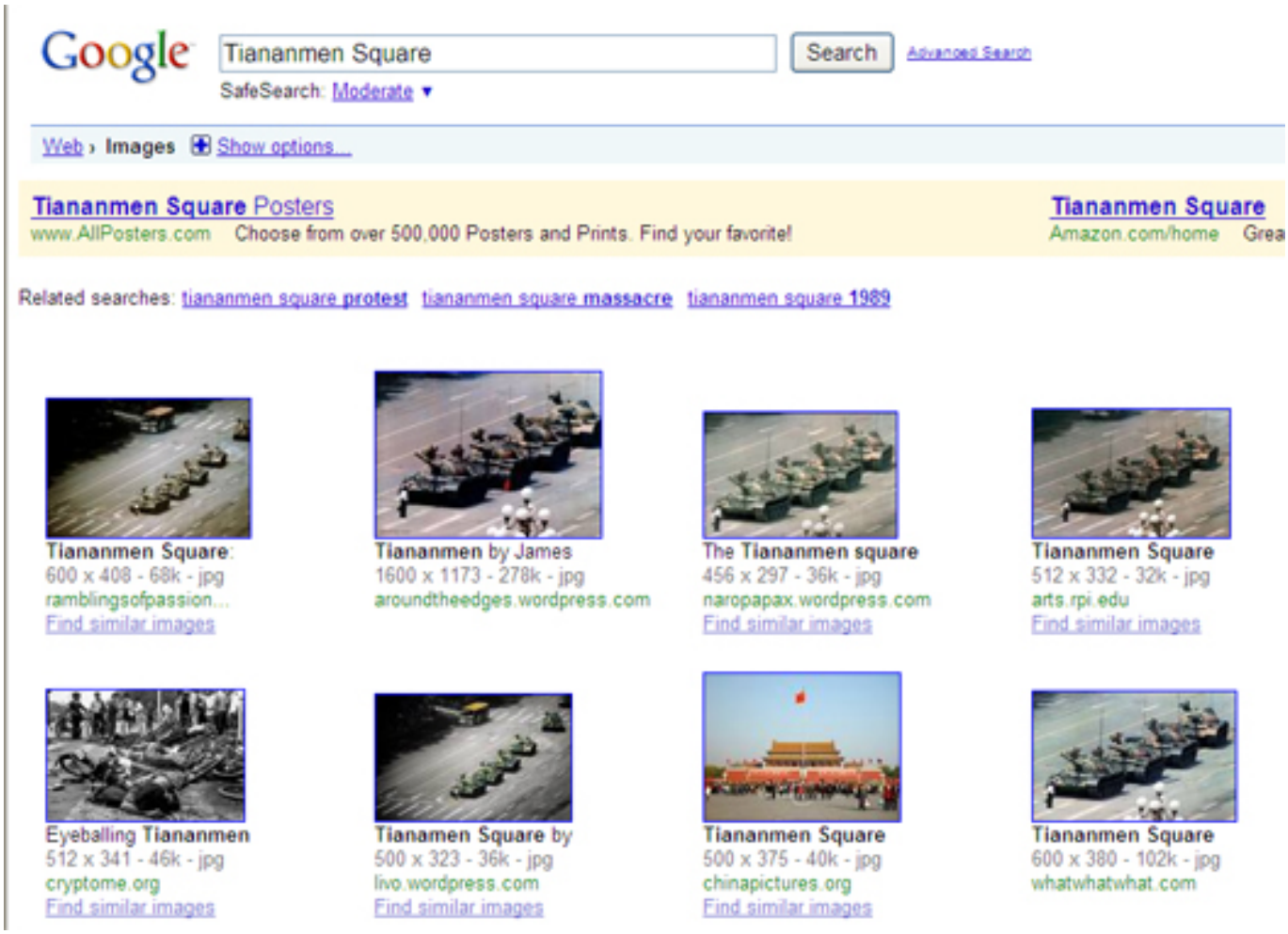
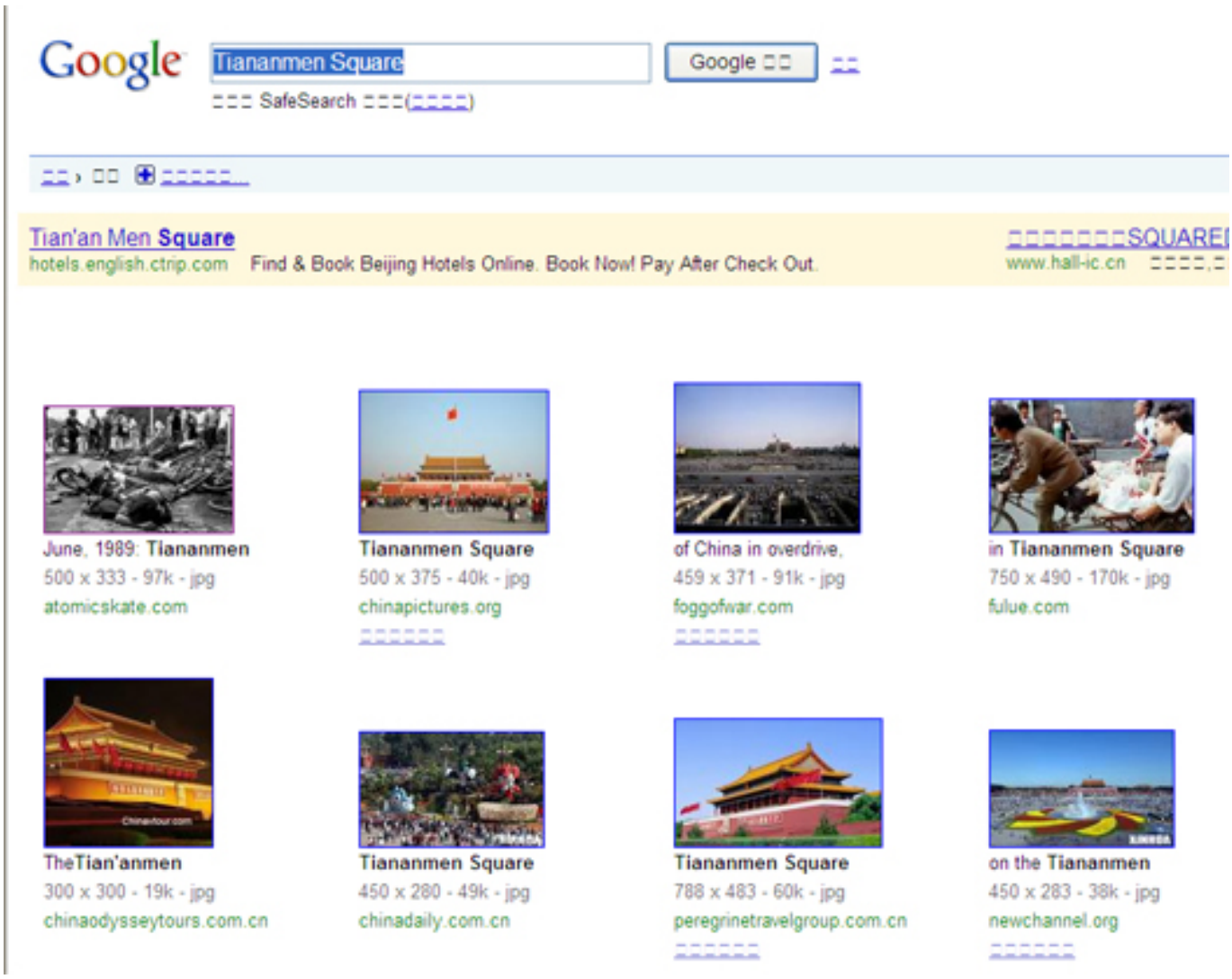
Google may sever ties with China

