



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on July 8, 2015

China Increases Internet Control, Citing “National Security”

According to a report by *The Guardian*, “China has passed a wide-ranging national security law expanding its legal reach over the internet and even outer space as concerns grow about ever-tighter limits on rights.”

Part of the push for tighter controls over the Internet comes from the increase in activism among the Chinese populace, particularly younger, more tech-savvy citizens. While officials claim the measures are being put in place to protect national security, most of the deliberately ambiguous new law is aimed at curtailing dissent.



In the world of cyber-espionage, China is an emerging force to be reckoned with. While steadily hacking systems in the West — including the [White House](#) and the [Office of Personnel Management in D.C.](#), — Beijing is also taking steps to harden Chinese government systems against intrusion, both from within and without. In keeping with the totalitarian mindset so prevalent in Communism, China’s most recent attempt to “protect national security” includes the typical draconian measures one would expect.

Zheng Shuna, a senior official at the National People’s Congress (NPC), maintained the party line in her statement to media explaining the new law: “China’s national security situation has become increasingly severe,” she asserted, assuring that Beijing will “not leave any room for disputes, compromises or interference” when it comes to protecting national interests. And totalitarian regimes do not usually see anything as being outside of “national interests.”

The law, which was approved by the standing committee of the NPC by a vote of 154-0 with one committee member abstaining, is so vague and wide-ranging that it allows for virtually limitless power, depending on how it is eventually defined. It looks as though the NPC committee had to pass it to see what is in it. As [The Guardian](#) reported,

The legislation is extensive and couched in general terms, with few exact details such as the sentences for violators. The practice, which leaves the authorities ample room for interpretation, is common in China, with the government issuing detailed regulations later.

The law “declares both cyberspace and outer space to be part of China’s national security interest, along with the ocean depths and polar regions, where Beijing has been extending its exploratory activities,” and “requires key internet and information systems to be ‘secure and controllable,’” *The Guardian* reported, quoting from a statement by the Chinese state news agency, Xinhua.

This new law is just part of a pattern in Beijing’s attempts to control dissent, according to Maya Wang of Human Rights Watch. She points out that the law “includes elements that define criticism of the government as a form of subversion,” adding that the legislation is also “very vague in defining what



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kind of specific actions would constitute a citizen endangering state security.”

China has a long history of censorship and violations of free speech. As the Internet has grown, the Communist Party and officials at the NPC have had an increasingly difficult time keeping people from speaking out and accessing banned information. Many Chinese citizens have turned to the Internet to obtain and disseminate that “banned information” via blogs and comments on websites. In an effort to maintain control over the flow of information, officials have stepped up censorship and increased limitations on Internet access. Already this year there have been myriad new laws and regulations of which this latest development is merely a logical (albeit despotic) extension.

In January China expanded an existing policy of blocking access to Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) that many were using to circumvent the so-called “Great Firewall of China” and access websites and information that were blocked by the country’s Cyberspace Administration. In February *CBS News* and other media reported on China’s new policy that “users of blogs and chat rooms [are now] required to register their [real] names with operators and promise in writing to avoid challenging the Communist political system, further tightening control over Internet use.”

Then in April the *Wall Street Journal* reported that “China’s Internet regulators announced more explicit rules for monitoring content on online news portals, demonstrating Beijing’s increasing willingness to discuss its censorship openly.” In that salvo against freedom of speech, Chinese officials lumped pornography, false information, rumors, and political criticism together as crimes worthy of censorship.

This new development ratchets up the previous censorship and lays the groundwork for even stricter laws in the future. NPC senior official Zheng Shuna made the point that the law set out the legal framework for “the management of internet activities on China’s territory and the resisting of activities that undermine China’s cyberspace security.”

As the Great Firewall of China gets an update to version 2.0, what little freedom of speech is left to its hapless citizens is eroding quickly.



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