence and, when wielded appropriately, can be a force for good governance, freedom, and democracy.

These possibilities have raised hopes that transparency will usher in an era of unprecedented justice and peace.[12] Optimists predict that greater transparency will reduce the incidence of conflicts caused by misunderstandings. It can facilitate international agreements and deter cheating. It alerts the world to disturbing events and gives governments, NGOs, and international organizations the opportunity to respond. Transparency also promises to improve governance and to make powerful organizations of all stripes more accountable. As a result, groups across the political spectrum advocate greater transparency of corporations, universities, police departments, local governments, national governments, and international organizations like the European Union, the World Trade Organization, and the World Bank.

Yet greater transparency is not an unmitigated good. In all likelihood, the trend toward greater transparency will be at once positive and pernicious. More information about other societies may reveal conflicting values and interests as well as shared ones. More information about the military capabilities of other states may show vulnerability and encourage aggression by the strong against the weak. Greater transparency can highlight hostility and fuel vicious cycles of belligerent words and deeds. It can highlight widespread prejudice and hatred, encourage the victimization of out-groups and by showing broad acceptance of such behavior without repercussions, legitimize it. Greater transparency can undermine efforts at conflict resolution and, when conflicts do break out, it can discourage intervention by third parties. Transparency sometimes can make conflicts worse.

Greater transparency will not necessarily promote democracy and good governance. Though transparency is partially credited with encouraging the democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe at the end of the Cold War, in some cases, more transparency may actually strengthen illiberal regimes and increase their legitimacy. To the extent that transparency empowers transnational NGOs, it does so indiscriminately, aiding terrorist networks as well as human rights advocates. Moreover, the power of NGOs is likely to remain limited relative to sovereign states, regardless of the merit of particular NGOs' goals. Within states, greater transparency will not necessarily lead to democracy or undermine authoritarian regimes.

In short, the trend toward greater transparency is a complex phenomenon with complex implications. It will benefit the world in many ways, but sometimes at a price. To a large extent, the effects of

transparency depend on what transparency reveals, who benefits, and how people interpret the information they receive in a more transparent global society. Transparency may reveal positive trends and an environment conducive to peace; but it may also reveal negative trends and an environment of suspicion and hate.

By highlighting the double-edged nature of transparency, this book strips predictions about the effects of greater transparency from value-laden assumptions about what transparency will reveal. Especially in the realm of international security and conflict, many discussions of transparency assume that when the fog of ignorance lifts, we will see harmony rather than conflict, and tolerance rather than hate. They assume that people will interpret new information in a particular way and hold a particular set of values. Their predictions are not false, but incomplete. When their assumptions hold, transparency is likely to have exactly the effects that optimists predict. However, when (equally plausible) assumptions are less rosy, greater transparency can produce more destructive results.

Optimists focus on how the availability of information will transform world events, but where people seek information, what information they trust, and what meaning they draw from that information will be more powerful. Regardless of whether the *Newsweek* article at the beginning of this chapter is true, it was quickly believed and treated as further evidence of an American war on Islam. Arguments that the United States has gone out of its way to respect the religious rights of Muslim prisoners, or that any violations are aberrations, have been quickly disregarded.[13] Such views have damaging implications for American interests. Wars, ever more, are wars of ideas and credibility as well as wars of might.

Though this book is about information, it is also about power. If knowledge is power, then transparency, by diffusing knowledge, empowers some groups and not others. This diffusion of information is not politically neutral, since when information changes hands, so too does influence. Moreover, the diffusion of power is not a one-way street. Transparency can make the strong stronger as well as empowering the weak.

Inevitably, this book is also about human nature. Because the trend toward greater transparency is about the relationship between people and information, the values and ideas that people use to evaluate information are crucial in analyzing the effects of greater transparency. Information is disseminated and interpreted by people, so human instincts and biases are always evident. People *choose* how to respond to new information and, indeed, whether to respond at all.

The Nature of Global Transparency

We live in an age of transparency. Nearly two-thirds of the world's countries are now democracies, which release vast amounts of information about their policy making.[14] Technological innovations, ranging from commercially available high-quality satellite imagery to the Internet, radically reduce the cost of obtaining information and transmitting it across borders. The twenty-four-hour news media ferrets out news and broadcasts it globally. Nongovernmental organizations document and publicize abuses of state power around the world. International organizations monitor the behavior of governments and determine whether they are adhering to international agreements. Together, these forces are making governments more transparent to outside observers than at any other time in human history.

