Russia in the Age of Digital Competition

Dr. Alina Polyakova

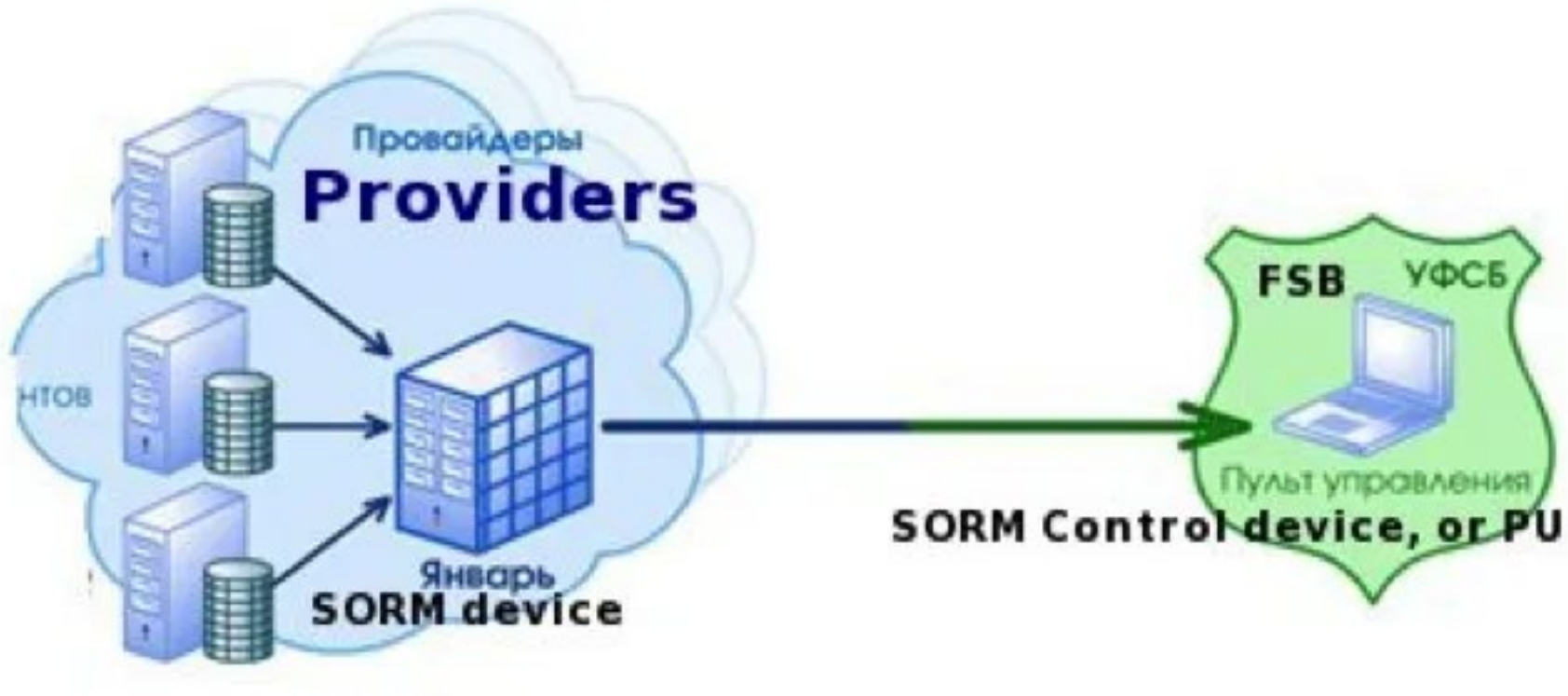
President & CEO

CENTER FOR EUROPEAN POLICY ANALYSIS (CEPA)

"
Whoever leads in AI will rule the world
Vladimir Putin
"
RT

RuNet

- 1990s: Free internet penetration
- 1998: SORM
  - System for Operative Investigative Activities [*Система оперативно-разыскных мероприятий]*



Information controls

- 2000s:
  - Series of laws increased state control of information (traditional and online)
  - Legalized censorship through ”extremism” laws, undesirable labels, and foreign agent categorization
- 2012 onwards: steps toward a “sovereign Russian internet”
  - 2019 Sovereign Internet Law came into effect
  - Allows Rozkomnadzor able to seize Russian internet
  - Intimidation of ISPs, telecoms, private firms
- 2015: SORM 3
- 2016: Yarovaya amendments require telecom providers, social media platforms, and messaging services to store user data for 3 years and allow the FSB access to users’ metadata and encrypted communications

Russian model of information control

- Ad-Hoc surveillance
  - Little information filtering (the Chinese model, more on this later)
- Based on on a repressive legal regime coupled with tightening information controls and intimidation of companies
- Data localization or “data sovereignty”
- SORM expansion
- “Safe City” video surveillance

