
RUSSIA SEEKS CHINA'S HELP CONTROLLING THE INTERNET

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A Russian group working to restrict information on the Internet is seeking advice from Chinese experts.

Russias Safe Internet League met in Moscow last month with Chinas powerful censors, including Fang Binxing. He is known as one of the creators of The Great Firewall of China.

The Safe Internet League is registered as a non-governmental organization. But it reportedly has links to important Russian officials.

Observers say the recent meeting shows that government officials in the two countries want to increase their control of the Internet.

Fang spoke to the gathering about cyber sovereignty. He said national borders should be guarded in the online world as they are in the real world. And he said foreign interference with a countrys government should not be accepted.

Lu Wei is Chinas chief of cybersecurity and Internet policy. He said online freedom is not a right but a responsibility. He said it should be limited because it could lead to terrorism, according to a message on the social media website Twitter from a Financial Times newspaper reporter.

Lu agreed with Russian officials who say Western media are leading an information war against their two countries.

Both Chinese and Russian officials at the meeting said that American business interests have too much control of the Internet.

Konstantin Malofeev is chairman of the Safe Internet League. Observers say he is linked to both the Russian government and the Russian-supported rebels in eastern Ukraine. He said Russia should learn from Chinas Internet censorship practices and protect its sovereignty online.

Russian Internet experts say the meeting shows that the Russian government plans to take increasing control of online information ahead of parliamentary elections. The vote will take place September 18.

Russia will hold its presidential election in 2018.

Andrei Soldatov is a Russian investigative reporter. He co-wrote the book, *The Red Web: The Struggle Between Russias Digital Dictators and the New Online Revolutionaries*. He told VOA he believes the government wants to be sure that it can control the Internet before the elections.

Russian officials began to watch social media more closely after it was used to organize large anti-government protests in 2011 and 2012.

Ilya Klishin is the chief of digital media at the independent Russian television station TV Rain. He told VOA they thought if you control the television stations -- I mean, like major TV stations -- then youre good, then you control the public opinion. At that point they found out that even Internet news websites and people on Facebook and Twitter can actually organize 100,000 (person demonstrations in) downtown Moscow.

Anton Nosik is a long-time blogger in Moscow. Russian officials charged him with extremism one day before the meeting of the Russian and Chinese Internet experts.

The charges are connected to online statements he made about Syria. He compared the countrys government to Nazi Germany and wrote that it should be destroyed.

The comments came just after Russia began its air campaign to support the Syrian government against rebels. Nosik could face a fine of thousands of dollars and a four-year prison term.

Nosik told VOA that Russian lawmakers are competing with each other to write bills that would censor and control information on the Internet. He says some of them are doing it because they want attention and to be included in the next parliament. He says lawmakers have written, in his words, so many laws (to limit) Internet freedom in very many different ways.

Reporter Andrei Soldatov says the government targets well-known bloggers and activists for a reason.

Because the Russian system, in large part, is based on intimidation and instigating self-censorship among journalists and among users of social networks and bloggers.

Experts believe the government will continue to try to intimidate independent journalists. But Klishin, from TV Rain, does not believe Russia will block large websites or social networks, as China does.

Its not like in China or even in Turkey where they had YouTube or Twitter blocked. So far, they (have) never blocked a major social network or web platform like Gmail or YouTube or Twitter, he says.

(If they banned) Facebook in Russia then everyone would notice.

Russia is following Chinas practice of forcing all foreign Internet service providers to place their servers with Russian data inside Russia.

Soldatov says Russian security services would have all the providers technologies of encryption immediately available.

Western companies have resisted placing their servers in Russia. But some Chinese companies have started to do so.

Kaynak/Source: