Portfolio Assessment of Department of State Internet Freedom Program: An Annotated Briefing

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Summary

The United States has long argued that all people have a fundamental right to freely express and share their ideas.1 Because the Internet enables individuals to communicate independent of time or distance, it facilitates the free flow of information. Yet some repressive states attempt to limit the content available online and use the Internet to identify and track those who oppose their rule. The State Department’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) Internet freedom program seeks to counter the efforts of authoritarian regimes to censor and control the Internet.2 DRL sponsored RAND in an assessment of their Internet freedom program’s portfolio of eighteen specific projects funded in the FY 2012-13 timeframe in order to determine its effectiveness regarding portfolio performance, balance, and synergy among projects.3

Methodology

To assess DRL’s Internet freedom portfolio, RAND researchers employed a multi-attribute utility analysis and the Portfolio Analysis and Management Method (PortMan).4 We began by developing an Internet freedom model that identified the variables which influence whether an individual chooses to use the Internet to expand political space. From this model, we created a set of metrics that formed the basis of the value, cost, and risk scores which determined the overall portfolio’s performance. One challenge was turning qualitative inputs into standardized quantitative metrics that could be evaluated by the PortMan methodology. To do this, RAND researchers built a survey protocol to ensure that its interviews of the DRL grantees were standardized and replicable. The protocol captured qualitative data fields for a multi-attribute utility analysis of projects: including their background, desired outcomes, specific outputs, implementation methodology, execution alignment with key Internet freedom attributes, cross-project synergy, tool employment, measures of performance achievement and measure of

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3 RAND Response to RFP DRL-11-RFP-01-INTERNET-110307, 31 March 2011
effectiveness relevance, technical, programmatic, and acceptance risk, among others. After collecting the qualitative data through semi-structured interviews, we then relied on a small group of experts and an approach that facilitates consensus building to estimate the value, risk, and cost metrics for each project. The resulting data was then analyzed using the PortMan framework to determine the overall portfolio’s performance and balance.