

CHINA BALANCE SHEET

INTERNET

The direction that China and U.S.-China relations take will define the world's future. For the United States, a rising China increasingly affects American prosperity and security, calling for some clear-eyed thinking and tough economic, political, and security choices. As the twenty-first century unfurls, the stakes have never been higher for getting U.S. policy toward China right. By untangling the complex, sometimes contradictory, strands of this vast and dynamic country, *China: The Balance Sheet* lays the foundation for informed and effective U.S. policy toward China, the world's emerging superpower.

BACKGROUND

- As of December 2006, there were an estimated 137 million Internet users in China, an increase of 23.4% from the previous year. At this pace, China will surpass the United States in two years, and the number of Internet users will reach 190 million by 2010.
- The Internet is a double-edged sword for a government trying to maintain control over the media – **crucial for economic modernization, but providing the Chinese public with unprecedented access to information.**
- The Chinese government has engaged in censorship of the Internet since the late 1990s and has devoted vast assets to create **one of the world's most sophisticated communications monitoring and filtering regimes.**

CURRENT SITUATION

- The government uses a range of regulatory and legal tools to censor the email, including: imprisoning Internet users who violate rules, making Internet Service Providers (ISPs) responsible for the activities of their subscribers, and constructing a system of high-tech Internet controls (dubbed “the Great Firewall” by critics) which blocks access to prohibited sites and filters email and site content.
- The State Council Information Office and the Chinese Communist Party's Propaganda Department determine what substantive content should be censored and the Ministry of Information Industry, Ministry of Public Security, and State Secrets Bureau among them employ **an estimated 30,000 Internet police.**

For further information, see *Breaching the Great Firewall? Beijing's Internet Censorship Policies and U.S.-China Relations* by James Mulvenon, published in *The China Balance Sheet in 2007 and Beyond*, available online and Chapter 3: “China's Domestic Transformation: Democratization or Disorder?”

China: The Balance Sheet: What the World Needs to Know Now about the Emerging Superpower

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- The government has consistently blocked access to sites addressing controversial topics such as Taiwan, Tibet, Tiananmen, and Falun Gong as well as foreign news sites, health organizations, and university sites. **There are currently an estimated 19,032 websites inaccessible in China.**
- Despite claims by Chinese authorities in February 2006 that Internet controls exist to prevent the promotion of “harmful” subjects like pornography and terrorism, observers estimate that there are **49 “cyberdissidents” currently in detention** for posting information on the Internet critical of the Communist Party.
- Proxy servers can be used to circumvent censorship controls, but a recent survey revealed that though many are aware of proxy servers, the percentage of netizens who use them remains small.
- **In 2001, there were an estimated 60 sets of government-issued Internet regulations.** One of the most recent is Provisions on the Administration of Internet News Information Services, which limits news websites in such a way as to potentially eliminate many individual or small organization news sites and limit Internet news to government-sponsored news.

IMPLICATIONS

- **Chinese censorship has the potential to create barriers to the free flow of trade** and thus undermine the Chinese government’s strategy of exploiting the Internet’s potential as a key driver of economic growth.
- Despite the significant restraints on online political discourse, the blogosphere, composed of an estimated 20 million bloggers, is helping to create **revolutionary social change.**
- **The government has thus far been able to limit the political potential of the Internet and will continue to do so in the short- to medium-term,** primarily due to controls that demonstrate their flexibility in responding to the rapidly changing technological environment (including built-in incentives for self-deterrence and self-censorship) and trends that promote the commercialization (and not politicization) of the Internet.
- However, **in the long-term, the scale of China’s information technology modernization would suggest that time is eventually on the side of the regime’s opponents.**
- In conclusion, the Internet, despite hopes to the contrary, will probably not bring a rapid “revolutionary” political change to China, but instead will be **a key pillar of China’s slower, evolutionary path to increased political pluralization and possibly even nascent democratization.**

Arrested Journalists

There are an estimated 49 “cyberdissidents” currently in prison, including the following:

- *Shi Tao, a reporter for Dangdai Shang Bao (Contemporary Business News) was convicted in April 2005 and sentenced to 10 years for forwarding an internal government document warning journalists not to cover 15th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square incident to a foreign website.*
- *In December 2003, official Li Zhi was sentenced to eight years for allegedly posting “anti-regime” messages and contacting the China Democracy Party.*
- *Zhang Jianbong (Li Hong) was arrested in September 2006 and sentenced to six years for posting articles calling for political reform.*
- *Yang Zili was sentenced to eight years in prison in May 2003 for writing articles on his website that addressed political freedom, the crackdown on the Falun Gong, and economic hardship among peasants.*
- *Yang Maodong (Guo Feixiong) was arrested in September 2006 for encouraging a village to demand the resignation of a corrupt village chief.*
- *Zheng Yichun, journalist, was sentenced to seven years in September 2005 for a series of articles he wrote for foreign publications and websites, as well as communication with a reporter linked to the Falun Gong.*
- *Zhao Yan, researcher for the New York Times, was arrested in September 2004 on charges of fraud and divulging state secrets.*