

China talks up tech prowess in face of US rivalry

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China's 'World Internet Conference' has been held yearly in the picturesque ancient canal town of Wuzhen since 2014

China on Sunday said it aims to become a "great power" in the online world and took a swipe at Washington on trade, kicking off its annual

conference promoting the Communist Party's controlled and censored version of the internet.

US-China rivalry is increasingly playing out in the digital sphere, as Beijing pursues dominance in next-generation technology while Washington takes measures to cripple Chinese tech firms like Huawei.

China heavily monitors and censors its internet, with US titans Facebook, Twitter and Google all hidden behind a so-called "Great Firewall" that also blocks politically sensitive content.

At the yearly World Internet Conference, held in the picturesque ancient canal town of Wuzhen since 2014, Chinese officials talked up the country's tech prowess.

"We have become a cyberspace power of 800 million netizens," the head of the Communist Party's propaganda department, Huang Kunming, said in a keynote address.

Huang added that in the future, China "will unceasingly expand the fruits of internet development and forge ahead from a cyberspace 'big power' to a cyberspace 'great power'".

The propaganda chief also denounced "cyber-hegemony and bullying" by other countries—using language typically reserved for the United States—which he said were behind confrontation in the high-tech world.

'Internet sovereignty'

The US is threatening crippling sanctions on Huawei, which is expected to be a leading player in the advent of ultra-fast 5G communications that will make many new technologies possible.

"Some countries have placed restrictions on and suppressed other countries and companies, escalating uncertainty and even antagonism in cyberspace," Huang said, without naming the United States directly.

The US commerce department also earlier this month said it will blacklist 28 Chinese entities it says are implicated in rights violations and abuses in China's Xinjiang region, where an estimated one million mostly Muslim minorities are held in internment camps.

President Xi Jinping has previously sketched out plans for China to gain dominance—with heavy assistance from the government—in key future technologies by 2025, a strategy that has caused US alarm.

The conference has faced foreign criticism as an attempt to whitewash the Communist Party's cyberspace controls in the name of "internet sovereignty" rather than viewing the web as an open global resource.

In the past, the event has drawn leading US tech CEOs such as Apple's Tim Cook and Google's Sundar Pichai.

But with the US-China tensions simmering, this year's conference lacks any high-profile US figures.

Silicon Valley has also been embroiled in recent efforts by Beijing to step up pressure on foreign companies deemed to be in support of Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement.

Earlier this month Apple removed an app criticised by mainland China for allowing Hong Kong protesters to track police, a move which sparked fierce criticism and accusations of bowing to China.

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