

# The New York Times

ROOM FOR DEBATE

A Running Commentary on the News

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## Google or China: Who Has More to Lose?

By THE EDITORS



Jason Lee/Reuters

Google's logo at its China headquarters building in Beijing on Tuesday.

Google's showdown with China over censorship now leaves the company with few choices. On Monday, it closed its Internet search service in China and redirected users to its uncensored search engine in Hong Kong. But government firewalls were able to disrupt searches on that site, and China is expected to retaliate in other ways, like canceling Google's deal with China's biggest cellular company.

Should Google take a harder stance and withdraw from China completely? Should multinationals like Google play a greater role in challenging China's policies?

## A Stand for Freedom



*Ai Weiwei is an artist and political activist based in Beijing.*

Unlike most companies, which will do whatever it takes to make a profit or gain market share, Google has set a different example. It has shown that it values decency and integrity, even when that means standing up to the Chinese government.

Google deserves tremendous respect for acting to protect users' privacy and security and upholding the ideals of freedom of information and exchange. The Chinese government has always been arrogant in dealing with protests of any kind when it comes to censorship or judicial reform. Google's departure now teaches millions of people how much is at stake.

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I think the Chinese government is facing enormous pressure even if it pretends that everything is fine. A society that repudiates freedom of information and speech simply cannot meet the demands of today's global competition and development. What the Chinese government doing is suicidal.

## Behind the Free-Market Veneer



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Whether Google should take a harder stance is not really up to Google anymore. The company might have thought it could continue to have a presence in the search business in China from Hong Kong and elsewhere and keep other businesses like online ads sales and operating system/smartphone programs, but China does not work like that.

Behind the veneer of a competitive free market, there is always the state and the party, which make sure that national and political interests prevail. If business considerations fit with the will of the government, then fine; if not, the government will make sure they do, and the government has many means at its disposal to do that.

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How far Google can push China, of course, depends on its bargaining power. Does it have a technology that the Chinese badly need? Possibly, but the Chinese may already have some of that technology. And while withdrawing would send a message to the world that

life for multinationals in China is getting tougher, global companies already know that or are about to find out.

## Why Google Changed Its Mind



**Lauren Gelman** is founder of *BlurryEdge Strategies*, a legal and business strategy consulting firm in San Francisco. She is also a senior fellow at the Center for Internet and Society at Stanford Law School.

The Chinese government’s “soft-power” approach has real world effects on their citizens’ access to information, and perhaps the attention Google has drawn to this problem will result in our government and others taking action.

But it is important to remember that Google did not make this pledge because of the Chinese regime’s position on Internet freedom. For five years Google collaborated with the Chinese government to censor online information available to the Chinese public, while touting the benefits of increased engagement.

There’s a difference between doing business and collaborating with the Chinese regime.

Google’s pledge to stop censoring search results on Google.cn is a good example of a company placing corporate responsibility above potential economic harm, and I applaud them for it.

## Google Did the Right Thing



**James Andrew Lewis** is a [senior fellow](#) at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and directs its technology and public policy program.

China thinks its domestic market is so big that Western companies will do anything to stay in it. Google’s decision was a rude shock to Beijing. Now what?

If past practice is a guide, China will look for ways to harm Google’s China operations without being noticed — discreet hints to companies not to use them and so on. Other Western companies also complain that they are being pressed by the Chinese to transfer technology, use Chinese standards and generally — dare I say it — follow the party line.

China needs to learn that a global approach is in its interest.

It's our own fault. The 1990s bargain that we made has come back to bite us. Google's deal to filter reflected the larger Western deal to accept China's authoritarian politics in exchange for market access. China, feeling more powerful these days, is starting to interpret this as *carte blanche* to ignore global rules for trade or finance when they are not in its interest.

## Anti-American Sentiments



***Dan Blumenthal** is a resident fellow in Asian Studies at the American Enterprise Institute.*

The decision by Google to pull out of China is a sign that all is not well for the Chinese Communist Party. It shows the leadership is both very confident and very insecure.

How else to explain its decision to leave Google with no option but to shut down its search engine? The fact that the leadership cannot abide the free flow of information is a sign of weakness. On the other hand, the party's belief that it can manage the costs of confronting one of the world's most popular and innovative companies is a sign of hubris.

China's confrontational nationalism masks fear that it cannot deal with the growing demands of its citizens.

The government clearly calculated that the cost to its international reputation in clamping down on Google is less than the political price of allowing Google to operate uncensored.