Tech Exports

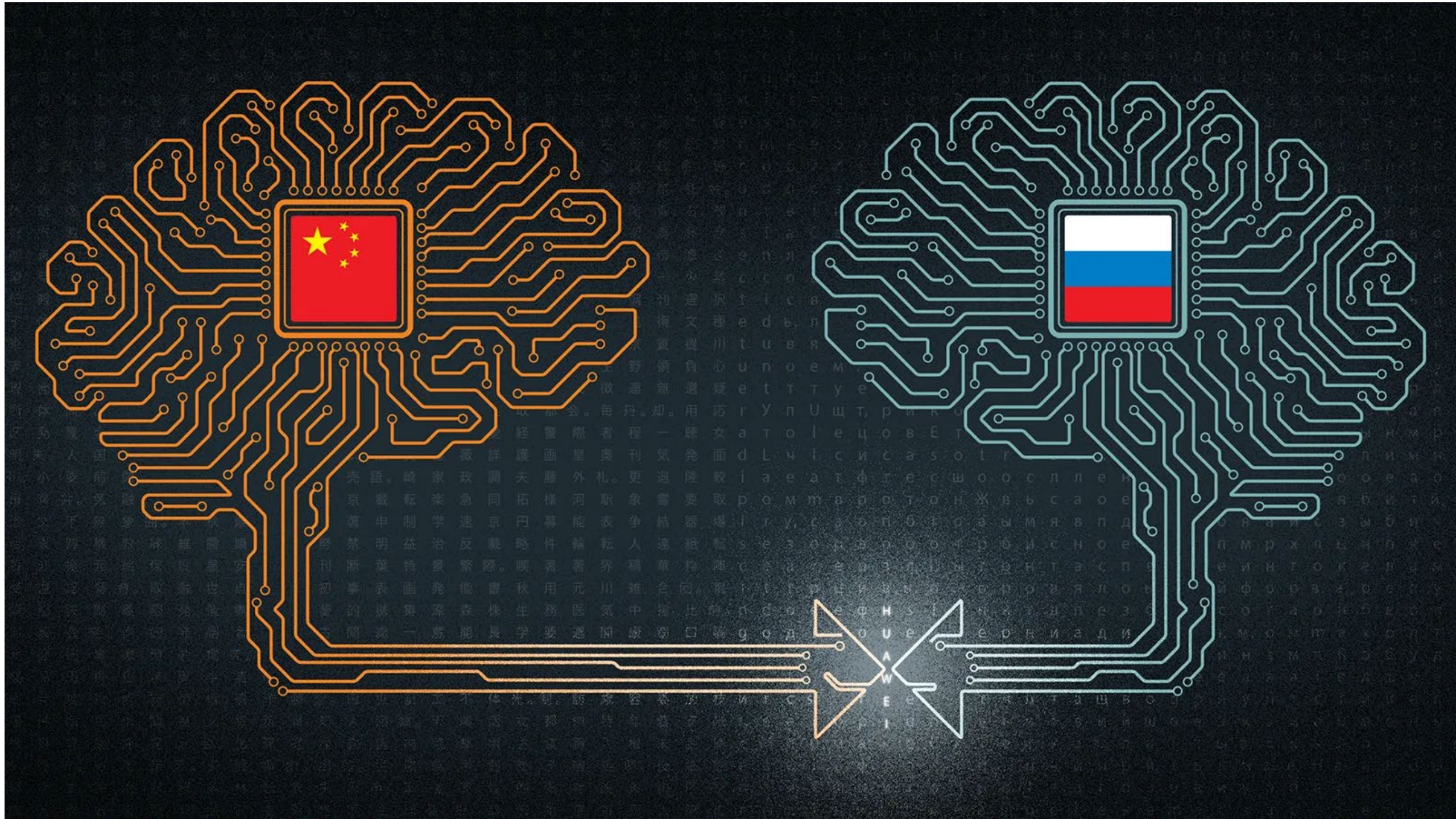
- Central Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa, South America
- Low-tech model vs high tech model
- Potentially more durable and adaptable

Challenges

Telegram

Why AI is key

- Data access limits AI capability Surveillance systems are low tech
- Top-down approach (even more than China)
  - RDIF investments
  - AI strategy
- Increased budget from $1.3 billion to roughly $6.1 billion in 2019


HUAWEI

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“Sovereign” Russian Internet

- Kill switch
- 2019 law- “Sovereign Russian Internet”
- Routing internet traffic through domestic exchanges
- Requires installation of equipment to:
  - Automatically block banned sites
  - Monitor communication across borders
  - Allow Roskomnadzor to take control at a “time of crisis”

Recommendations

- Designate regimes as digital authoritarians
- Targeted sanctions
- Democratic models
- Code of Conduct
- Public awareness
- Export controls