SUMMARY of the Article "Brick in the Wall," Muna Khan, Dawn, August 18th, 2024

The article reflects on the implications of techno-nationalism and the growing trend of governments using technology as a tool to control information and assert national identity. The writer recounts her experience from graduate school in 2016, where she was introduced to various social media platforms used in the US, which were perceived as primitive compared to China's WeChat. The US, despite its claims of internet freedom, has a history rooted in using technology to keep perceived enemies out, starting with the creation of Arpanet by the US defense department in the 1960s to communicate securely amid fears of a Soviet attack. The article delves into how techno-nationalism, like the US blacklisting Huawei over spying concerns, serves national interests by influencing global power dynamics. China's creation of the "Great Firewall" in 2000, which serves as a defense against foreign influence, is compared to Pakistan's reported Rs30 billion firewall aimed at limiting foreign content and protecting national security. However, this firewall is seen as detrimental, isolating Pakistan from the global economy and causing significant financial losses, especially for the tech industry. The writer criticizes Pakistan's version of techno-nationalism as "cringe" and counterproductive, warning that it prioritizes security over civil liberties and will likely harm the economy and civil rights. The article concludes by urging policymakers to reconsider the firewall, emphasizing that Pakistan cannot afford the isolation and chaos it will bring.

Easy/Short SUMMARY:

The article discusses how governments use technology to control information and protect national interests, a trend called techno-nationalism. The writer talks

about her experience using social media in the US, which seemed less advanced compared to China's WeChat. The US has a history of using technology to keep out enemies, starting with Arpanet in the 1960s. The article compares China's "Great Firewall" with Pakistan's new firewall, which aims to block foreign content. However, this firewall is seen as harmful to Pakistan's economy and internet freedom. The writer criticizes Pakistan's approach and urges leaders to rethink the decision.

SOLUTIONS to The Problem:

Re-evaluate the Firewall Implementation

The government should reassess the necessity and scale of the firewall, focusing on minimizing its negative impact on economic and civil liberties while ensuring national security.

Promote Digital Literacy and Awareness

Launch programs to educate the public and policymakers about the importance of internet freedom, digital rights, and the potential harms of restrictive online practices.

Strengthen Local Tech Industry

Instead of isolating Pakistan with a firewall, invest in the local tech industry to create homegrown solutions that can compete globally, boosting the economy and reducing dependency on foreign platforms.

Encourage Public-Private Collaboration

Foster collaboration between the government and the private sector to develop technology policies that balance security concerns with economic growth and civil liberties.

Develop Alternative Security Measures

Explore alternative methods to enhance national security that do not involve restricting internet access, such as improving cybersecurity infrastructure and intelligence capabilities.

Incentivize Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Provide incentives for innovation in the tech sector, encouraging the development of secure yet open platforms that align with national interests without compromising global connectivity.

Engage in International Diplomacy

Use diplomatic channels to address concerns about foreign influence on the internet, negotiating agreements that protect Pakistan's interests while maintaining access to global networks.

Protect Civil Liberties

Ensure that any technological measures implemented to protect national security also respect and protect the civil liberties of citizens, avoiding excessive restrictions on free speech and access to information.

Implement Transparent Policies

Adopt transparent and inclusive policy-making processes that involve input from stakeholders, including tech companies, civil society, and the public, to ensure that decisions are balanced and well-informed.

Monitor and Adjust Policies

Regularly monitor the impact of the firewall and other techno-nationalist policies, making adjustments as needed to prevent negative outcomes and respond to the evolving digital landscape.

IMPORTANT Facts and Figures Given in the Article:

- The writer started using Facebook, Twitter, and Slack in 2016 for graduate school.
- WeChat in China offers a wide range of services, unlike US platforms.
- Arpanet was created by the US defense department in the late 1960s.
- Techno-nationalism is used by countries to link innovations to national identity and global power.
- The US blacklisted Huawei in 2019 over spying concerns.
- China created the "Great Firewall" in 2000 to keep foreign influence out.
- Pakistan's firewall is reportedly costing the country $300 million.
- Pakistan Software Housing Association warns of significant financial losses due to the firewall.

MCQs from the Article:

1. What year did the writer start graduate school and begin using platforms like Facebook and Twitter?

A. 2014
B. 2016
C. 2018
D. 2020

2. Which Chinese app is mentioned as being more advanced than US platforms?

A. WhatsApp
B. WeChat
C. TikTok
D. Baidu

3. When was Arpanet created by the US defense department?

A. 1950s
B. Late 1960s
C. 1970s
D. 1980s

4. What is the primary purpose of China's "Great Firewall"?

A. To promote economic growth
B. To enhance social media engagement
C. To keep foreign influence out
D. To improve internet speed

5. How much is Pakistan reportedly losing due to disruptions caused by the firewall?

A. $100 million
B. $200 million
C. $300 million
D. $400 million

VOCABULARY:

1. **Primitive** (□□□□□□): Very basic or simple in terms of technology.
2. **Oblivious** (□□□□□): Unaware or not concerned about what is happening.
3. **Acquiescing** (□□□□ □□□□□□): Accepting something reluctantly but without protest.
4. **Gatekeeper** (□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□): A person or thing that controls access to something.
5. **Disrupted** (□□□□□ □□□): Interrupted or disturbed.
6. **Clamp down** (□□□□ □□□□): To take strong action to stop or control something.
7. **Techno-nationalism** (□□□□□ □□□ □□□□□□□□□): The use of technology to promote national interests.
8. **Innovations** (□□□□□□□): New ideas or methods.

