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Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's Refworld website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment please email Basesdedonnees.DatabaseUnit@irb-cisr.gc.ca.

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7 March 2014

CHN104762.E

China: The Public Security Bureau (PSB) Golden Shield Project, including implementation and effectiveness; Policenet, including areas of operation; level and effectiveness of information sharing by the authorities (2010-February 2014)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Overview

In correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, a representative of the Laogai Research Foundation, a Washington, D.C. based organization that researches and raises awareness of forced labour prison camps, Internet surveillance and censorship, and other human rights violations in China (n.d.), describes China's Golden Shield as "a vast network of surveillance infrastructure... which monitors Chinese citizens online and offline" (26 Feb. 2014). A Chinese economist, author and political commentator writing in Hong Kong's Chinese-language *Open Magazine,* calls the Golden Shield an [translation] "enormous telecommunication control and monitoring system" (17 Feb. 2010). In 2013, the *New York Times* wrote that the Golden Shield was "over a decade old, an overarching monitoring network spun by the state" (28 June 2013).

1.1 Terminology

Some sources indicate that the name "Golden Shield Project" refers specifically and exclusively to China's Internet censorship system, also known as the Great Firewall of China (*Sydney Morning Herald* 16 Aug. 2011; Professor 17 Feb. 2014; *PC Pro* 29 Nov. 2013). However, the *Economist* suggests that the Golden Shield and the Great Firewall are two separate entities (5 Apr. 2013), while the *New York Times* indicates that the Great Firewall is one of several components of the Golden Shield (28 June 2013).

Additionally, the Laogai Research Foundation describes Policenet as a component of the Golden Shield Project (26 Feb. 2014); other sources maintain that it is a separate program (Professor 17 Feb. 2014; *Sydney Morning Herald* 16 Aug. 2011).

2. Firewall, Censorship, and Internet Monitoring Functions

The Laogai Research Foundation states that the Golden Shield Project is "more than a mere firewall;" it is "a sophisticated surveillance system that enables the government to censor specific search requests, monitor the activities of Internet users, and track dissidents offline" (12 Mar. 2013). The *Sydney Morning Herald* explains that the system is used by the authorities to "eliminate references to politically sensitive topics" online (16 Aug. 2013). Similarly, the Chinese economist's article in *Open Magazine* states that the firewall was developed by [American technology company] Cisco Systems to "sniff out, examine, and finally delete information censored by the regime" (17 Feb. 2010). Various sources note that the firewall blocks access to specific websites, including Facebook and Twitter (*Sydney Morning Herald* 16 Aug. 2013; Cheung

and Zhao 2013, 2; *PC Pro* 29 Nov. 2013). Other sources corroborate that the government uses the Golden Shield's firewall system to filter or block content (Freedom House July 2013, 7-8; Cheung and Zhao 2013, 2; *PC Pro* 29 Nov. 2013) and to run surveillance on Internet users' activities (ibid.; Freedom House July 2013, 8).

The *Open Magazine* article states that

[p]art of the Golden Shield project was a database, part a monitoring network. It took care of: "access control, anti-hacker intrusion, communication security, computer accessories and software, decryption and encryption, e-commerce security, extranet and intranet security, firewalls, networking communications, network security and management, operation safety, smartcard security, system security, virus detenction, IT-related services and others." (17 Feb. 2010)

In its explanation of the firewall system, the Laogai Research Foundation states that "the physical structure of Chinese cyberspace forces virtually all Internet contact between China and the outside world to flow through three chokepoints" where the authorities monitor all the transmitted information (12 Mar. 2013). Additionally, Reporters Without Borders [Reporters sans frontières, RSF] wrote in 2012 that China "is now thought to be capable of controlling the data flow from local IP addresses and simultaneously restricting the number of IPs authorized to connect to the international network" (RSF 12 Mar. 2012). For its part, Freedom House writes that "[f]iltering is heterogeneous and often inconsistent, depending on timing, technology, and geographical region" (July 2013, 20).

3. Monitoring, Policing, and State Security Functions

The Chinese economist writing in *Open Magazine* states that "as early as 2002, Cisco had developed Policenet, an administration system" for the Ministry of Public Security [also known as the Public Security Bureau, PSB] (*Open Magazine* 17 Feb. 2010). The article goes on to say that

[w]ith Policenet, public security officials can search out any Chinese citizen's photograph, work history, family background, political leanings, Internet history, and at least 60 days of emails. Carrying it around is also convenient: police just scan an individual's identification card and query the database on the spot, obtaining all the information about the individual they need. (ibid.)

Similarly, in a March 2013 article, the Laogai Research Foundation describes Policenet as "a system of cutting-edge databases" that allow public security officials to "instantaneously obtain an array of personal information," including political behaviour, family relationships, and Internet browsing histories (12 Mar. 2013). Freedom House indicates that Chinese website owners and Internet content providers are required to collect and retain for 60 days electronic records of its users, and to turn over such information to the authorities upon request (Freedom House July 2013, 39). The same source notes, however, that microblog services [such as Sina Weibo, a Chinese equivalent of Twitter] have "struggled to enforce identity checks" on its users, who are required to provide their real names when registering, but may circumvent the requirement by using fake ID numbers, for example (ibid.).

The representative of the Laogai Research Foundation provided the following information:

[T]he Golden Shield incorporates extensive tracking and control mechanisms such as real-name online registration requirements, GPS monitoring, and facial recognition surveillance technology in a multi-pronged approach to identify potentially disruptive individuals. Policenet, a component of the Golden Shield, stores a wealth of information on Chinese citizens and connects the various agencies and levels of command within the public security apparatus. This integrated system enables Chinese public security forces to effectively target and neutralize political dissidents. (26 Feb. 2014)

In partial corroboration, the Chinese economist writing in *Open Magazine* affirms that "Cisco's Policenet has been helping the [Chinese Communist Party]'s public security organs to ferret out political dissidents and Falun Gong practitioners for years" (17 Feb. 2010).