Jason Lomberg, Technical Editor

Google has shocked the world by ending its Chinese censorship operation. Due to numerous factors (including cyber attacks emanating from China), Google declared [1] that it'd no longer censor search results on Google.cn.

Since launching Google.cn in 2006, Google has reluctantly accommodated China's despotic online censorship. At the time (and ever since), critics have lambasted Google for its perceived hypocrisy. After all, the company known for its progressive corporate philosophy (with the slogan, "Don't be evil") was doing business with one of the most tyrannical regimes on the planet—and not just doing business, but accommodating their iron-fisted internet controls. The fruits of collaboration can be seen below. The first picture shows Google.com search results for "Tiananmen Square." The second is the same search on Google.cn. Quite a difference!





In order to maintain their stranglehold on power, autocratic regimes must control the flow of information, lest the citizenry discover truths that contradict the official state party line. For over 10 years, China has maintained the "Golden Shield Project [2]" (i.e. the "Great Firewall of China"). Fearing a rising China Democracy Party (CDP), China instituted the expansive multi-million dollar project (and banned the CDP). Through a combination of IP blocking, DNS filtering and redirection, URL filtering, and packet filtering (among others), the Golden Shield restricts the flow of information. Censored content includes pro-Democracy sites, the Tiananmen Square Massacre, Taiwan, the Dalai Lama, and anything the government deems to be obscene, pornographic, or subversive.

Screenshot of Green Dam Youth Escort in Windows.

But as with any system, the Golden Shield has weaknesses. Through various techniques, such as proxy servers, users can bypass the “Great Firewall of China.” As a fictional hacker famously said, “You can't stop the signal.” China fought back by, among other things, attempting to install “Green Dam Youth Escort [3]” software (purportedly, to block access to pornography) on all computers sold within China. But this bid was unsuccessful, and “subversive” material continues to slip through.

In mid-December, Google and approximately 20 other companies were victims of a coordinated cyber attack originating from China. Google believes the intent was to access the Gmail accounts of Chinese human rights activists (Google claims this was unsuccessful). At the inception of Google.cn, the internet giant believed [4] that “**expanding access** to information to anyone who wants it” (emphasis theirs) outweighed their discomfort in accommodating China’s internet controls. But they promised to “carefully monitor conditions in China” and said they wouldn’t “hesitate to reconsider our approach to China.”

No action has been taken yet, evidenced by the Google.cn picture taken above (i.e. the censorship is still in place). But Google made it clear that, barring a new agreement, they’re prepared to shut down Google.cn and close their China offices. Google will no longer be complicit in the Chinese government’s systematic

suppression of dissent.

Source URL (retrieved on *09/22/2014 - 8:26pm*):
http://www.ecnmag.com/articles/2010/01/google-may-sever-ties-china

Links:
[1] http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2010/01/new-approach-to-china.html
[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Firewall_of_China
[3] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_Dam_Youth_Escort
[4] http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2006/02/testimony-internet-in-china.html