

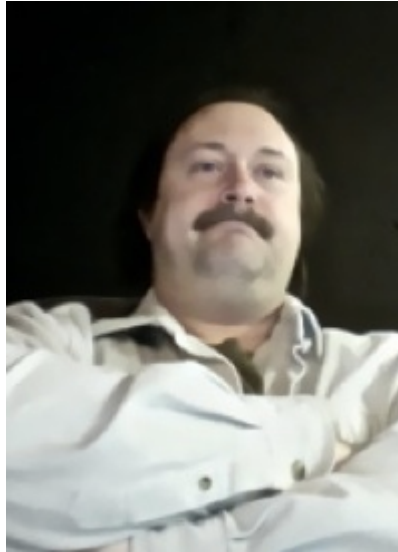


Written by [Dennis Behreandt](#) on March 26, 2010

Google Makes a Good Move on China

It's refreshing to see that at least one large American company is willing to take a stand against tyranny. That company, surprisingly, is Google.

As has been widely reported, the company is in a spat with China [over censorship and hacking](#). Google entered the market in the communist country a few years ago, presumably looking to score big in an emerging market made up of hundreds of millions of new customers. But that necessitated having to compromise with the Chinese communist police state. As part of that compromise, Google agreed to censor search results delivered by its Google.cn service. As a result, the search giant came under fire for its apparent failure to live up to its "Don't be evil" motto. For its part, Google [argued](#) that "While removing search results is inconsistent with Google's mission, providing no information (or a heavily degraded user experience that amounts to no information) is more inconsistent with our mission."



This compromise [became increasingly uncomfortable after the 2008 Olympics for Sergey Brin](#), co-founder of the dominant search engine and Internet technology company. After that, he recalled, the issue of "China was ever-present.... One out of five meetings that I attended, there was some component specifically applied to China in a different way than other countries."

It's no surprise that that might trouble Brin. Now 36, Brin spent his first years, until age 6, behind the Iron Curtain in Soviet Russia. For those too young to remember, or who have conveniently forgotten, the Soviet Union was a communist nation and a thorough police state. It imprisoned and tortured those with whom it disagreed. Millions alternately died ([see my article here](#) on the Ukrainian genocide) or were sent to the [Gulag](#) to be "reeducated through labor."

This is, of course, foreign to the American experience. Could a government really tyrannize people as the Communist governments are reputed to have done? Certainly for many decades, uncounted numbers of Americans have chosen not to believe in the reality of this level of evil. And yet, it is absolutely real. A few years ago, I had the good fortune to meet with and interview a survivor of the Soviet Gulag. [Pastor Peter Rumachik](#) came to the U.S. after the fall of the Soviet Union to raise money to build new Baptist churches in Russia. But before that this small, soft spoken man had endured decades in the Gulag system, for the crime of being a Christian. Listening to him speak of his ordeal was both horrifying and uplifting. Horrifying because of the terrible realization that the evil of



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communism is a tangible reality, and uplifting because Pastor Rumachik's survival is a testament to the triumph of courage and faith over darkness.

How much more real is such tyranny to one who has seen it first hand? That experience reportedly was behind Sergey Brin's change of heart. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Brin "said he was moved by growing evidence in China of repressive behavior reminiscent of what he remembered from the Soviet Union. Mr. Brin said memories of that time—having his home visited by Russian police, witnessing anti-Semitic discrimination against his father—bolstered his view that it was time to abandon Google's policy."

If only more Americans could see the importance of standing for principle; but apparently insulated from evil, they are unable to make an appropriate estimation of the threat it presents. As a result it becomes easy to rationalize engagement with repressive regimes like that in China, and this pragmatism begets profit.

Google again serves as the example. What Brin ultimately saw clearly as problematic in Google's courting of China, company [CEO and advisor to the Obama administration Eric Schmidt](#) apparently missed. The controversy at the company over its China policy finally came to a head after the cyber-attack on the search engine firm launched by the Chinese government in 2009. According to the *Journal*, "After the cyberattack a heated debate ensued in the company about whether to cease censoring, say people familiar with the matter. Mr. Brin and other executives prevailed over Chief Executive Eric Schmidt and others who felt Google ought to stay the course in China, say people familiar with the discussions."

While Google is to be commended for taking a stand, others aren't so sure. Says the *WSJ*: "few large companies have come out pledging their support. Privately, some Silicon Valley executives say they are confused by the reversal based on moral arguments alone." Of course they're confused: Their experience of evil has only been academic.

This failure to grasp and understand the tangible reality of evil has consequences, both in the U.S. and abroad. Overseas, for instance, the cooperation of U.S.-based tech firms with China's police state keeps the repressive Communist government in power. That has concrete ramifications for the billion or so citizens subject to that government. But there are also consequences at home. Failure to understand the dangers inherent in the concentration of political power that socialism entails puts everyone at risk. Congress and the President are eager to expand Federal power, not just in health care but in a multitude of areas. Democrats want [cap and trade](#) to control industry, and they want a [national ID Card](#) to track the movements of citizens. And it's not just the Democrats — for eight years under the Bush administration the Republicans eviscerated the Constitution with glee, even to the point of getting the telecom companies to participate in helping the government [eavesdrop](#) on American citizens.

The Founding Fathers, by creating a government of three branches, balanced against the states and the people respectively, sought to prevent the accumulation and centralization of power. But the walls they built are gradually being torn down, often with the unwitting help of business people who ought to know better and who ought to understand the danger of too much power. Alas, it seems that [Lord Acton's truism about absolute power](#) has been forgotten.

Whether it is with regard to China, or in connection with policy closer to home, American business has turned a blind eye to the cause of freedom and justice, at least in part because of a failure to see the reality of evil for what it is.



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At least Sergey Brin appears to understand somewhat, at least for now. And one other company, Internet firm GoDaddy, has likewise decided to [scale back business in China](#). Small steps, perhaps, but good news nonetheless. Hopefully, it portends a change for the better.

Dennis Behreandt is a contributor to *The New American* magazine. Visit his blog and archives [here](#).



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