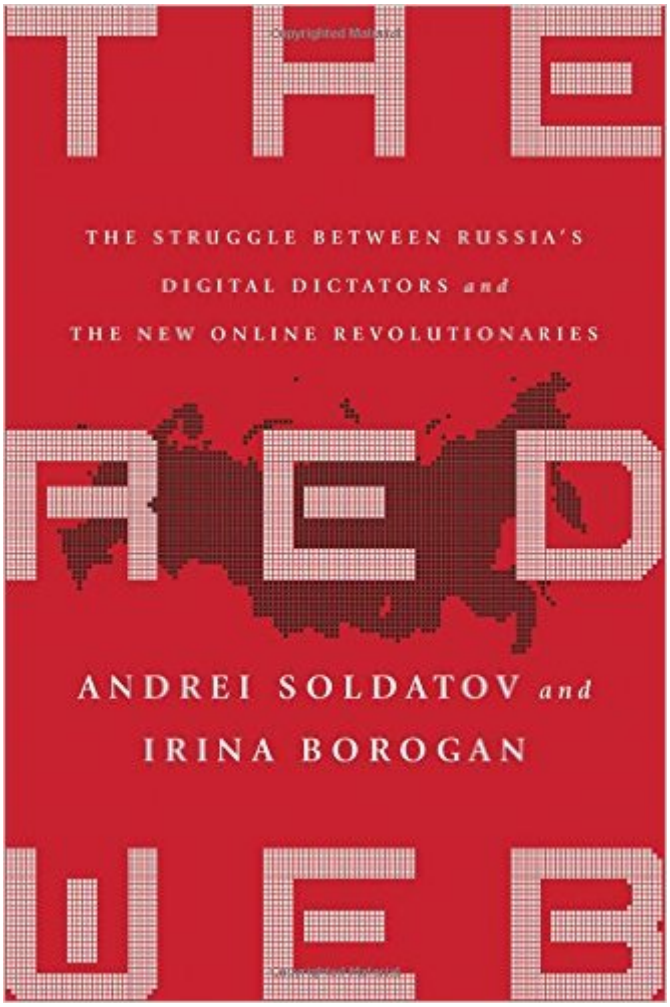
The Red Web: The Struggle Between Russia’s Digital Dictators And The New Online Revolutionaries



Synopsis

A Library Journal Best Book of 2015A NPR Great Read of 2015The Internet in Russia is either the most efficient totalitarian tool or the device by which totalitarianism will be overthrown. Perhaps both.On the eighth floor of an ordinary-looking building in an otherwise residential district of southwest Moscow, in a room occupied by the Federal Security Service (FSB), is a box the size of a VHS player marked SORM. The Russian governmentâ ™s front line in the battle for the future of the Internet, SORM is the worldâ ™s most intrusive listening device, monitoring e-mails, Internet usage, Skype, and all social networks.But for every hacker subcontracted by the FSB to interfere with Russiaâ ™s antagonists abroad—such as those who, in a massive denial-of-service attack, overwhelmed the entire Internet in neighboring Estonia—there is a radical or an opportunist who is using the web to chip away at the power of the state at home.Drawing from scores of interviews personally conducted with numerous prominent officials in the Ministry of Communications and web-savvy activists challenging the state, Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan peel back the history of advanced surveillance systems in Russia. From research laboratories in Soviet-era labor camps, to the legalization of government monitoring of all telephone and Internet communications in the 1990s, to the present day, their incisive and alarming investigation into the Kremlinâ ™s massive online-surveillance state exposes just how easily a free global exchange can be coerced into becoming a tool of repression and geopolitical warfare. Dissidents, oligarchs, and some of the worldâ ™s most dangerous hackers collide in the uniquely Russian virtual world of The Red Web.

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Customer Reviews

It took me about 24 hours to read the whole book - and when I closed the last page, I felt like, well - I want to read more!It is an in-depth history of the Russian Internet, and the way it has developed since its very first days.Putting aside the even more history about the phone communications interception and monitoring (which, by the way, is also amazing - just search the names of the people, who 'worked' there - Lev Kopelev and Alexander Solzhenitsyn; and you may be surprised to find out what they did there), the part about the Internet development is quite precise*.The authors have done a number of interviews, and have used public (and obviously some not-so-public) sources of information, and have managed to put them in an order that makes it an intriguing reading, at moments catching the reader's breath.The reader (in particular the reader from the USA) might be also fascinated by the description of Mr. Snowden's adventures in Russia - there are some facts, which were not widely known until this book was published.The American reader will also find more details about the authors of the Russian Internet policy - and these details are much more precise and factual, than similar accounts, shared for example by Richard Clarke in his book Cyber War.Here's a quote from the book, which is among my favorites (p. 304):"[Kolesnikov] insisted that what the authorities had done to the Internet was entirely immaterial: 'Look, did it affect your morning coffee?'"Today, a year after this conversation took place, the Russian Internet continues to change, and develop, and in some cases, it may have affected the morning coffee of some people.I highly recommend this book - you will have fun reading it.

The authors provide an interesting discussion of the unique features of Russian Internet censorship that distinguish it from the kind practiced in other countries. I particularly liked the analysis of SORM and its connection with the Soviet past. The thesis of continuity with the past is fascinating: today most international Internet traffic moves through one Internet exchange point (MSK-IX) in a way that is similar to how most telephone calls in Moscow during Soviet times went through one major telephone station. The artificial bottleneck, of course, facilitates control and censorship.My only criticism is that the book often reads like an overly literal translation of an original Russian manuscript. For example, the authors use the word â œperspective research" (perspektivnye issledovaniya) ("This section took orders and research commissions on perspective research from all the agencies ...") when what they really mean is either â œprospectiveâ • or â œfuture researchâ •. They say â œfixingâ • (fiksirovatâ ™) ("Nossik also wrote that 'fixing of all incoming and

outgoing Internet traffic of 75 million Russian users requires, without any exaggeration, petabytes and exabytes of disk space'") when this verb should almost always be translated as â œrecordingâ •. Other sentences could be rewritten for better diction: "He expressed fear that the Internet was building beyond their controlâ • should be â œHe expressed fear that the Internet was developing beyond their control.â • â œAndreevsky Flagâ • disguises the fact that that it is a flag with St. Andrewâ ™s cross. The transliteration of Russian names is sometimes inaccurate: â œLev Mishkinâ • should be â œLev Myshkinâ • if the Internet handle is supposed to be modeled on the Dostoevsky character.

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