

China doubles down on internet control after tough new law

November 17 2016, by Gerry Shih

China's leaders and official media are pushing for greater control of the internet and technology products as tensions surrounding a far-reaching Chinese cybersecurity law loom over a gathering this week of the world's leading tech firms and Chinese officials.

The Communist Party's mouthpiece People's Daily warned in an editorial on Thursday that China must break monopolies over core technologies and standards and remain untethered to other countries' technology supply chains.

The commentary, aimed apparently at Silicon Valley in unusually stark terms, comes one day after President Xi Jinping called for "more fair and equitable" governance of the internet at the opening of the state-run World Internet Conference. Since 2014, China has hosted executives from the likes of Microsoft, Apple, Facebook and Alibaba in eastern China to promote its vision of an internet that is more tightly controlled by national governments rather than running unchecked as a transnational network.

The conference this week has highlighted U.S. and China's competing and increasingly entrenched views about the internet, trade and cybersecurity, and the potential for these issues to become an enduring irritant in bilateral relations.

Xi reiterated on Wednesday the Chinese position of "internet sovereignty" over its 700 million Internet users, while other top leaders

declared the country's willingness to work with the global industry for mutual benefit—if security could be assured on China's terms.

Earlier this month, China passed a broad cybersecurity law that gives law enforcement greater powers to access private data and requires data to be stored locally on Chinese servers. Human rights groups have voiced concern about police overreach while U.S. firms have lobbied against the measure, saying it would wall off China's internet and unfairly hamper their access to the market.

Other Chinese proposals in recent years have effectively discouraged state-backed companies and agencies from buying foreign products out of cyber-spying concerns. China has also encouraged its state-backed sector to develop—or outright acquire—technologies in strategically critical industries like semiconductors, which it believes to be an Achilles heel of the Chinese economy. Recent efforts to acquire U.S. chip companies have been rebuffed by U.S. regulators on national security grounds.

Foreign technology trade groups say the regulations have used security as a pretext for enacting protectionist trade policies to benefit China's tech industry, and more than 40 groups signed a letter to Communist Party cyberspace officials last week urging China to respect its World Trade Organization commitments.

"We are concerned that these commitments are undermined by public statements and other forms of high-level guidance that call for indigenous and controllable substitution plans for information [technology products](#) and services," the trade groups said, while acknowledging that China faced "legitimate security concerns."

Beijing has said the internet has been overwhelmingly dominated by the United States and it has backed a proposal to transfer control over some

of the [internet](#)'s core architecture to a U.N agency, the International Telecommunication Union.

Critics, however, objected to letting authoritarian regimes like Iran and China get equal votes on matters affecting speech. The U.S. government in September privatized control over the systems by transferring them to a nonprofit oversight organization.

The People's Daily made clear in its editorial on Thursday that China needed to avoid dependence on foreign firms "particularly by breaking monopolies over core technologies and standards and not allowing other countries to control vital supply chains."

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