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The Great Firewall: China's Misguided — and Futile — Attempt to Control What Happens Online

By Oliver August 10.23.07 | 12:00 AM

I didn't know I was a surveillance target until the day I walked into a hotel in China's Fujian province. I was pushing past half a dozen workmen changing lightbulbs in the glum but busy lobby when a uniformed man stepped in front of me. Blue jacket, creased trousers, braided epaulets, peaked cap: government security officer. Politely, he asked whether I would mind answering a few questions. He stood erect, with the manicured swagger of a corporate CEO. Next to him, a gangly plainclothes colleague gave me a so-you-thought-we-wouldn't-catch-you look.

How had they known I would be here? The only people who had my itinerary were my editors in London. A few days earlier, I had sent them an email outlining my trip, and I'd been updating them daily by phone. I could only assume that the authorities had been monitoring my email and calls. I had been chasing down leads on the whereabouts of Lai Changxing, China's most-wanted man. Lai had cheated the government out of \$3.6 billion by smuggling oil, cars, and cigarettes. Embarrassed, Beijing wanted to hinder any reporting of his case.

How to Breach the Great Firewall of China

Go in disguise

Use proxy servers and other software that can mask your location and identity. Among the most popular apps are Psiphon, Freegate, TOR, and UltraSurf.

Scramble messages

Use encryption for email. Top software tools include Hushmail and Cryptomail, which take advantage of so-called pretty good privacy — PGP — encryption.

Post on the down low

Avoid online discussion groups for obviously controversial subjects. Post sensitive messages in lifestyle or sports Web sites, which are rarely monitored.

Search overseas

Try the international version of a Web site rather than the China-based one. Google's US-based search engine (in Chinese) isn't blocked, for example.

Watch your language

Avoid controversial terms (e.g., "democracy," "Dalai Lama"), or at least don't put them in the title of your blog post. Body text is much less likely to be monitored.

Log On to Skype

The P2P freeware uses 256-bit encryption for phone calls, staying below government radar. Use the international version (not the Chinese one) to avoid spyware.

The two officers in the hotel demanded to see my passport and asked what I knew about Lai. Then they withdrew to a corner of the lobby to confer. Eventually, they took me to a police car, drove me to the airport, and put me on a plane to Beijing.

It was, in short, impressive evidence of the government's ability to monitor and control electronic communication. And my experience only hinted at the Chinese government's appetite for control. Beijing has recently added a new weapon to its arsenal of surveillance technologies, a system it believes to be a modern marvel: the Golden Shield. It took eight years and \$700 million to build, and its mission is to "purify" the Internet — an apparently urgent task. "Whether we can cope with the Internet is a matter that affects the development of socialist culture, the security of information, and the stability of the state," President Hu Jintao said in January.

The Golden Shield — the latest addition to what is widely referred to as the Great Firewall of China — was supposed to monitor, filter, and block sensitive online content. But only a year after completion, it already looks doomed to fail. True, surveillance remains widespread, and outspoken dissidents are punished harshly. But my experience as a correspondent in China for seven years suggests that the country's stranglehold on the communications of its citizens is slipping: Bloggers and other Web sources are rapidly supplanting Communist-controlled news outlets. Cyberprotests have managed to bring about an important constitutional change. And ordinary Chinese citizens can circumvent the Great Firewall and evade other forms of police observation with surprising ease. If they know how.

Like its namesake, the Great Firewall consists of hundreds of individual fortifications spread out along a vulnerable frontier. At its core is a giant bank of computers and servers. Traffic generated by China's 162 million Internet users is routed through the shield, which checks all requested URLs against a blacklist of tens of thousands of Internet addresses. The list includes pages offering political information deemed dangerous by the government, like BBC News and Voice of America. Access to these sites is blocked (at least in theory), and when users attempt to view one of them, they are punished with an involuntary time-out lasting anywhere from 30 seconds to 30 minutes. Search engines are similarly restricted. If you enter the characters for

"democracy" or "Tiananmen Square massacre" into Google.cn you will generally get zero results. This is a technological breakthrough for the Chinese government. Until recently, it could not interfere with the inner workings of search engines and instead blocked entire sites, not just individual pages of a site.

The Golden Shield hardware — supplied by Cisco and other US companies — is supplemented by human censors who are paid about \$170 a month. They sit at screens in warehouse-like buildings run by the Public Security Bureau. These foot soldiers in China's information war monitor domestic news sites, erasing and editing politically sensitive stories. Some sites provide the censors with access so the authorities can alter content directly. Others get an email or a call when changes are required. Similar methods are applied to blogs. Sensitive entries are erased, and in the most egregious cases blogs are shut down altogether.

HYBRID TECHNOLOGIES INC. (OTCBB: HYBT) SAM'S CLUB ANNOUNCES "ONCE IN A LIFETIME PACKAGE" WITH HYBRID'S ALL LITHIUM SMART CAR

Hybrid and NASA Kennedy Space Center Team Up to Offer Sam's Club Members a Once In a Lifetime Package for 2007

Mooresville, NC, Bentonville, AR - **OCTOBER 5, 2007** - Hybrid Technologies, Inc. (NASD OTCBB: HYBT - News) www.hybridtechnologies.com, emerging leaders in the development and marketing of lithium-powered products worldwide, is pleased to announce Sam's Club Inc. has revealed the Hybrid Smart car as a once in a lifetime package offered only to Sam's Club members.

To link to the official Sam's Club release click here:

<http://walmartfacts.com/articles/5332.aspx>

The 2007 Hybrid Technologies lithium-powered Smart Car is a zero-emission vehicle and features cutting-edge technology from NASA, while being cool enough for A-list celebrities, including George Clooney, who owns a similar model. The national space center contributed space-based intelligence for the car's advanced battery system. This unique gift package also includes a behind-the-scenes VIP trip to NASA's Kennedy Space Center to witness a shuttle launch first-hand. This package is offered for \$35,000.

"We're offering the fully electric Smart Car to Sam's Club members as it represents the latest in advanced lithium technology. This vehicle, originally developed under a Space Act Agreement with NASA, has created a strong following throughout environmental, celebrity and automotive circles. This Limited Edition STS-118 Smart Car will be the perfect addition for car collectors or environmentalists wanting to make a difference by driving a zero-emissions vehicle," said Richard Griffiths, Strategic Relations for Hybrid Technologies.

Forward-Looking Statement

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occur, and actual results could differ materially from those anticipated or implied in the forward-looking statements.