Transparency is a condition in which information about the priorities, intentions, capabilities, and behavior of powerful organizations is widely available to the global public.[15] It is a condition of openness enhanced by any mechanism that discloses and disseminates information such as a free press, open government hearings, mobile phones, commercial satellite imagery, or reporting requirements in international regimes. Transparency is not synonymous with truth. It may reveal actual or perceived facts, actual or perceived falsehoods, behavior, intentions, ideas, values, and opinions. It may reveal neutral, empirically verifiable information or propaganda specifically designed to advance a particular cause or view. The term *transparency* does not necessarily require premeditated acts of disclosure by organizations, nor does it imply anything about the nature of the information revealed or what types of actors will gain from that information. Transparency increases due to major initiatives by governments to open up but it also increases through the cumulative effects of small acts. Much transparency occurs due to the aggregate, often unintended, acts of individuals or small organizations that spread information. In an age of transparency that dissemination of information is magnified and multiplied by information technologies, the media, and human networks. Transparency, in sum, describes the relative availability of information, without respect to content.[16]

Five factors in particular have led to the rise of global transparency: the spread of democratic governments, the rise of the global media, the spread of nongovernmental organizations, the proliferation of international regimes requiring governments to disclose information, and the widespread availability of information technologies. Of these five factors, the first four involve governments or organizations whose actions lead to the dissemination of information across borders. The

latter is not an organization but a tool used by individuals or groups of individuals to disseminate information. Information and communication technologies have no agenda; they are neutral transmitters of content. Just as paper may be blank or printed and may be used to transmit all sorts of messages, information technologies are not themselves information providers.

These five factors can be mutually reinforcing, with each factor enhancing the power of the others to further increase transparency. To give some examples, information and communication technologies make it possible for nongovernmental organizations to disseminate information. International organizations publicize information that is reported by the media, which in turn is used by domestic opposition groups to pressure governments to release more information or to explain differences between official policy and information made available by nongovernmental sources.[17] The plurality of sources also matters. When there are discrepancies between information provided by one source and information provided by another source, that discrepancy can lead to questions that in turn clarify and improve the quality and credibility of that information, and sometimes produce more information.

The Spread of Democracy

Between 1950 and 2000, the number of democracies in the world rose from 22 to 120.[18] Democracies generally are characterized by a free press, public hearings, freedom of assembly, competing political parties, and contested elections—all of which facilitate the release of information to both the domestic population and observers worldwide. As a result, "[T]here is no way you can talk only to [your own population]. Other people listen in."[19]

Though there are variations in openness, democracies generally release more information than their nondemocratic counterparts. They have so-called sunshine laws requiring public disclosure of sensitive information.[20] They have free presses that report on issues that are sensitive or embarrassing to the government. And, democratic elections create pressure for otherwise tight-lipped officials to share information with the media, interest groups, opposition parties, and the general public.[21] Observers both inside and outside democratic societies process this information and draw conclusions about leaders' opinions, preferences, and intentions. They can attend public hearings and access government documents; evaluate public opinion by reading poll data and reading the public materials of thousands of interest groups that influence decision making; and read newspapers, magazines, and websites

produced by independent media or groups promoting a particular view. The information released by democratic governments is incredibly helpful to interested analysts, especially for those who are knowledgeable about government structures and processes and about the history and culture of the democratic society in question.

Global Media

CNN, the BBC, Al-Jazeera, and other 24-hour news services provide nearly instant, real-time coverage of breaking news around the world. The scope of this coverage has expanded remarkably in the past twenty years. In 1980, CNN had 8 U.S. bureaus, 2 international bureaus, and an audience of 1.7 million. By 2000, it had 10 U.S. bureaus and 27 international bureaus, which delivered news to 78 million U.S. homes and an additional 212 countries and territories.[22] Al-Jazeera, which launched in 1996, has more than 30 bureaus and its website is among the 50 most visited sites in the world.

As live coverage is broadcast into homes worldwide, public officials are pressured to respond quickly to breaking crises and to avert the suffering that citizens see on television.[23] In the words of former CNN anchor Bernard Shaw, they have much less time to "perceive, react, and respond" to world events.[24] Though there are reasons to be skeptical of the most ambitious claims regarding the so-called CNN Effect, governmental officials agree that it has radically changed the way in which foreign policy is conducted and it has increased exponentially the amount of information in the public domain.[25]

