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# The Darkening Web: The War For Cyberspace



## Synopsis

No single invention of the last half century has changed the way we live now as much as the Internet. Alexander Klimburg was a member of the generation for whom it was a utopian ideal turned reality: a place where ideas, information, and knowledge could be shared and new freedoms found and enjoyed. Two decades later, the future isn't so bright anymore: increasingly, the Internet is used as a weapon and a means of domination by states eager to exploit or curtail global connectivity in order to further their national interests. Klimburg is a leading voice in the conversation on the implications of this dangerous shift, and in *The Darkening Web* he explains why we underestimate the consequences of states' ambitions to project power in cyberspace at our peril. Not only have hacking and cyber operations fundamentally changed the nature of political conflict - ensnaring states in a struggle to maintain a precarious peace that could rapidly collapse into all-out war - but the rise of covert influencing and information warfare has enabled these same global powers to create and disseminate their own distorted versions of reality in which anything is possible. At stake are not only our personal data or the electrical grid but the Internet as we know it today - and with it the very existence of open and democratic societies. Blending anecdote with argument, Klimburg brings us face-to-face with the range of threats the struggle for cyberspace presents, from an apocalyptic scenario of debilitated civilian infrastructure to a 1984-like erosion of privacy and freedom of expression. Focusing on different approaches to cyberconflict in the United States, Russia, and China, he reveals the extent to which the battle for control of the Internet is as complex and perilous as the one surrounding nuclear weapons during the Cold War - and quite possibly as dangerous for humanity as a whole. Authoritative, thought-provoking, and compellingly argued, *The Darkening Web* makes clear that the debate about the different aspirations for cyberspace is nothing short of a war over our global values.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

excellent read

I was looking for a book to provide me with a broad perspective on the internet. This book met my needs. The author has had a long and deep involvement with the international public and private entities that created and oversee the internet. As the author notes, the foundation of the internet at its creation, not too many decades ago, was trust. The engineers and technologists who built the internet trusted each other so trust is in the DNA of the internet. Obviously, trust is now in short supply; hence, the book is entitled "The Darkening Web." If you're interested in why its darkening, Alexander Klimburg will give you the reasons. The hardware, the software, telecoms providers, governance of the internet, and great power politics all play substantial roles in the difficulties inherent in maintaining and sustaining the internet. It's a wonderful resource, but preserving this resource is threatened by powerful competing interests. The author sharply criticizes the U. S. for its efforts to dominate and control the internet. The Snowden disclosures gravely damaged much of the international trust in America's oversight and use of the internet for national purposes. He also devotes major sections of the book to Russia's and China's efforts to seize control of the internet for their national purposes. One Chinese undertaking that the author discusses, which I had not previously heard, seeks to create what amounts to a credit card score for its citizens use of the internet. Go to Chinese government websites and your point score goes up; go to Chinese government disfavored websites and your score goes down, way down. Post a favorable comment about the government and your score rises; online criticism of the government gravely damages a citizen's score. It's like a rewards program. A good score will result in perks from the government; a bad score and you don't get to make that special trip to Shanghai. A diabolical approach that may prove quite effective, in my opinion. The book considers cyber power. It looks at the efforts by powers, other than great powers, to pursue effort to project power over the internet. Israel, Iran, and North Korea have all sought to do so. Some of the attraction of the cyber battlefield is the attribution problem. A given event occurs and it's not always clear what state or non-state actor to attribute the cause. The presence of criminal elements who may be allowed by foreign states, Russia and China, in particular, to pursue acts on the internet that advance national goals without the direct

involvement of clearly identified national agencies further complicates the attribution problem. The author discusses terminology - whether to use the term "cybersecurity" or "data security." He prefers "data security." Terminology affects the competing visions for the internet between the Free Internet group with the U.S. and Europe as advocates and the Sovereign Internet group led by Russia and China. I found this enlightening. Can you be secure on the internet? The answer that I came away with was a resounding "no". But I enjoyed the 370 pages of the book and, if the topic interests you, I recommend it.

This book provides a highly informed account of the increasing ability of states to exert power through and via cyberspace. It exposes the inherent ambiguities and contradictions of the cyber domain and suggests a set of separate policy dimensions intended to manage the complexity of achieving a stable cyberspace. It is an inspiring plea not only for governments, but also for businesses, academics and researchers of civil society to find a global consensus on how to coherently govern this dominant domain of the future. Don't miss it!

Solid introduction and in-depth coverage of cyberspace; as Alexander Klimburg writes in the introduction, the book is for both the beginner and more informed. Worth the read, especially with today's importance. Don't get bogged down in the complex web of stakeholders and policy if you're new to the topic, but appreciate the extremely nuanced coverage from Klimburg.

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