

Governing the Internet - Everything Has Changed Yet Nothing Has!

On the 30th September 2016, the US Department's National Telecommunication and Information Administration allowed their IANA functions contract with ICANN to lapse. With this stewardship of the IANA functions has formally passed out of the hands of the US Government and into the hand of the global multi-stakeholder community. So what changes? Basically, the US Government can no longer unilaterally influence the performance of the IANA functions, a point on which there was a considerable and vocal debate with conspiracy theories abounding. The important point is that now with the new global multi-stakeholder community nobody can unilaterally influence that way in which the IANA functions runs. So while everything in a sense has changed, everything still continues like before and so nothing has changed! The US Government has simply stepped out of the controversy!

Can this move significantly impact the way in which the Internet functions? No. There are now too many entities to influence for a new majority view on anything and no one wants the Internet to fall apart. Everyone desperately sees the need to continue with what is working, but there is no whipping boy left!

For the uninitiated, while the Internet at large is a highly distributed network of networks that operate in an almost independent manner, there is a small core set of functions that needs to be performed centrally. The most important of these are the "IANA (Internet Assigned Numbers Authority) functions". The IANA functions specifically are

- The coordination of the assignment of technical Internet protocol parameters
- The administration of certain responsibilities associated with Internet DNS root zone management (including assigning new global top level domain names)
- The allocation of Internet numbering resources (IP address ranges ; and
- Other services related to the management of the .ARPA and .INT top-level domains.

ICANN is a non-profit organization that was incorporated in the USA in California in September 1998. ICANN has performed the IANA functions under a contract issued by the US department of Commerce's National Telecommunication and Information Administration.

More details about the IANA transition can be found at <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/category/iana-functions>.

*Authored by Dr. Sundeep Oberoi
TCS Enterprise Security and Risk Management*