

**SFGate.com****Software: China's new censor**

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The Chinese government, in its continuing bid to become the world's most zealous censor, has issued a heavy-handed directive to computer makers. By July 1, it says, manufacturers must install filtering software on all PCs entering the country. The government claims that the software is designed to block pornographic words and images, but it will be regularly updated as the government's list of banned Web sites grows. It's not hard to see where this is leading. And it shouldn't be hard for U.S. computer manufacturers to decide to push back.

Nothing about this is right. The Chinese government did not work with computer manufacturers to develop filtering software. Instead, it has approved one program and one program only. The program's developers have ties to China's military and public security agencies, which suggests that the government fully intends to use the software for surveillance. No one knows how installing this software will affect a new computer's mainframe or other software options.

The fact that this directive will compromise the integrity of their products should be enough for PC makers to fight back. It may be a smarter way for them to fight back, as well, given China's sensitivity to criticisms of their dreadful censorship policies. Regarding the obvious ethical problems, U.S. computer manufacturers should push back hard behind the scenes - and figure out ways to warn the user about the software if they feel that they must install it in the meantime. They could also warn political dissidents that now is the time to purchase a new computer.

Meanwhile, it would be nice if Congress decided to push back in public. The late Rep. Tom Lantos of San Mateo was the most vocal defender of free expression and human rights in China on Capitol Hill, but now he's gone. For anyone who's ready to fill those enormous shoes, this would be the right issue on which to step up.

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