Spread of Nongovernmental Organizations

When it comes to publicizing information that governments would prefer to keep secret, NGOs like Amnesty International, Greenpeace, and Transparency International are thorns in official sides worldwide. Despite their diverse missions and philosophies, NGOs call attention to embarrassing problems such as human rights abuses, toxic waste dumps, and corruption in order to promote particular causes. In the past few decades, NGOs have grown in both number and power. The Union of International Associations now lists over 15,000 transnationally oriented NGOs and the growth of informal coalitions is outpacing the increase in formal organizations.[26] Many of these organizations are small and poorly funded, but some are extremely influential and sophisticated, with global networks of researchers who scrupulously document abuses by even the world's most secretive regimes.[27] These NGOs have become influential

players in world affairs. To give an example, NGOs mobilized the political support that was necessary for the implementation of the international treaty to ban land mines, despite American resistance. Though the treaty is not yet legally enforceable, the initiative is helping to change views about the acceptability and practice of using land mines. NGOs also had a significant impact on the agreement behind Africa's largest oil pipeline and successfully pressured the signatories to take the pipeline's environmental and social effects into account.[28]

International Organizations

International regimes and organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the International Convention for the Protection of the Sea from Ships (MARPOL), and the United Nations Register on Conventional Arms, often require their members to disclose a wealth of information to each other and to the global public.[29] Though they are more likely to require participants to disclose information on issues for which there are fewer benefits to asymmetrical information, some disclosure regimes touch on the most sensitive data of all: information related to national security and defense. These agreements force their members to disclose information that they would rather keep secret in order to achieve some outcome that is desired even more than the benefits of asymmetrical information.[30] This information may include data that governments are loath to disclose domestically. However, in an age of transparency that information often finds its way back home and enables citizens successfully to pressure governments to be more open domestically as well.[31]

Notably, international organizations are themselves becoming more transparent, which releases even more information to the international community and can help citizens and member governments hold these organizations more accountable. To give just a few examples, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the European Union have all launched initiatives to make themselves more transparent.

Information Technology

Information technology is revolutionizing global communications, making it easier and cheaper to share information than ever before. Though this revolution still bypasses much of the world's population, the trends are staggering. To give just a few examples:

- There were 940 million Internet users worldwide by 2004,[32] and the Computer Industry Almanac estimates that this number will

jump to more than 1 billion users by the end of 2005.[33] Internet users in Russia alone, jumped from 1.4 million in 1998, to 7.5 million in 2000—a fivefold increase in just two years.[34]

- Every country in the world now has some sort of Internet connection.[35] With the development of wireless applications, Internet access is available without a personal computer, which will make communication even cheaper and more widely accessible.
- There are 418 radios and 247 televisions for every 1,000 people worldwide. In the United States, the country with the highest radio and television penetration, there are 2,146 radios and 847 televisions for every 1,000 people.[36]
- The number of cellular connections worldwide is projected to grow from almost 727 million at the beginning of 2001, to 1.26 billion in 2003, and to more than 1.76 billion in 2005.[37]

In addition, anyone with a credit card can now purchase sophisticated satellite imagery of almost any site on earth. These photos are available at one-meter resolution—a quality previously reserved only for superpowers. In 2004, the industry leader in commercial satellite imagery began selling photographs at one-half meter resolution, which allows photographs to distinguish anything larger than nineteen inches. An analyst would be able to identify something smaller than a picnic table and distinguish a cow from a horse.[38]

Economic pressures encourage the trend toward greater transparency. Investors want to invest their scarce resources in countries where they have credible information about risks and rewards. They want to be able to predict what the investment climate will look like in the future and ascertain that the government upholds its commitments. Consequently, investors—particularly direct investors who wish to build factories or offices, but also portfolio investors—tend to put their money into more transparent countries and shun less transparent countries. To attract investment, countries must don what Thomas Friedman calls "the golden straitjacket," a set of policies that may constrain governments' behavior but allows them to attract needed resources.[39] Greater transparency is a key requirement for those who don the golden straitjacket.

Values reinforce the trend. As transparency increases, more and more governments and international organizations conclude that transparency is not only inevitable, but also morally right. As Ann Florini writes, "The world is embracing new standards of conduct, enforced not by surveillance and coercion but by willful disclosure: regulation by revelation."[40] The expectation that powerful organizations will be transparent

creates additional pressure for secretive organizations to open up because secretive organizations look like they have something to hide. When transparency is prevalent, acts of secrecy are themselves suspicious. President George W. Bush justified the 2003 invasion of Iraq at least partly because of the regime's lack of transparency and because of the consequent suspicion that it was building weapons of mass destruction. To quote President Bush, "A country that hides something is a country that is afraid of getting caught, and that was part of our calculation."[41]

