Quick Analysis – The Impact of Efforts to Disconnect Russia from the Internet

18 March 2022

Internet Society

As the conflict in Ukraine evolves, various governments, organizations, and companies are considering sanctions to thwart Russia's invasion. Increasingly, sanctions and other proposed measures have involved directly or indirectly disconnecting ordinary Russian users from the global Internet.

While it is understandable that people are seeking ways to support victims of geopolitical conflict, we cannot achieve this by harming a critical lifeline for civilians. Actions to politicize connectivity and management of the Internet's infrastructure – regardless of the reason – threaten the Internet and everyone's ability to use it as a resource for good.

Cutting access to the Internet means ordinary citizens lose their ability to use a vital communications resource. It also opens a Pandora's Box to dangerous possibilities that, once open, we won't be able to close. The following gives an overview of how some of the proposals and actions to disconnect Russia impact the global Internet.

What We're Seeing

Scenario 1: Politically motivated requests and unilateral actions to remove networks from the Internet, including:

Government requests to Internet governance bodies

On 28 February, Ukraine officials asked ICANN to revoke ccTLDs .RU, .SU, and .рф and shut down root servers in Russia. They also asked RIPE NCC to revoke the rights of Russian members to IPv4 and IPv6 addresses. *You can find an overview of the impact below, and a full analysis in our Internet Impact Brief on the Impact of Ukraine's Requests to Disconnect Russia from the Internet.*

Scenario 2: Government sanctions with unintended consequences on the Internet, including:

Internet infrastructure companies disconnecting from Russian networks

On 4 March, Cogent disconnected a significant part of the Internet's infrastructure from Russian networks, noting economic sanctions and security threats as the reason for their action. Lumen followed soon after; and

Internet Exchange Points (IXPs) disconnecting Russian networks from the Internet

On 11 March, LINX suspended membership to two Russian networks: Megafon (AS 31133) and Rostelecom (AS 12389). A news story reported an email from LINX's chairman said its board of directors made the decision to comply with sanctions against "designated persons, and entities".

In the two cases under Scenario 2, we believe the disconnection was an unintended consequence of sanctions[1]. *You can find an overview of the impact of similar actions in Scenario 2 below, and a full analysis in our Internet Impact Brief on How Refusing Russian Networks Will Impact the Internet.*

How Do these Scenarios Impact the Internet?

We've analyzed these scenarios to demonstrate how government sanctions and requests could have unintended consequences that harm the Internet. An 'x' means the scenario would cause harm to the associated element the Internet needs to exist or thrive.

What the Internet Needs to Exist

Critical Property of the Internet Way of Networking	*Scenario 1: Requests to ICANN AND RIPE NCC*	*Scenario 2: Refusing Russian Networks*
An Accessible Infrastructure with a Common Protocol	x	x
Open Architecture of Interoperable and Reusable Building Blocks		
Decentralized Management and Single Distributed Routing System	x	x
Common Global Identifiers	x	
A Technology Neutral, General-Purpose Network		

Bottom line: Actions that prevent Russian networks from accessing the global Internet are detrimental to key parts of what the Internet needs to exist. Harm to these critical properties can result in fragmenting the open Internet, cutting users' access both within and outside Russia.

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[1] The specific sanctions in effect in each of these cases can be unclear due to the imprecision of public statements.

What the Internet Needs to Thrive

Enablers of an Open, Globally Connected, Secure and Trustworthy Internet	*Scenario 1: Requests to ICANN and RIPE NCC*	*Scenario 2: Refusing Russian Networks*
Easy and unrestricted access	X	X
Unrestricted use and deployment of Internet technologies		X
Collaborative development, management, and governance	X	X
Unrestricted reachability	X	X
Available capacity	X	X
Data confidentiality of information, devices, and applications	X	
Integrity of information, applications, and services	X	
Reliability, resilience, and availability		X
Accountability	X	X
Privacy	X	

Bottom line: Actions that prevent Russian networks from accessing the global Internet hinder key elements the Internet needs to thrive, making it less open, globally connected, secure and trustworthy for everyone.

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Key Take-Aways

Our analysis offers a glimpse of how recent proposals and actions that result in disconnecting users significantly threaten what the Internet needs to be an open, globally connected, secure, and trustworthy resource for everyone. Ultimately, actions to block or disconnect Russian networks from the Internet will:

- Disrupt network operations far beyond a country's borders.
- Have unintended consequences that undermine the use of the Internet by people in Russia.
- Splinter the Internet along geographical, political, commercial, and technical boundaries.
- Set a dangerous precedent that undermines trust in multistakeholder governance processes.
- Severely hinder the Internet's reliability, resilience, and availability.
- Legitimize dangerous playbooks for regimes seeking to control Internet access in future conflicts.

Recommendations

The strength of the global Internet relies on a shared responsibility among its users to uphold the integrity of its core infrastructure.

Access to the open Internet provides not just information, access to opportunity, and ways to communicate, but also hope and assurance for those gripped by conflict. Any restrictions imposed will only be a burden to ordinary citizens.

To prevent harming what the Internet needs to exist and thrive, we must:

- Resist calls to cut people off from the Internet.
- Consider the secondary effects of sanctions that may impact, harm, degrade, and undermine the Internet and access for users in Russia and worldwide.
- Resist actions that politicize Internet operations to fulfill political agendas.
- Conduct Internet impact assessments before any proposal that could impact the Internet.

The Internet Society firmly believes that the Internet is for everyone – and when we say everyone, we mean without prejudice to political, geographic, social, gender, religious or any other affiliations.