



**RIPE NCC**

RIPE NETWORK COORDINATION CENTRE

# Avoiding Internet Fragmentation

Digital Cooperation For a Global Internet, 2023 and Beyond

Chris Buckridge | 26 January 2023 | RIPE NCC Roundtable Meeting

# Internet Fragmentation



- Fragmentation is the antithesis of a global Internet
- A broad concept that can be defined in a variety of ways
- Past work on the issue includes:
  - *Will the Internet Fragment?: Sovereignty, Globalization and Cyberspace*, Mueller, 2017
  - *Internet Fragmentation: An Overview*, WEF Report (Drake, Kleinwächter, Cerf), 2016
- More recently:
  - UN Secretary-General referenced fragmentation as a threat in ‘Our Common Agenda’
  - IGF 2022 Policy Network on Internet Fragmentation

# Some Distinctions & Definitions



## WEF paper

- Technical Fragmentation
- Governmental Fragmentation
- Commercial Fragmentation

## IGF PN-IF

- User experience
- Technical layer
- Governance/coordination

## Milton Mueller

- The Internet is now and always has been fragmented
- The Internet is not now and never will be fragmented

# 1. Fragmenting Agreements



- The global Internet is a free, open system that rests on certain agreements
  - Agreement on the definitive record of IP address holdings or the authoritative DNS root zone file;
  - Agreement on the organisations that maintain these records
  - Agreement on how these organisations will be governed
- We are in danger of fragmenting consensus around these agreements
  - New governance issues challenging existing models
  - Distrust between actors across the stakeholder spectrum

# 2. Fragmenting Discussions



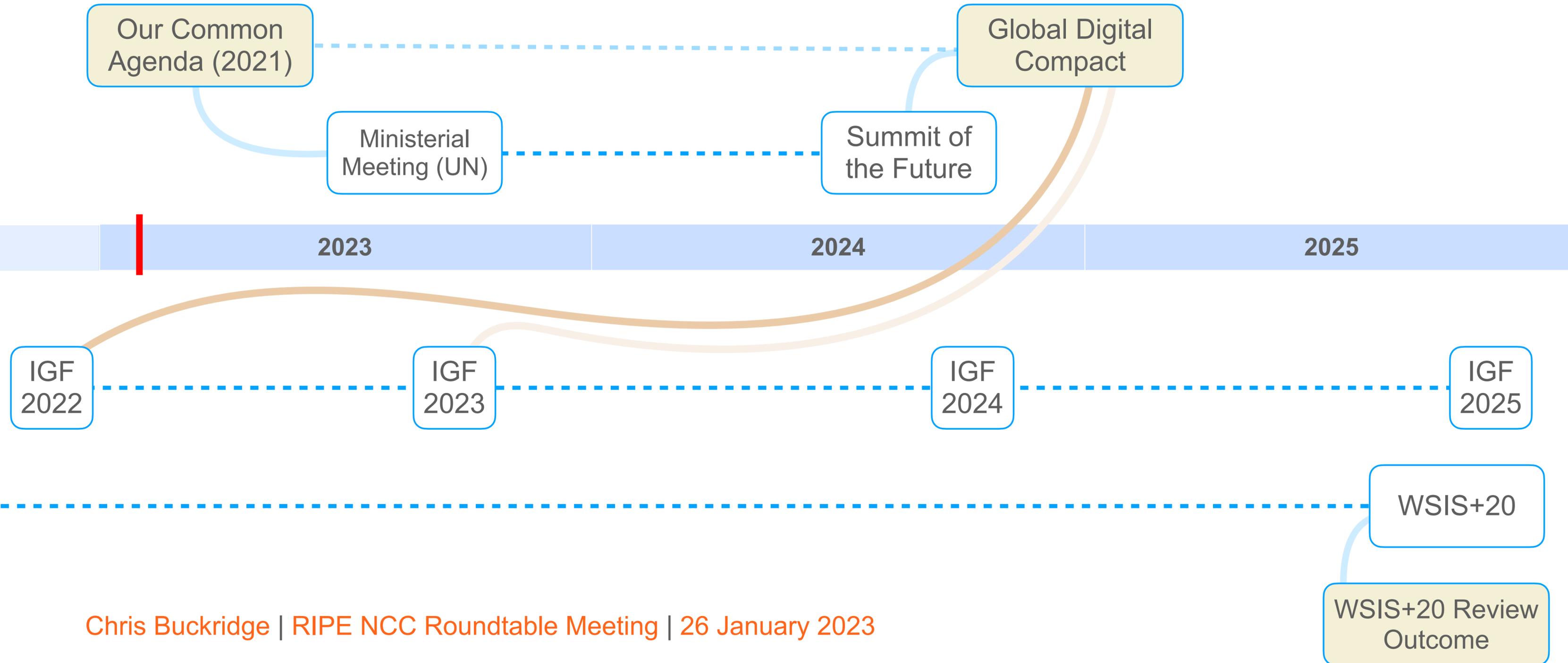
- The Internet is so all-encompassing that there is a real danger of fragmenting any attempt at Internet governance
- Internet governance now takes place across
  - Standardisation bodies
  - National legislatures
  - Industry groups and public-private partnerships
  - Intergovernmental organisations
- How do we ensure coordination and common understanding across all of these discussions and processes?

# Current Thinking



- IGF 2022 Messages on ‘Avoiding Internet Fragmentation’
  - A need for vigilance and understanding of fragmentation threats
  - A need for robust multistakeholder processes to effectively govern a global, unfragmented Internet
  - “While legal, regulatory and policy approaches will differ around the world, active coordination across international boundaries is vital to ensuring that fragmented approaches do not threaten the global reach and interoperability of the Internet.
  - “[D]iversity and decentralisation should not be mistaken for fragmentation. These are fundamentally positive aspects of the Internet’s architecture and operations.”
  - “The Global Digital Compact provides an opportunity to reassert the value of an open interconnected internet...”

# UN Discussion of Fragmentation



# Of Note



- The Global Digital Compact (via the Summit of the Future) will be finalised one year ahead of WSIS+20
  - The GDC may inform the WSIS+20 negotiations and contribute to outcomes
- WSIS laid the foundations of institutional support for a multistakeholder approach to Internet governance
  - The 20-year review of WSIS and its agreements (including the Tunis Agenda) may revisit or rescind that support
- Consultations are being conducted NOW!
  - Both online via the Office of the Tech Envoy, and in various formations being organised by the Co-Facilitators (the UN delegations of Sweden and Rwanda)

# Some Final Thoughts



- The coming years will require a re-commitment to the multistakeholder approach
- Now is the moment to ensure that multistakeholder processes and structures are living up to their principles
  - Inclusive, transparent, effective, fit for purpose
- We need to build back the consensus and trust that are the fundamental basis of an unfragmented global internet.



# Questions



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