Predicting the effects of greater transparency requires delving through many layers of complexity and understanding what information is available, who gets what information, and how they interpret and act on that information. The sources of transparency in international politics—democratic governments, the global media, nongovernmental organizations, and international organizations—all report information selectively, which is reasonable for some organizations and a fundamental responsibility of others. Citizens of democracies do not want to become informed about every issue in detail, which is why we elect representatives and maintain permanent government bureaucracies. Similarly, we would not want to read newspapers that reported every significant event or all stories in equal depth; we buy newspapers precisely because they filter information for us. Nonetheless, consumers of information rely on organizations with goals such as profit, entertainment, or the promotion of a particular political agenda that takes precedence over their role as public educators. Consider just a few examples of how the very factors that create and disseminate information also affect our understanding of the world both by what information they spread and—more importantly—what information they do not:

- Democracies still keep millions of secrets despite their openness. The United States, one of the world's most transparent countries, creates more than 3.5 million secrets each year, almost 10,000 secrets per day.[42] More than 32,000 full-time employees at 20 departments and agencies are involved in classification activities and approximately 1.5 billion pages of records at least 25 years old remain classified.[43]
- An extensive literature documents the forces that distort media coverage of international events due to the fact that (1) many media organizations are businesses with a profit motive; (2) the media must report on the government's activities while simultaneously relying on the government as a source of that information; and (3) the media has significant influence over which stories get coverage, which do not, and how those stories are

presented. Those decisions are in turn affected by costs, geography, what else is happening in the world at the same time, and the interests of viewers and readers.[44]

- NGOs focus on some issues and not on others. What issues they do cover, depends on a confluence of circumstances including leadership, timing, funding, and technology. Notably, attention and money do not always go to the most deserving causes, and groups that are supported by larger international organizations, often drown out small, indigenous groups. As Clifford Bob writes, "In a context where marketing trumps justice, local challengers—whether environmental groups, labor rights activists, or independence-minded separatists—face long odds. Not only do they jostle for attention among dozens of equally worthy competitors, but they also confront the pervasive indifference of international audiences."[45]
- Information released by international organizations and regimes is limited by selective participation, including nonparticipation by some of the worst offenders. Moreover, disclosure regimes exist in only a small number of issue areas and, even in those areas the high costs of collecting and reporting information limit their scope.
- The reach of information and communication technologies is still extremely limited. Two out of every three human beings have never made a telephone call. Nineteen out of twenty people in the world lack Internet access. For every two telephone lines in all of sub-Saharan Africa, there are three in Manhattan alone.[46]

Complicating matters further, information is collected, analyzed, and disseminated by human beings (or at least by computers programmed by human beings). Humans often have trouble processing information and even more trouble processing large amounts of information—something that transparent organizations provide in abundance. Decades of scholarship indicate that human beings rely on cognitive shortcuts to help them cope with large volumes of information. We form theories about the way things work and we may resist new information that does not fit our preexisting views. Though these cognitive processes help us to cope with information and form opinions, they can also lead us astray. Thus, even when the information we receive because of greater transparency is excellent and unbiased, we may not interpret it accurately. We may fail to recognize important information amid the "noise" of constant information streams or we may fail to recognize its implications.[47]

Three key factors affect the ability of people to recognize important information when they see it. First, correct interpretation is more likely when the "signal-to-noise" ratio—that is, the strength of the signal relative to the strength of the confusing or distracting background stimuli—is low. When there is simply too much information, people may disregard important data.[48] Second, people are more likely to recognize important information if they expect to find it, and if it does not contradict their existing beliefs. Third, people are more likely to recognize important signals if they work in an environment that rewards correct appraisal and that does not punish people for coming up with the "wrong" answer.[49] Though the first factor may seem to be the most important, controlled laboratory tests show that information overload is less important than the second and third factors.[50]

Humans filter information through their own cognitive processes, but also interpret information in the context of broader social relationships. As part of this process, humans tend to sort others into categories such as friend or foe. Assigning this identity makes the world easier to understand and helps us to predict how others will behave.[51] Governments, too, predict each other's actions not in isolation. but as part of a history of social practices, a fact that affects whether certain actions by governments are considered threats or not.[52] For example, we normally consider the possession of nuclear weapons as a threat. But, as Benjamin Frankel indicates, "If we base our judgment of a country's intentions concerning nuclear weapon development on capabilities alone, then we would have to regard some thirty countries as proliferation suspects."[53] That is obviously not the case and governments worry about some countries' nuclear capability far more than others. The United States, for instance, would be far more concerned if Iran developed theater nuclear weapons than if Canada did likewise.

People must also draw meaning from information, which can be complicated, even when that information consists of tangible, measurable facts. Consider two examples: the level of pollutants in a river or the number of missiles near a border. Both pollutants and missiles are observable, physical entities that can be counted using established scientific methods. However, interpreting the data is still problematic. What exactly should be counted? What exactly qualifies as a "pollutant"? Do a pile of unassembled parts count as a missile? What level of chemicals or missiles is acceptable? At what level do we treat the chemicals or missiles as dangerous? Should people bother to change their behavior based on the new information? Complicating matters further, the intellectual and normative frameworks we use to interpret information constantly evolve. Standards of behavior change. As a result, levels of pollution that

were once acceptable, may no longer be tolerated. People may no longer feel safe with a certain level of defense, even though that same level made them feel safe in the past.

The fact that intellectual and normative standards change, shows that people's views are malleable and can be influenced by information. People can persuade others to change their minds, a fact that makes transparency more complex than simply removing obstacles to understanding or giving more people access to information. By disseminating information and giving people different types of information from different sources, the trend toward greater transparency can change how people interpret information. Merely by packaging information in a certain way, people may in a sense create new knowledge.[54] When organizations aggregate existing information or present information in ways relevant to political debates, they have the potential to change the way in which people think and behave and what issues they feel are important. Transparency International did not discover corruption and reveal it to the world's surprise. Rather, it measured, analyzed, and publicized corruption in order to persuade governments and international organizations that they must confront the problem and change their own behavior.

Why Transparency Matters

The trend toward greater transparency deserves attention because it affects international relations, because influential leaders advocate greater transparency as a solution to many problems, and because it bears on many important debates about international politics and security. Indeed, growing transparency affects the lives of citizens around the globe. It affects the fundamental security of societies by influencing the likelihood of war and peace and influences the success of cooperative efforts to reduce violent conflict. The trend toward greater transparency affects the quality and efficiency of governance, at all levels of government within states, and internationally. Greater transparency also empowers citizens directly and allows them to monitor world affairs themselves instead of relying on a single official source of information. For these reasons alone, transparency merits greater scholarly attention.

Technology experts, peace advocates, political scientists, politicians, business leaders, arms control experts, and international lawyers all cite growing transparency as a trend that may solve a host of global problems. Their faith in transparency leads them to advocate transparency as a matter of policy and to make predictions about what greater transparency means. However, many "transparency optimists" have not

examined carefully their assumptions about transparency, which is dangerous since greater transparency may not always have the effects optimists expect. That transparency sometimes has negative consequences is no reason to restrict it, but leaders should anticipate and prepare for transparency's complex effects.

Transparency also merits further study because the effects of greater transparency bear on important debates about international politics. This book sheds light on these debates and on whether transparency will have the effects that scholars and policy makers expect.[55] For instance, the trend toward greater transparency should bear on several theories regarding war and peace. Some analysts believe that transparency will make the world more peaceful by clearing up misunderstandings that can lead to war.[56] Governments will have better information about opponents' intentions and capabilities. Consequently, they will not start wars because they overestimate an opponent's aggressive intentions and enter a conflict neither side wants, or because they underestimate the other side's strength and start a war they wrongly think they can win.[57] Greater transparency may also reduce conflicts by easing what political scientists call the security dilemma. According to this concept, wars and arms races occur in international politics because states cannot be sure of each other's intentions. As a result, when states arm themselves, expand, or form alliances to increase their own security, other states view those actions as threatening, even when such measures are purely defensive and not motivated by any aggressive intent.[58] Political scientists view this scenario as tragic because states, interested only in increasing their security, end up being even less secure.[59] Some scholars argue that transparency can end the tragedy of the security dilemma. If states can readily discern that others are not aggressive, have limited objectives, and genuinely want peace, then international conflict can be reduced significantly.[60]

Some observers believe that greater transparency will allow us to know one another better, which will help to prevent conflicts. We can see this sentiment in the statements of technology enthusiasts like Michael Dertouzos, who argue that "Any new channel of communication among the people and organizations of this world is likely to contribute to increased understanding and hence greater peace."[61] Advocates of international exchange and youth programs echo this sentiment, though they favor face-to-face contact versus contact via technology. Whatever this means, advocates of this idea agree that increased contact improves relations between groups, which inevitably decreases the chance that conflicts will escalate to violence. Some analysts expect transparency to reduce the incidence of intergroup conflict by preventing political leaders from demonizing other groups.[62] The ability to

dehumanize enemies through propaganda, they argue, is a necessary condition for waging war.[63] Dehumanizing enemies, in turn, requires the government to control information—something that is increasingly difficult in the age of transparency—to avoid contradiction or the spread of information that humanizes other groups. Common examples of this phenomenon are ethnic conflicts in Bosnia and Rwanda, where controlling the media was critical to mobilizing the political support that was necessary in order to wage campaigns of ethnic cleansing and genocide.[64]

When conflicts do break out, greater transparency will lead to more frequent acts of intervention by third parties, according to some analysts. Theoretically, by providing early warning of impending conflicts, transparency should allow outsiders (often NGOs) to identify trouble spots and to encourage governments or international organizations to intervene before conflicts get out of hand. Greater transparency also makes foreign conflicts more visible to the world and therefore harder to ignore. In an example of the so-called CNN effect, people who watch scenes of horrible violence on their televisions may pressure their politicians to intervene in the conflict, in order to end the violence.

