

# Rallying For Democracy

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## Echoes of ideologies clashing

01/02/2010 20:15 by admin

Asia Times Online

Jan 26, 2010

Echoes of ideologies clashing

By Eli Clifton

WASHINGTON - China reacted strongly to Hillary Clinton's speech in which the United States secretary of state called on it to investigate security breaches which preceded Google's decision last week to end its cooperation with Chinese Internet censorship.

And on Sunday, A Chinese Industry Ministry spokesman flatly rejected claims Beijing was behind the recent cyber attacks. "The accusation that the Chinese government participated in [any] cyber attack, either in an explicit or implicit way, is groundless," the spokesman said. "We [are] firmly opposed to that."

The state-run China Daily said the US's strategy was "to exploit its advantages in Internet funds, technology and marketing and export its politics, commerce and culture to other nations for political commercial and cultural interests of the world's only superpower".

Clinton's speech last week spelled out the Obama administration's position on Internet freedom, and publicly called on Chinese authorities to investigate the security breaches which Google said had convinced it to end its cooperation with Chinese Internet censorship.

"Those who disrupt the free-flow of information in our society or any other pose a threat to our economy, our government and our civil society," said Clinton.

On January 12, Google announced that it would cease to censor its search engine results in China and, if an agreement could not be reached with the government, it would shut down its offices in China.

Google's announcement was accompanied by accusations that Chinese hackers had breached its security and gained access to the e-mail accounts of several diplomats, journalists and Chinese human-rights activists.

The company's decision to go public about security breaches and refuse to continue with censorship of Google search engine results has called attention to Beijing's efforts at censorship, as well as rampant corporate espionage and intellectual property theft reportedly conducted by, or on behalf of, Chinese companies.

While the Chinese government has denied involvement in the hacking of Google e-mail accounts and claims to be committed to protecting intellectual property rights, many in the US believe it hasn't made a serious effort to stamp out such violations.

According to a Federal Bureau of Investigation report leaked by the Daily Beast, the Chinese government has developed 180,000 cyber spies, action that "poses the largest single threat to the United States for cyber terrorism and has the potential to destroy vital infrastructure, interrupt banking and commerce, and compromise sensitive military and defense databases."

The report, if true, makes Google's claims of isolated attempts to hack into e-mail accounts the tip of the iceberg,

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and would suggest China's capability to use cyber spies for corporate espionage and cyber-terrorism represents a threat which cuts across human rights, banking and commerce, and national security issues.

"Secretary Clinton has elevated Internet freedom to a key US priority by confronting governments that censor online speech and supporting companies that stand up for human rights," said Arvind Ganesan, business and human-rights director for Human Rights Watch. "The challenge now will be to put these goals into practice by incorporating Internet freedom into diplomacy, trade policy and meaningful pressure on companies to act responsibly."

Indeed, privacy advocates and human-rights groups have spoken out in support of Google's decision to stand up to Beijing's censorship. Clinton's speech touched on not only the pragmatic national security implications of Chinese cyber attacks but also the broader ideological struggle facing companies seeking to do business in China, or other countries which practice censorship.

Clinton framed her remarks in the context of the growing importance of the Internet in connecting people in such diverse places as Iran after the tumultuous June elections and Haiti after last week's earthquake. But her comments defined a clear doctrine of where the Obama administration stands on Internet freedom and privacy.

"On their own, new technologies do not take sides in the struggle for freedom and progress, but the United States does," said Clinton.

"We stand for a single Internet where all of humanity has equal access to knowledge and ideas. And we recognize that the world's information infrastructure will become what we and others make of it.

"Now, this challenge may be new, but our responsibility to help ensure the free exchange of ideas goes back to the birth of our republic. The words of the First Amendment to our constitution are carved in 50 tons of Tennessee marble on the front of this building," she said, referring to a 74-foot-high engraving of the First Amendment at the Newseum in Washington DC, where she was speaking. "Every generation of Americans has worked to protect the values etched in that stone," Clinton said at the Newseum in Washington DC.

Reports have suggested that Google may be more flexible in its stance than its statement a week ago, which read: "We have decided we are no longer willing to continue censoring our results on Google.cn, and so over the next few weeks we will be discussing with the Chinese government the basis on which we could operate an unfiltered search engine within the law, if at all."

The decision to no longer cooperate in censoring search results means it is unlikely that the company's Chinese search engine will remain available to Chinese users, but room for compromise might be reached on Google retaining its offices in China, which include engineers, sale personnel, and a small involvement in the Chinese mobile phone industry.

(Inter Press Service with additional reporting by Asia Times Online.)