An undated article on the website of the Ministry of Public Security, entitled "Deepening the Implementation of the 'Golden Shield' Project," indicates that all police units nationwide have access to eight public security databases, including the "National Basic Population Information Database" (China n.d.). Also accessible through the databases is information on household registration [*hukou*], border exit and entry, road traffic, and criminal investigations (ibid.). For additional information on public security officials' access to information relating to border controls, please consult the Response to Information Request CHN104761.

A 6 July 2012 article published by the state-run Xinhua News Agency states the following:

China will establish a unified criminals record system to better hold criminals' information and promote social administration, an official from the Supreme People's Court (SPC) said Thursday.

The unidentified official said that the decision was made in a statement jointly made by the SPC, the Supreme People's Procuratorate, the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), the Ministry of State Security (MSS) and the Ministry of Justice.

The information to be recorded in the system includes criminals' basic information, the names of the procuratorates and judicial organs, the number and date of verdicts, the crimes, the punishment and the enforcement of the punishment.

The official said that the police departments have established a database for criminals around the country, while the procuratorates have also started the inquiry system for bribery records. The unified criminals record system will be established on the achievements of those systems, the official said.

4. Implementation of the Golden Shield Project

The undated article on the website of the Ministry of Public Security indicates that, at the time of publication, 90 percent of grassroots-level police stations and police squads had access to the ministry's information databases (China n.d.).

In February 2011, Xinhua News Agency published the following information on the status of the Golden Shield Project:

[translation] [T]he public security information network infrastructure in its various forms is essentially now entirely in place. At the present time, the public security information network covers 32 provincial ministries, 478 city bureaus, 3,361 county bureaus and more than 70,000 local-level police stations. The rate of network coverage for local police stations stands at 99%.

...

[T]he application support capabilities of the public security information centres at the three levels of government have been markedly strengthened. Construction of an identity authentication and access control management system for the public security network is basically complete, while a standards and specifications system and an operations management system for the network are essentially in place.

...

[A] full range of computerized applications for Public Security has been launched. Currently, information systems have been created under the categories of integrated criminal investigations, fugitives, crime-scene fingerprints, stolen cars, narcotics and anti-terrorism, and more than 40,000 household registration stations across the country are able to provide front-counter "population management" services [i.e. front-line services to citizens regarding household registration requirements]. Over 400 vehicle management offices across China have introduced computerized workflow management and put in place national network applications. Offices responsible for entry and exit documents, whatever their location, have completely computerized their processing operations as well as the issuing of passports on an on-demand basis. Border ports have implemented completely computerized inspection procedures and integrated operations on a nation-wide network. (18 Feb. 2011)

Additional or corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

5. Sharing of Golden Shield Information Between Government Officials

According to the website of the Ministry of Public Security, China's public security system is structured through "vertical linkage, horizontal integration, and internal and mutual connection" (China n.d.)

The 2011 Xinhua News Agency article states the following:

At the present time, information sharing between public security authorities and other bodies is moving steadily forward. The Ministry of Public Security has already begun information sharing with the People's Bank, the Ministry of Security, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Civil Aviation. As an example, banking institutions across the whole of China do an average of eight million checks per day on personal information through a shared network, something that is very important for ensuring that accounts are held under real names, financial practices are normalized and financial fraud is stopped. (18 Feb. 2011)

In an interview published in November 2013 by the UK-based magazine *PC Pro*, Chinese journalist Michael Anti, described by the magazine as "one of China's most important voices, reporting on the country's censorship," explains that the Ministry of Public Security owns the database of citizen identity information and that other ministries are required to pay for access to the information (29 Nov. 2013). Corroborating

information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The representative of the Laogai Research Foundation noted that "Chinese secrecy laws make it extraordinarily difficult to obtain accurate information on politically sensitive subjects" and that it is "often impossible to obtain official records regarding surveillance techniques and capabilities, [and] criminal investigations in politically sensitive cases" (26 Feb. 2014). In an April 2013 article on Chinese censorship, the *Economist* stated that "[o]fficial data on the operation of China's two state-run online censorship systems, the Great Firewall and the Golden Shield, are unavailable for obvious reasons" (5 Apr. 2013). In a 2013 article, citing an Internet specialist formerly at the University of Toronto, the *New York Times* indicated that Western researchers know "remarkably little" about the extent of state surveillance in China (28 June 2013). This statement was corroborated by the Laogai Research Foundation researcher (26 Feb. 2014).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact a professor specializing in Chinese policing at Xavier University, a professor specializing in Chinese state surveillance at the University of Pennsylvania, and representatives of the following organizations were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: Embassy of Canada in Beijing, Embassy of China in Ottawa. The NGO, Human Rights in China, was unable to provide information for this Response.

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International; Asia Catalyst; British Broadcasting Corporation; Center for Strategic and International Studies; China – Beijing General Station of Exit and Entry Frontier Inspection, Embassy of China in the United States, Ministry of Public Security; *China Civil Aviation Report*; *China Daily*; *China Perspectives*; Chinese Human Rights Defenders; Dui Hua Foundation; ecoi.net; *Epoch Times*; Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor; Human Rights in China; Human Rights Watch; Open Net Initiative; Norway – Country of Origin Information Centre; *People's Daily*; Shanghai Daily; *South China Morning Post*; United States – Congressional-Executive Commission on China, Congressional Research Service, Department of State, Library of Congress; US-Asia Law Institute; *Want China Times*.

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