Other analysts hope that greater transparency will empower NGOs at the expense of sovereign governments, and topple authoritarian regimes, trends they present as unambiguously positive. With respect to authoritarian governments, observers argue that the free flow of information will erode the power of authoritarian regimes and allow citizens to challenge their governments' authority.[65] Former Citibank CEO Walter Wriston predicts that the spread of information technology will eradicate authoritarianism around the globe by opening people's eyes to the democratic freedoms they are denied. Aware of what they are missing, citizens will demand more say over their destiny and topple governments that do not comply.[66] According to Wriston, transparency empowers citizens "to watch Big Brother" instead of the other way around, unleashing "a virus of freedom for which there is no antidote" that will be "spread by electronic networks to the four corners of the earth."[67] The most commonly cited prediction concerns the People's Republic of China, where approximately one hundred million Internet users are viewed as increasingly slipping beyond the government's control.[68] Indeed, President Bill Clinton boldly announced that the Internet will make a closed political and economic society "impossible" and ultimately bring down the Communist regime.[69]

About this Book

This book presents a view of transparency that is more complex than the conventional wisdom. Though the trend toward greater transparency

will have major effects on international politics—by reducing uncertainty, helping people to know each other better, and decentralizing power—greater transparency will not always reduce international conflicts; it will sometimes make them worse. Transparency, furthermore, will not always promote cooperation and good governance; it may sometimes strengthen illiberal regimes rather than weaken them. Transparency does empower transnational NGOs, but it does not always empower them as much or in the ways we might like.

Why is this prognosis gloomier than most of the discussions of transparency to date? First, comprehensive analyses about the impact of greater transparency are relatively rare. Analysts mention transparency as part of a solution to particular problems in international affairs, but do not take a broader perspective. The result is that discussions of transparency are often one-sided and are focused on its positive effects with little, if any, discussion of costs. Such analyses are not necessarily wrong, but they are incomplete. The cumulative effect is an overwhelming focus on the positive aspects of transparency. To address this imbalance, the major purpose of this book is to discuss the complex implications of growing transparency, with particular attention to the circumstances under which transparency's effects are negative.

Second, many discussions of transparency contain unanalyzed assumptions based on a particular set of values. Analysts often assume an underlying harmony of interests in discussions of international affairs.[70] When that assumption is accurate, clearing up misperceptions and uncertainty should allow governments to see their common interests and encourage cooperation, mutual understanding, and peace. However, harmony is not always the underlying condition of international affairs, an unfortunate reality that greater transparency may only expose. Nations sometimes have real conflicts of interests and values and will want to protect them, often resorting to violence.[71]

Third, some discussions of transparency focus exclusively on deliberate acts of openness, which inevitably lead to more optimistic predictions.[72] Deliberate acts of transparency by governments signal that those governments are trustworthy and adhering to certain standards of behavior. If governments desire friendly political relations and have cooperative intentions, transparency highlights this inclination and may encourage like responses by other states. In this way, transparency fuels virtuous cycles in which clearly visible cooperative gestures are reciprocated, and further reinforces the friendly relationship. Because of this dynamic, sometimes transparency may be more meaningful as a political signal about identity and intent than for the specific information it reveals.

Whereas deliberate acts of openness can lead to better relations among governments, we should not expect involuntary transparency due to technological breakthroughs, investigative reporting by the global media, or reports by NGOs to have the same effect. Instead, involuntary transparency may lead to many of the more pernicious outcomes elaborated earlier in this book. Involuntary transparency is not a signal, nor is it as likely to spread information that indicates cooperative or at least benign intent on the part of governments. It may show arms buildups and hostile intentions, which may make political relations worse. In this context, transparency may fuel vicious cycles by demonstrating a high level of threat, which leads to hostile rhetoric and military preparations, which leads to even worse relations. Involuntary transparency is also likely to spread information that governments would prefer to keep secret such as corruption, human rights abuses, environmental degradation, oppression, the desire to overrun or otherwise abuse their neighbors, or plans to kill members of their population.

