

## Creator of China's Web curbs admits dodging them

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This file photo shows a customer surfing Internet at cafe in Beijing. The architect of China's vast Internet censorship system has admitted using software to circumvent the controls -- but only to probe just how secure his widely-criticised creation is.

The architect of China's "Great Firewall" has admitted using software to circumvent the vast system of Internet censorship -- but only to probe the security of his widely reviled creation.

Fang Binxing said he uses six virtual private networks (VPNs) to scale the government's far-reaching online barrier, whose restrictions on sensitive content extend to banning Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

"I have six VPNs on my home computer," Fang, 50, said in a rare interview published in Friday's Global Times newspaper.

But Fang, president of the Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications, said he uses them purely to test the firewall's effectiveness.

"I'm not interested in reading messy information like some of that anti-government stuff," Fang told the English-language state newspaper.

Fang also defended the Great Firewall, calling it "urgently" needed.

He is considered the inventor of the system, which filters out information deemed subversive or politically harmful by China's communist government.

China has sanitised media reports on the Middle East unrest and restricted online discussion of it, apparently fearful it could spark calls for democracy at home.

China has a world-leading 457 million Internet users, according to official figures, and countless Chinese find ways to access banned content through VPNs.

Such networks get behind the firewall by disguising a user's location, often via a foreign server.

Thousands of Chinese Internet users vented their anger at Fang in December when he opened a microblog account on web portal Sina.com, which operates a tightly managed Twitter clone. Fang closed the account within days.

"He is the enemy of all netizens who are forced to scale the wall all day long," said one typical comment, later deleted by web monitors.

Fang told the newspaper the comments were "dirty abuse" that he

endured "as a sacrifice for my country".

"They can't get what they want so they need to blame someone emotionally: like if you fail to get a US visa and you slag off the US visa official afterwards," he said.

Internet users savaged Fang anew on Friday over his latest comments.

"When new forces come into power (in China) someday, he will get his comeuppance," said an entry on one website, cnblogs.com.

"Kill him!" railed another user.

However, in a tribute to Fang's brainchild, criticism was otherwise scarce as the use of his name is blocked on many major websites, including hugely popular Twitter-like Chinese microblogging services.

Fang defended the Great Firewall as a pressing necessity when it went up in 1998 and said it needed to be upgraded to prevent people from tunnelling under.

"Drivers just obey the rules," he said, comparing the firewall to traffic control. "So citizens should just play with what they have."

China's Internet controls have become a key irritant in relations with the United States, especially after a dispute over Chinese censorship led US search engine giant Google to reduce its presence in China.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton renewed a call for Internet freedom on Tuesday, saying nations like China that suppress online activity will pay an economic cost and risk unrest like that seen recently in the Middle East.

She also announced plans to launch State Department Twitter feeds in Chinese, Russian and Hindi, just days after starting feeds in Arabic and Farsi.

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