

Chinese access to Gmail cut, regulators blamed (Update 3)

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In this March 23, 2010 file photo, a security guard walks past while foreign visitors are seen inside the Google China headquarters in Beijing. Connections to Google Inc.'s popular email service have been blocked in China amid efforts by the government to limit access to the company's services. Records from Google's Transparency Report show online traffic from China to Gmail dropped to zero on Saturday, Dec. 27 although there was a small pickup on Monday, Dec. 29, 2014. (AP Photo/Andy Wong, File)

Chinese access to Google Inc.'s email service has been blocked amid government efforts to limit or possibly ban access to the U.S. company's services, which are popular among Chinese seeking to avoid government monitoring.

Data from Google's Transparency Report show online traffic from China to Gmail fell precipitously on Friday and dropped to nearly zero on Saturday, although there was a tiny pickup on Monday.

Taj Meadows, a spokesman for Google Asia Pacific, said Google has checked its email service and "there's nothing technically wrong on our end."

In a Tuesday editorial, the Chinese Communist Party-run Global Times newspaper raised the possibility, without confirmation, that the government had cut access to Gmail.

"If the China side indeed blocked Gmail, the decision must have been prompted by newly emerged security reasons," the editorial read. "If that is the case, Gmail users need to accept the reality of Gmail being suspended in China. But we hope it is not the case."

Earl Zmijewski, vice president of data analytics at U.S.-based Internet analysis firm Dyn Research, said his tests showed that China's government had blocked Google IP addresses in Hong Kong used by people on the mainland to access Gmail services.



In this March 23, 2010 file photo, a surveillance camera is seen in front of the Google China headquarters in Beijing, China. Connections to Google Inc.'s popular email service have been blocked in China amid efforts by the government to limit access to the company's services. Records from Google's Transparency Report show online traffic from China to Gmail dropped to zero on Saturday, Dec. 27 although there was a small pickup on Monday, Dec. 29, 2014. (AP Photo/Andy Wong, File)

Calls to the government regulator, the China Internet Information Office, were unanswered Monday. Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said she did not know about any blockage.

U.S. State Department spokesman Jeff Rathke said in a statement that the development was troubling.

"We continue to be concerned by efforts in China to undermine freedom

of expression, including on the Internet, and we believe Chinese authorities' censorship of the media and of certain Web sites is incompatible with China's aspirations to build a modern information-based economy and society," he said.

Google closed its mainland China search engine in 2009, saying it would no longer cooperate with the country's censors. That followed hacking attacks traced to China aimed at stealing the company's operating code and breaking into email accounts.

Since then, access to Google services has been periodically limited or blocked, possibly in an effort to pressure Chinese users into abandoning Google products and shifting to services from domestic companies willing to cooperate with the government.

The Global Times editorial pointed a finger at Google, saying "China welcomes the company to do business on the prerequisite that it obeys Chinese law; however, Google values more its reluctance to be restricted by Chinese law, resulting in conflict."

Google products are popular among Chinese young people and activists who do not want their email communications to be monitored or intercepted by the Chinese government.

Web access in China to Gmail has been blocked since June, according to Greatfire.org, a China-based advocacy group for Internet freedom, but users had been able to access the mail service through mobile apps or third-party email software such as Microsoft Outlook and Apple Mail until the current block.

It was not immediately clear what prompted the complete ban at this time.

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