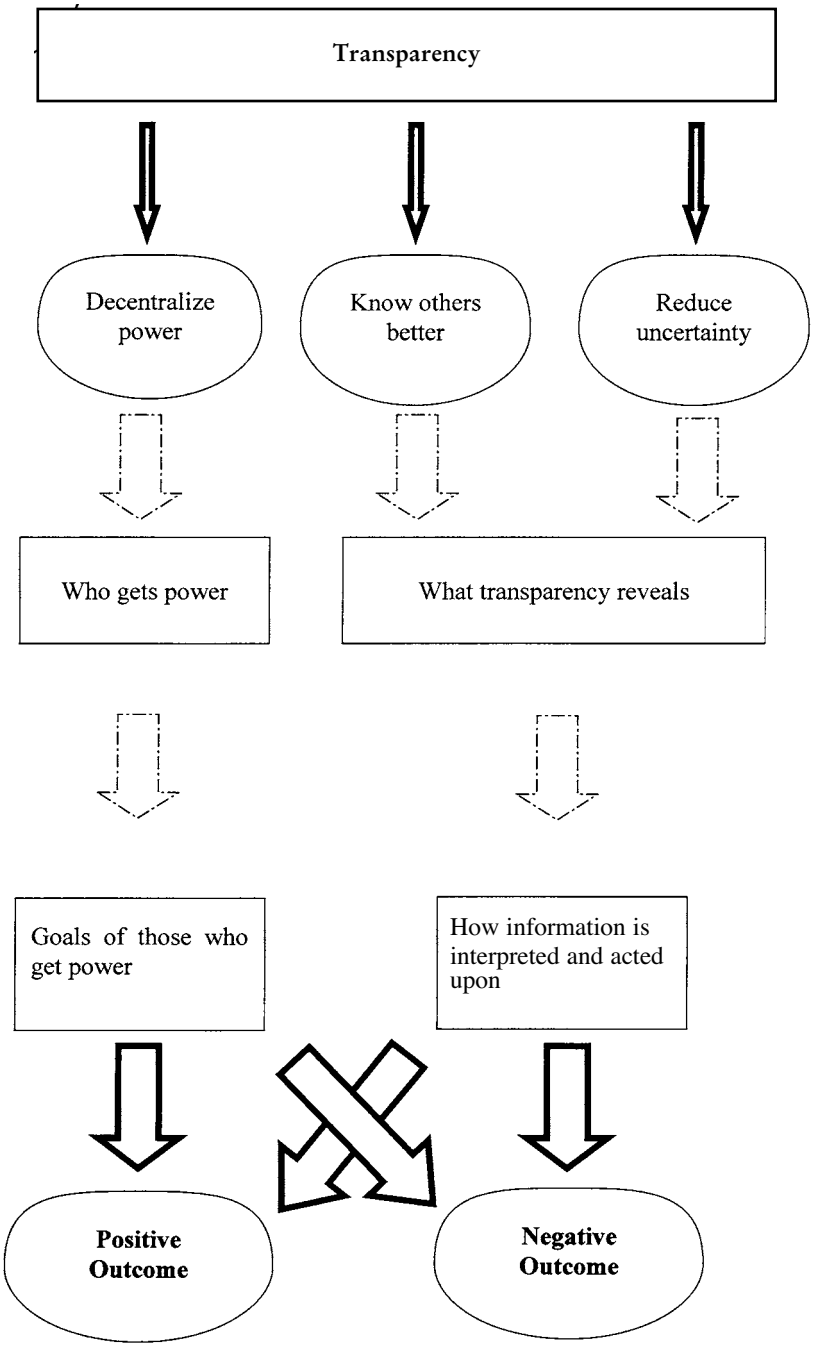
Importantly, a lack of transparency itself sends a signal that more transparent governments may perceive as threatening. The trend toward greater transparency is a condition, but a commitment to transparency is a value, motivated by a particular view of morality or justice. Like transparency, its absence sends a political signal about identity and values, whether governments wish to send that signal or not. Secrecy implies that states have something to hide. It also suggests that a regime does not fully embrace the prevailing norms of the international community.

Finally, greater transparency can mislead us. Transparency does make more information about the intentions and capabilities of governments and powerful organizations widely available to the global public. It does not mean that information is correct, unbiased, or complete or that we will interpret that information correctly. As a result, greater transparency is no guarantee of fewer misunderstandings.

Outline of the Book

This is a conceptual book. Its goal is to examine what transparency is, and how it will affect international politics and security. Its purpose is not to test specific hypotheses—a goal that the author and others have pursued in other publications—but to integrate existing knowledge and to determine what it tells us about the trend toward greater transparency and its implications. The book includes several case studies: one on the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, one on the international response to that genocide, and one on transparency in Singapore. The purpose of these

Figure 1.



case studies is to illustrate the complex dynamics of information flows and the implications of greater transparency.

