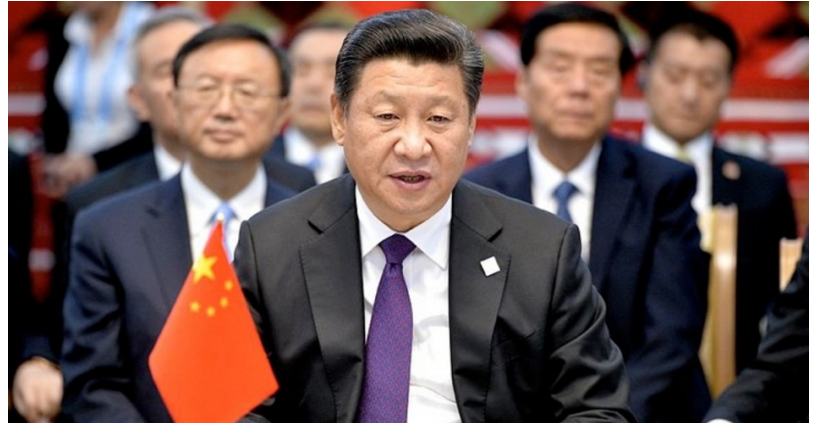




Written by [James Murphy](#) on August 23, 2018

Chinese President Wants “Clean and Righteous” Internet

Chinese President Xi Jinping (shown) is looking to make the Internet an even “safer” space than it already is in the People’s Republic by removing content he refers to as “vulgar.” In a Wednesday meeting with state propaganda officials, Xi expressed his wish that the internet must be “clean and righteous.”



Since a free and uncensored Internet is not in the interest of China’s communist and authoritarian government, the country has been tightening its already-strict controls on content. The list of [banned websites in China](#) is already long and includes Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and Tumblr. Apparently, President Xi wants it longer still.

In 2017, the Chinese government shut down close to 130,000 websites, which were “obscene” or contained “harmful” information. A 2012 report by Freedom House stated that China was the third-most-restrictive country in the world when it comes to Internet access. In the six years since Xi took office, Internet controls have only tightened.

According to China’s state-run news agency [Xinhua](#), Xi said that China must “uphold a clean and righteous internet space.” The remark was made during a two-day conference that discussed Chinese propaganda in broader terms, including how the country’s messaging is affecting trade relations with the United States.

Just like the U.S. and Europe, China’s blogging community has a history of responding to news events with humorous videos and postings, which can tend toward obscene in the eyes of Chinese censors. This type of content is generally purged quickly.

Xi insisted that content creators be responsible, achieve quality and, above all, respect the law. “Reject the vulgar, the base and the kitsch,” Xi explained. “Put forth more healthy, high quality internet works of culture and art.”

The country has two main ways of controlling what citizens see on the Internet. The first is euphemistically referred to as the [Great Firewall](#), which blocks access to foreign websites. The second way is known as [Golden Shield](#), a domestic surveillance tool that keeps track of how citizens use the Internet. The Golden Shield in particular is very Orwellian in scope, as it patrols what citizens are searching on the web. It’s a tool meant to instill fear when searching for content that the government might not approve of.

Chinese Internet censorship is even attempting to reach beyond its borders. Also occurring yesterday, BuzzFeed News’ Beijing bureau chief Megha Rajagopalan was denied a visa renewal, effectively ejecting her from the country. Rajagopalan, an American, was denied the renewal in May for unspecified reasons. She called her time in China “six wonderful and eye-opening years.”



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In a Wednesday tweet, Rajagopalan told followers, “China’s Foreign Ministry declined to issue me a new journalist visa. They say this is a process thing, we are not totally clear why.”

But many suspect the “why” is quite obvious: Rajagopalan has reported extensively on [China’s security crackdown in the western region of Xinjiang](#), where the communist government is holding hundreds of thousands of ethnic Uighurs, mostly Muslim, in reeducation camps. It was a story China does not want told, and Rajagopalan’s ouster sends that message quite clearly.

It’s not the first time that the foreign ministry has denied a visa to a reporter. In 2012, Al-Jazeera journalist Melissa Chan’s credentials were not renewed for unspecified reasons. In 2016, French reporter Ursula Gauthier lost her credentials after reporting negatively about Chinese government policy.

China claims that its censorship efforts are all about ensuring national security and “social stability.” Of course, anyone can see that the Great Firewall and Golden Shield are really about suppressing unapproved ideas and controlling the populace. That’s what authoritarians do.

In a way, you can almost empathize with the Chinese president. The Internet is, oftentimes, a slime hole, seemingly bereft of goodness; replete with pornography and violence. However, if the antidote to those nastier elements of the web is censorship, then the cure is deadlier than the disease. Society without the freedom to say what you want and look at what you want is no better than prison.

But freedom is a funny thing; it’s like the water of ideas. Give it time and, eventually, it wears down whatever is holding it back and it bursts forth. On an instinctive level, the people of China must realize that they are not getting the full story about things. President Xi and the Chinese government are engaged in keeping a tidal wave of ideas from pouring onto its shores. But, in the end, the water always wins.

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