



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on January 2, 2013

## After UN Internet Grab Fails, China Seeks to End Online Anonymity

Less than a month after governments [debated ending online anonymity](#) and other proposals to impose a global regulatory regime on the Internet at a [United Nations conference in Dubai](#), the dictatorship ruling mainland China announced that all Web users would have to identify themselves with their full names. The new rules also mandate that “illegal” content — criticism of the regime, for example — be immediately scrubbed and reported to authorities.



The latest move against online freedom in China, approved by the autocratic regime’s so-called “legislature,” is aimed at further quashing public dissent. It was announced after a series of incidents illustrated that regular Chinese people were becoming increasingly brazen in criticizing the corrupt ruling Communist Party and its ruthless machinations.

Of course, the people of China have long suffered from widespread online restrictions and official censorship — the totalitarians in Beijing have famously created what is likely the most Orwellian Internet regime on Earth. At the International Telecommunication Union summit in Dubai in December, the Chinese dictatorship even joined with other repressive regimes in a [failed effort to push similar restrictions at the global level](#).

Traditional media such as newspapers and television in China, meanwhile, are owned and run by the dictatorship itself, helping authorities to maintain stricter control over information than probably any other government in history. As an additional precaution, for the brave souls who do dare to speak out, punishment can be [swift and brutal](#) — forced-labor re-education camps, arbitrary prison sentences, attacks on family members, torture, and worse.

Still, despite the regime’s best efforts, pesky critics continue to criticize the tyranny and the overbearing corruption, especially online. So-called “micro-blogging” has proliferated, and even the regime’s “social networking” services — popular Western ones such as Twitter and Facebook are mostly banned — have helped citizens to expose lawlessness, corruption, and more. And as ever greater numbers of Chinese join the online world, the trend toward speaking out is only accelerating.

So, late last week, what passes for a “legislature” in China — in reality little more than a powerless rubber stamp subservient to Communist Party bosses — approved a sweeping set of new rules and regulations. The latest additions to the dictatorship’s Internet regime purport to require that all users provide their real names and other personal information to access the World Wide Web or to post something online.

The new regulatory burdens also mandate the deletion of online posts or Web pages that contain what the regime considers to be “illegal” content — information exposing official criminality or questioning tyranny, for example. Internet service providers, meanwhile, will now be required to report violators, along with all of their personal information, to the regime for punishment.



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In reality, of course, many of the supposed “reforms” were already in place anyway — being forced to use one’s real name, deleting criticism of the regime, and severe punishments for online critics of the nation’s self-styled communist rulers. Now, it is spelled out explicitly in what passes as “law” in China: “Service providers are required to instantly stop the transmission of illegal information once it is spotted and take relevant measures, including removing the information and saving records, before reporting to supervisory authorities.”

In typical Orwellian fashion, the regime’s functionaries attempted to defend their latest assault on free speech and an open Internet. “This is needed for the healthy development of the Internet,” [claimed](#) deputy director of the “Legal Work Committee” Li Fei during a press conference. “The country’s constitution protects citizens’ rights in supervising and criticizing the state and government officials’ behavior.”

However, there was also a caveat. “When people exercise their rights, including the right to use the Internet, they must do so in accordance with the law and constitution, and not harm the legal rights of the state, society ... or other citizens,” Li was quoted as saying. According to news reports, the latest crackdown came after the brazen corruption of multiple lower-level regime functionaries was exposed online by regular so-called “netizens” — citizens who use the Internet.

The Communist Chinese Party’s propaganda department quickly sprang into action as well, using regime-run media to assure its victims that the new rules were nothing to worry about. “Instead of depriving netizens’ freedom and entitlement, the rules protect the legal rights of every Internet user,” the dictatorship’s Xinhua “news” and [espionage](#) service [claimed](#) in an article, adding that many of the mandates were already in place anyway. “The rules will ultimately help to create a better online environment in China.”

Critics, however, are not buying the official statements being made by the autocracy’s functionaries. “Their intention is very clear: It is to take back that bit of space for public opinion, that freedom of speech hundreds of millions of Chinese Internet users have strived for,” prominent Chinese writer Murong Xuecun was [quoted as saying](#) by the Associated Press after the new identity regime was announced.

Professor Zhang Zhi’an at the University in Guangzhou, meanwhile, explained the real purpose of the new regulations. “Anti-corruption campaigns online have deeply tarnished the party and the government’s image, and social media discussions have increased instability in certain regions,” he [told](#) Bloomberg News. “Enforcing real name registration will make web users more cautious when posting comments online.”

Even regular Chinese Internet users on services like Weibo, a heavily censored, regime-approved alternative to Western social networking services, are complaining about the latest wave of restrictions. “So now they are getting Weibo to help in keeping records and reporting it to authorities. Is this the freedom of expression we are promised in the constitution?” one user was [quoted as complaining](#) online by Sky News. Another openly called for defiance: “We should resolutely oppose such a covert means to interfere with internet freedom.”

However, despite the uproar, analysts [say](#) that actually putting the new restrictions in place will be difficult, if not impossible. As *The New American* [reported](#) as far back as 2009, the regime has been trying to end online anonymity for years, though its efforts so far have produced mixed results. Still, the so-called “[Great Firewall](#)” of China is constantly evolving to ensure that the regime’s victims do not find



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unapproved information, and vast resources are being expended to keep the censorship system up to date with technological progress.

While it may seem like a hallmark of far-flung totalitarian regimes, the Obama administration was [openly discussing an online “identity system”](#) as [recently as 2011](#). “We are not talking about a national ID card. We are not talking about a government-controlled system,” [claimed](#) U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke, whose department was charged with developing the scheme. “What we are talking about is enhancing online security and privacy, and reducing and perhaps even eliminating the need to memorize a dozen passwords, through creation and use of more trusted digital identities.”

Critics and opponents, however, blasted the idea and warned that it could be merely a stepping stone to building a system along the lines of what the Chinese dictatorship is now trying to erect. “The government cannot create that identity infrastructure,” [said](#) Center for Democracy and Technology’s Jim Dempsey, adding that any such system should be entirely voluntary and developed by the competitive private sector. “If [the U.S. government] tried to, it wouldn’t be trusted.”

Much like the [communist regime in China](#), the Obama administration tried to downplay fears that the controversial scheme would be used for surveillance or to restrict free speech. Considering statements made by [senior officials](#) and the president’s own [lawless behavior](#), analysts warned that such a plan would be fraught with danger and ripe for abuse. The emerging European Union super-state is [working on a similar plot](#), too.

It is no surprise that [tyrants](#) of all [varieties](#) are [paranoid of the Internet](#) and the forces it can unleash — after all, it gives regular people a tool to complain, expose misdeeds, realize that they are not alone, and organize to oppose tyranny. That is why the UN and most of its member governments — [dictatorships of assorted varieties](#) — tried [so hard](#) last month to [seize control over the Web](#) at the ITU summit. [The plan failed this time](#), but as the communist Chinese regime’s latest announcement shows, efforts to censor and control the Internet will continue to intensify using various real and imagined pretexts.

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