The book draws extensively on scholarly research, but always with an eye to its practical application. It intends to bridge the worlds of theory and practice. Making this goal explicit is important because it has costs and benefits. The cost is that this book cannot possibly engage every scholarly debate in adequate depth or resolve those debates. It also cannot give policy makers extensive details about how to implement the book's conclusions. The benefit is that it can ask both scholars and policy makers to consider the broader context of their work and to recognize how flawed or incomplete assumptions can lead to flawed understanding and action.

Chapter 2 analyzes how transparency reduces uncertainty in international politics and argues that less uncertainty will not always lead to more cooperation and less conflict. Greater transparency can illuminate hostility, invite aggression, and exacerbate conflicts. It can undermine efforts at international cooperation and conflict resolution.

Chapter 3 examines how transparency increases knowledge of other peoples and argues that more contact with, and information about, other groups will not always lead to peace. Although greater transparency can familiarize "the other" and in so doing, reduce intergroup animosities and prejudice, it can also show conflicting values and interests. Under some conditions, greater transparency can exacerbate hostilities and spread prejudices about out-groups.

Chapter 4 analyzes how transparency disseminates information about foreign peoples and disputes and argues that information will not always result in earlier and more frequent conflict intervention. Although greater transparency can help the international community to overcome informational obstacles to early intervention and even help to create the political will to intervene, sometimes greater transparency will make conflict intervention less likely.

Chapter 5 discusses the tendency of transparency to decentralize power and argues that greater transparency will not necessarily empower democrats and peace-loving NGOs. Sovereign states, including those run by authoritarian governments, retain significant control over information and, when they do not, the results may not always be positive. Greater transparency empowers terrorists and activists alike.

Chapter 6 summarizes the book's arguments and emphasizes the importance of stripping predictions about transparency's effects from value-laden assumptions about what transparency shows. That approach reveals transparency as a complex phenomenon, the effects of which can be either positive or negative depending on what transparency reveals,

how people interpret the information they receive, and how people respond to that information.

Though the purpose of this book is to separate the effects of transparency from false assumptions about what transparency will reveal, ideas and values are critical to understanding the effects of greater transparency. They influence what information people seek and how people interpret and act on that information. They affect the behavior of governments. Because ideas and values evolve, transparency will have different effects at different times. Moreover, these ideas and values can be actively influenced. That possibility gives governments and other powerful organizations a potent source of power in the age of transparency because they can reach foreign audiences quickly, cheaply, broadly, and directly. They can persuade people to change their minds and look at information in new ways. The ability to convince others to share one's ideas and values conveys extraordinary power. When others "want what you want," accomplishing goals is easier and success is more likely.[73] Those who can persuade others to share their values and interests through a compelling message, will be the true winners in the age of transparency.

The scope of this book is ambitious. By definition that means that many issues are not covered in depth and many more are not covered at all. The book does not discuss at all, for instance, transparency of financial institutions, central banks, or fiscal and monetary policy making. It does not discuss at all the effects of transparency on currency markets. The book also does not discuss the relative transparency of international institutions, ranging from the European Commission to the World Trade Organization, or the effects of transparency on negotiations. Instead, this book focuses on broad issues of security and governance and on the transparency of national governments to their citizens, to transnational organizations, and to one another. The reason for this choice is that sovereign states and their governments remain the single most powerful actors in international politics, and by focusing on them, we can analyze global transparency and explain its most important effects. Though the broader phenomenon of transparency is an interesting one that deserves further attention, especially analyses that examine both the pros and cons of greater transparency, it is beyond the scope of this book. This book also does not concern operational issues related to transparency. Though it discusses, for example, the relationship between transparency and accountability and transparency and conflict resolution, it does not discuss how to increase the accountability or how to resolve conflicts. A "how-to" guide to these and other objectives would undoubtedly be valuable, but those are separate endeavors.

Most importantly, this book is not a defense of secrecy. More often than not, secrecy is a bad policy for governments, which all too often classify information for the wrong reasons. Secrecy covers up missteps and corruption. It prevents leaders, who sometimes become overenchanted with their own ideas, from defending them to skeptics. Criticism is good for governance and transparency ensures that governments face criticism. Secrecy makes governments weak. Transparency is also morally right. Governments should be held accountable to the governed. Holding leaders to high standards, and punishing leaders who fail to meet them, mandates that citizens know what their leaders are up to. Citizens pay taxes and have a right to see how they are spent. They fight in wars and have a right to understand why they must sacrifice their lives. Citizens abide by laws and are punished if they do not. They have the right to expect that their leaders will uphold similar standards. Transparency does not ensure accountability, but accountability without transparency is nearly impossible.