9. **Blacklist** (□□□□ □□□ □□□□): To put a person or entity on a list to be avoided or excluded.
10. **Containment** (□□□□ □□□): The action of keeping something harmful under control.
11. **Firewall** (□□□ □□□□): A security system to block unauthorized access while permitting outward communication.
12. **Civil liberties** (□□□□□ □□□□): Individual rights protected by law from governmental interference.
13. **Self-driving** (□□□□ □□□□□ □□□): A vehicle that can operate without human input.
14. **Rivalry** (□□□□□□ □□□□□□□): Competition for the same objective.
15. **Subsidies** (□□□□□): Financial support given to a business by the government.
16. **Isolation** (□□□□□□): The process of being separated from others.
17. **Freelancers** (□□□□ □□□□ □□□ □□□□□□□): Individuals who work for themselves rather than for a company.
18. **Liberties** (□□□□□□□): The state of being free within society from oppressive restrictions.
19. **Corporate** (□□□□□□□□): Relating to a large company or group.
20. **Policymaking** (□□□□ □□□□□□): The process of creating laws or policies.

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[Brick in the wall](#)
Muna Khan

I HAD to join Facebook, Twitter and Slack when I started graduate school in 2016 — for different messaging purposes. I thought all of this could be done on WhatsApp but then, it was not a popular app in the US. My Chinese classmates, meanwhile, found all the apps 'primitive' as they could do so much more back home on WeChat — from messaging to gaming to paying utilities to live streaming.

But you don't have internet freedoms like we do, American students would say, oblivious to Mark Zuckerberg's attempts to chip away at their privacy or how platforms were acquiescing in authoritarian governments' requests to take content down. The few discussions I witnessed in class came off as some sort of nationalism, years of being taught their country was the good guy keeping the bad guy out.

In case you didn't know, the US military paved the way for the internet to be built when the US defence department set up Advanced Research Projects Agency, which created Arpanet in the late 1960s, to allow research institutes to communicate with armed institutes' agencies through a large-scale computer network. That was born from a fear of Soviet attack. The Soviets were attempting to create what we now refer to as the internet, roughly a year after Arpanet, but could not.

Technology has long been used to keep 'enemies' out. Someone or something is always trying to be the gatekeeper of information but the internet has disrupted everything since its birth in 1983. The more it has evolved, the more the attempts to clamp down on it, almost always in the name of security.

An entire country is being made to pay for the 'sins' of one party.

Techno-nationalism — how countries link innovations to identity, stability and national interests — aims to influence global power. Donald Trump, for example,

blacklisted Huawei Technology over spying concerns in 2019 but thanks to Chinese government support, the company made a remarkable comeback. The US is reportedly thinking of co-opting US allies in a "broader containment campaign" and exploring additional sanctions, reports Bloomberg.

When China created the great firewall in 2000 that is being referenced in conversations about the reported Rs30 billion firewall in place here, it did so to keep foreign influence out, it says. Its techno-nationalism led it to hold an advantage over others (though at the cost of civil liberties). Technological innovations, for example, increase job opportunities, investment and economic growth, maybe even exports if other countries become reliant on your country's technology. This can also lead to global competition as we're witnessing in the China-US rivalry.

In the decade since it created the Made in China 2025 plan, the country may just be able to achieve what it set out to do: reduce dependency on foreign supply chains in industries like AI, robotics and self-driving cars. China's plan is viewed as a threat by, and to, the West.

I'm sure it led to Joe Biden passing the Chips and Science Act, 2022, which gave $280bn in new funding to boost domestic research and manufacturing of semiconductors in the US. It also gave billions in subsidies for chip manufacturing, billions to public sector research in the sciences, and many incentives aimed at strengthening the country's supply chain with the aim of countering China.

And now, onto our techno-nationalism which, in a word, is 'cringe', irrespective of who is in charge. It aims to globally isolate us, without giving us tools to enable us to build or empower. We don't have a Chinese superapp like Weibo. We have Vigos and we all know their purpose.

An entire country is being made to pay for the so-called sins of one political party. This is essentially what this firewall is about. This wall's creators, implementers and defenders have never had to worry about making ends meet.

At the time of writing, the Pakistan Software Housing Association warned the country could lose at least $300 million due to disruptions caused by the firewall. Businessmen are warning of dire consequences. Freelancers have complained of

lost opportunities on sites like Fiverr. My friend Mohsin, a fashion designer, told me he has not received an order online in 10 days which is highly unusual. I won't even bother about civil liberties because they have never mattered in the country but I hope they will matter now that the internet has slowed for everyone.

Anything grounded in nationalism produces greater harm because it prioritises security over civil liberties, and favours the wealthy (corporates) who influence policymaking to suit their interests. It clashes with Pakistan's diverse population. Another solution is needed, one grounded in sense and sensibilities. We can't afford the isolation and chaos this firewall is going to bring. Someone explain this to the men in charge, who have much to lose if they go ahead with this firewall.

The writer is a journalism instructor.

X: LedeingLady

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