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Cisco File Raises Censorship Concerns

Document Implies Support for China

By [Glenn Kessler](#)
Washington Post Staff Writer
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[Cisco Systems](#), seeking to penetrate the Chinese market, prepared an internal marketing presentation in which it appeared to be willing to assist the Chinese Ministry of Public Security in its goal of "combating Falun Gong evil cult and other hostile elements," according to a translation of a document obtained by congressional investigators.

The Cisco presentation will take center stage today at a hearing of the [Senate Judiciary Committee](#) on the Global Internet Freedom Act, which aims to defeat Internet censorship. [The Washington Post](#) obtained a copy of the presentation, the authenticity of which was confirmed by Cisco.

Falun Gong is a spiritual movement that has been harshly repressed by the Chinese government, which claims the group is engaged in illegal activities.

In its [PowerPoint](#) presentation, Cisco referred to the Chinese government's project to control the Internet, including its use by groups such as Falun Gong. After a slide referencing the crackdown on Falun Gong, the next slide proclaims: "Cisco Opportunity: High start-point planning, High standard construction, Technical training, Security and operation maintenance."

A Cisco spokeswoman said the document was six years old and was intended only for internal use by Cisco's Chinese employees, not as a marketing tool to entice business from the Chinese government. "The inclusion of the statement was not appropriate," said Jennifer Greeson Dunn. "It was simply a restatement of the government's objectives. It has nothing to do with Cisco's objectivity and Cisco's technologies. We are very much for freedom of expression."

Still, Cisco has sold the Chinese Ministry of Public Security what Greeson Dunn called "generic routing and switching technologies" designed to make the communications infrastructure more efficient. She said Cisco has not sold any equipment meant to "identify dissidents or hostile elements."

Mark Chandler, senior vice president and general counsel for Cisco, will testify at the hearing held by the human rights subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee, as will [Google](#) and [Yahoo](#) executives. Lawmakers will seek to determine whether Cisco is just selling off-the-shelf technology or is helping China apply that technology to control dissent.

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A committee staff member, speaking on condition of anonymity because the hearing had not yet been held, said that despite Cisco's claims of innocence, the presentation "raises troubling questions about what they are doing." He noted that Cisco, which provides the hardware that governments such as China use for firewalls and surveillance systems, has regularly assured lawmakers that it does not know how its products are used and does not market products for censorship. Now, he said, "we don't know what the truth is."

The [House Foreign Affairs Committee](#) has passed the Global Online Freedom Act to curtail the ability of U.S. companies to help foreign governments censor the Internet. The bill, which has been endorsed by many human rights groups and is squarely aimed at China as host of the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, makes it a crime for U.S. companies to turn over personal information on their users if the government intends to repress the citizens. But opponents criticize the legislation as taking a simplistic approach to a complex international issue, putting private companies in the middle of a dispute between governments.

[Sen. Richard J. Durbin \(D-Ill.\)](#), who is chairing the hearing, has not endorsed the House legislation but is seeking more information for possibly proposing his own legislation.

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