



Employees: Google Continues Development Of China's Censorship Search Engine

Dissenting employees are waiting for Google to declare that “censorship is unacceptable and that they will not collaborate with governments in the oppression of their people.” They may be waiting for a long time. □
TN Editor

Google employees have carried out their own investigation into the company's plan to launch a censored search engine for China and say they are concerned that development of the project remains ongoing, The Intercept can reveal.

Late last year, bosses moved engineers away from working on the controversial project, known as Dragonfly, and said that there were no current plans to launch it. However, a group of employees at the company was unsatisfied with the lack of information from leadership on the issue — and took matters into their own hands.

The group has identified ongoing work on a batch of code that is associated with the China search engine, according to three Google sources. The development has stoked anger inside Google offices, where many of the company's 88,000 workforce previously protested against plans to launch the search engine, which was designed to censor broad categories of information associated with human rights, democracy, religion, and peaceful protest.

In December, The Intercept [reported](#) that an internal dispute and political pressure on Google had stopped development of Dragonfly. Google bosses had originally [planned](#) to launch it between January and April of this year. But they changed course after the outcry over the plan and indicated to employees who were working on the project that it was being shelved.

Google's Caesar Sengupta, an executive with a leadership role on Dragonfly, told engineers and others who were working on the censored search engine in mid-December that they would be allocated new projects funded by different "cost centers" of the company's budget. In a message marked "confidential - do not forward," which has been newly obtained by The Intercept, Sengupta told the Dragonfly workers:

Over the past few quarters, we have tackled different aspects of what search would look like in China. While we've made progress in our understanding of the market and user needs, many unknowns remain and currently we have no plans to launch.

Back in July we said at our all hands that we did not feel we could make much progress right now. Since then, many people have effectively rolled off the project while others have been working on adjacent areas such as improving our Chinese language capabilities that also benefit users globally. Thank you for all of your hard work here.

As we finalize business planning for 2019, our priority is for you to be productive and have clear objectives, so we have started to align cost centers to better reflect what people are actually working on.

Thanks again — and your leads will follow up with you on next steps.

Sources with knowledge of Dragonfly said staff who were working on the project were not told to immediately cease their efforts. Rather, they were instructed to finish up the jobs they were doing and then they would be allocated new work on other teams. Some of those who were working on Dragonfly were moved into different areas, focusing on projects related to Google's search services in India, Indonesia, Russia, the Middle East, and Brazil.

But Google executives, including CEO Sundar Pichai, refused both publicly and privately to completely rule out launching the censored search engine in the future. This led a group of concerned employees — who were themselves not directly involved with Dragonfly — to closely monitor the company's internal systems for information about the project and circulate their findings on an internal messaging list.

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In-Store Cameras Spot Shoplifters Before They Steal

Vaak's website claims to "Analyze more than 100 person feature quantities such as face, clothes, movement direction, attribute and estimate behavior and purpose." Basically, it tags you 'guilty' before you commit a crime. □ TN Editor

It's watching, and knows a crime is about to take place before it happens. Vaak, a Japanese startup, has developed artificial intelligence software that hunts for potential shoplifters, using footage from security cameras for fidgeting, restlessness and other potentially suspicious body language.

While AI is usually envisioned as a smart personal assistant or self-driving car, it turns out the technology is pretty good at spotting nefarious behavior. Like a scene out of the movie "Minority Report," algorithms analyze security-camera footage and alert staff about potential thieves via a smartphone app. The goal is prevention; if the target is approached and asked if they need help, there's a good chance the theft never happens.

Vaak made headlines last year when it helped to nab a shoplifter at a convenience store in Yokohama. Vaak had set up its software in the shop as a test case, which picked up on previously undetected shoplifting activity. The perpetrator was arrested a few days later.

"I thought then, 'Ah, at last!'" said Vaak founder Ryo Tanaka, 30. "We took an important step closer to a society where crime can be prevented with AI."

Shoplifting cost the global retail industry about \$34 billion in lost sales in 2017 — the biggest source of shrinkage, according to a report from Tyco Retail Solutions. While that amounts to approximately 2 percent of revenue, it can make a huge difference in an industry known for razor-thin margins.

