

US in new push to break China Internet firewall

11 May 2011, by Shaun Tandon



People surf the Internet in Hefei in central China. US State Department officials have said they would give \$19 million to efforts to evade Internet controls in China, Iran and other authoritarian states which block online access to politically sensitive material.

The United States plans to pump millions of dollars into new technology to break through Internet censorship overseas amid a heightened crackdown on dissent in China, officials have said.

State Department officials said they would give \$19 million to efforts to evade Internet controls in [China](#), Iran and other authoritarian states which block online access to politically sensitive material.

Michael Posner, the assistant secretary of state in charge of human rights, said funding would support [cutting-edge technology](#) that acts as a "slingshot" -- identifying material that countries are censoring and throwing it back at them.

"We're responding with new tools. This is a cat-and-mouse game. We're trying to stay one step ahead of the cat," Posner said.

The announcement came shortly after the United States and China wrapped up wide-ranging annual talks in which Secretary of State [Hillary Clinton](#) showed exasperation at Beijing's intensifying clampdown on domestic critics.

China routinely blocks sites that present non-official viewpoints on topics such as Tibet's exiled leader the [Dalai Lama](#), the banned Falungong spiritual movement and the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown on pro-democracy protesters.

More recently, Chinese authorities blocked search results for "Hillary Clinton" after she gave a speech championing Internet freedom and for "Jasmine," an allusion to pro-democracy uprisings sweeping the Arab world.

"In effect, we're going to be redirecting information back in that governments have initially blocked," Posner said.

"This can be done through email or posting it on blogs or RSS feeds or websites that the government hasn't figured out how to block," he said.

The funding comes out of \$30 million which the [US Congress](#) allocated in the current fiscal year for Internet freedom.

The failure until now to spend the money led lawmakers to accuse the State Department of kowtowing to China. A recent Senate committee report called for another government body to be put in charge of the funds.

Falungong supporters developed the so-called Global [Internet Freedom](#) Consortium, a software to evade China's Internet firewall that was so effective that Iranians sought it out during 2009 protests against the clerical regime.

Posner said that the State Department would not identify the recipients of funding due partly to "reasons of security."

Another US official who requested anonymity said that the State Department received requests for funding totaling \$180 million and that it chose which

ones appeared most effective.

The funding grants still need the green light from Congress, but the official voiced hope that it would happen quickly.

Clothilde Le Coz, Washington director of the media rights group Reporters Without Borders, welcomed the news and its timing, saying that China is jailing 77 people due to their Internet activities.

"It is a good news to know that more netizens will certainly be helped in getting their word out," she said.

But she said that circumvention tools for the Internet were a "Band-Aid" as the larger issue was ensuring freedom of expression.

In a speech in February, Clinton called the Internet "the public space of the 21st century" and pledged US efforts to ensure that it develops in a way that allows freedom of expression and association.

However, she also criticized activist site WikiLeaks for publishing secret US cables. She accused WikiLeaks of "theft" and said the issue did not contradict the US commitment to an open Internet.

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