The opportunity is huge. Retailers are projected to invest [\\$200 billion](#) in

new technology this year, according to Gartner Inc., as they become more open to embracing technology to meet consumer needs, as well as improve bottom lines.

“If we go into many retailers whether in the U.S. or U.K., there are very often going to be CCTV cameras or some form of cameras within the store operation,” said Thomas O’Connor, a retail analyst at Gartner. “That’s being leveraged by linking it to an analytics tool, which can then do the actual analysis in a more efficient and effective way.”

Because it involves security, retailers have asked AI-software suppliers such as Vaak and London-based Third Eye not to disclose their use of the anti-shoplifting systems. It’s safe to assume, however, that several big-name store chains in Japan have deployed the technology in some form or another. Vaak has met with or been approached by the biggest publicly traded convenience-store and drugstore chains in Japan, according to Tanaka.

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Slouching Toward Green New Deal, Some Republicans Flip-Flop On Climate Change

Rep. John Shimkus (R-IL) used to forcefully fight against climate change fanatics. Now he says, “It’s just not worth the fight anymore.” Such surrender is spreading among Republican and conservative ranks. □ TN Editor

Representative John Shimkus once issued a forceful rejection of climate science at a congressional hearing, invoking the Bible and declaring that “Earth will end only when God declares it’s time to be over.”

Last month, in a turnabout, the Illinois Republican signed onto a letter with the top Republican of the House Energy and Commerce Committee that said “prudent steps should be taken to address current and future climate risks.”

“It’s just not worth the fight anymore,” Shimkus said in an interview when asked about his changing stance on climate change. “Let’s just see what we can do to address it and not hurt the economy.”

Shimkus is among a number of Republicans who — after years of sowing doubt about climate change or ignoring it altogether — are scrambling to confront the science they once rejected. They are planning hearings on the issue, pledging to invest in technologies to mitigate its impact and openly talking about the need for taking action.

The shift in posture follows the public’s growing anxiety after catastrophic hurricanes, flooding and wildfires linked to global warming. Fully 74 percent of registered voters think global warming is happening and 67 percent said they are worried it, according to polling conducted by Yale Program on Climate Change Communication. Among conservative Republicans, just 42 percent think global warming is

happening but that is up five percentage points since a poll taken in 2017.

Moreover, Democrats have seized the issue with populist fever — even proposing a sweeping plan to phase out climate-warming gas emissions through a “Green New Deal.”

“Members are openly using the term climate change,” Republican Senator Lisa Murkowski, from oil-rich Alaska, said of her GOP colleagues. “You are not seeing this kind of dismissive attitude but more open conversations about some of the challenges, some of the technologies we can look to, some of the solutions.”

To be sure, the party hasn’t gone completely green. It hasn’t passed any major proposals to combat climate change and generally supports Trump administration policies to roll back environmental regulation.

“It’s a baby step forward,” said Tiernan Sittenfeld, a senior vice president with the League of Conservation Voters. “It remains to be seen whether they are sincere or whether they are just starting to engage in deceitful rhetoric.”

Murkowski, who chairs the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and has long acknowledged climate change, has scheduled the panel’s first hearing on the topic in years, focused on electricity generation. Additional GOP controlled-committees plan to follow with a focus on greenhouse gas emissions, Murkowski said. “It is very much a multicommittee effort,” she said.

In addition to Murkowski, other Republicans have been meeting in small groups to come up with a strategy on the issue: Senators John Cornyn of Texas, Cory Gardner of Colorado, Susan Collins of Maine, Bill Cassidy of Louisiana, Thom Tillis of North Carolina, Rob Portman of Ohio, Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, and former 2012 presidential nominee Mitt Romney, now a senator representing Utah.

“There is a growing consensus on our side that man-made emissions are contributing to global warming, that the ‘green deal’ is absurd, and we should be able to find a more appropriate solution to the problem,”

Graham said in an interview, adding he had recently been discussing the issue with Romney, who has called climate change a critical issue.

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