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**Google CEO quietly met with military leaders at the Pentagon, seeking to smooth tensions over drone AI**

Google CEO Sundar Pichai speaks May 8 at the Google I/O conference in Mountain View, Calif. (Jeff Chiu/AP)

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By

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Oct. 5, 2018 at 9:24 p.m. GMT+2

Google chief executive Sundar Pichai quietly paid the Pentagon a visit [during his trip to Washington last week,](https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2018/09/28/google-ceo-visits-congress-combat-charges-conservative-bias-ahead-key-hearing/?utm_term=.34af882fe3e2&itid=lk_inline_manual_2) seeking to smooth over tensions roughly four months after employee outrage prompted the tech giant to sever a defense contract to analyze drone video, according to two people familiar with the meeting.

Pichai met with a group of civilian and military leaders mostly from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence, the Defense Department directorate that oversees the artificial-intelligence drone system known as Project Maven, according to the people, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the meeting freely.

Google had worked with the Defense Department to develop Project Maven, which uses AI to automatically tag cars, buildings and other objects in videos recorded by drones flying over conflict zones. But in June, the tech giant said it [would not renew its contract](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2018/06/01/google-to-drop-pentagon-ai-contract-after-employees-called-it-the-business-of-war/?itid=lk_inline_manual_5) following an uprising from employees, who criticized the work as helping the military track and kill with greater efficiency.

A Defense Department spokesman said: “We do not comment on the details of private meetings. Department leaders routinely meet with industry partners to discuss innovative technologies. These meetings support continuing dialogue aimed at solving future technology challenges.”

A spokeswoman for Google did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

[Google CEO visits White House and Congress to combat charges of anti-conservative bias ahead of key hearing](https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2018/09/28/google-ceo-visits-congress-combat-charges-conservative-bias-ahead-key-hearing/?utm_term=.caf025fd0258&itid=lk_interstitial_manual_10)

The secrecy surrounding Pichai’s visit highlights one of the tech giant’s most challenging binds: how to retain Silicon Valley workers angered by the moral implications of developing warfare technology while also staying in the running for Washington’s lucrative military contracts. Previously, Google said it has worked — and would continue to work — with defense leaders on “cybersecurity, training, military recruitment, veterans’ health care, and search and rescue,” Pichai [wrote in a blog post](https://www.blog.google/technology/ai/ai-principles/) in june. Google also has bid for one of the Pentagon’s most lucrative cloud-computing contracts.

Google’s change of heart over Project Maven, its first big AI partnership with the Pentagon, has become a key source of tension between the tech giant and military officials, who felt that Google should have done a better job communicating that the technology could help keep military personnel out of harm’s way, according to a source familiar with the work.

“Without a doubt, this has caused a lot of consternation inside the DOD,” said Bob Work, the former deputy secretary of defense who helped launch Project Maven last year. “Google created a big moral hazard for itself by saying it doesn’t want to use any of its AI technology to take human life. But they didn’t say anything about the lives that could be saved.”

[Google to drop Pentagon AI contract after employee objections to the ‘business of war’](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2018/06/01/google-to-drop-pentagon-ai-contract-after-employees-called-it-the-business-of-war/?utm_term=.56db0d6b8862&itid=lk_interstitial_manual_16)

Google’s decision to terminate its relationship with Project Maven also has [drawn sharp rebukes from congressional lawmakers](https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2018/09/10/googles-no-show-congress-adds-its-political-headache/?itid=lk_inline_manual_17), particularly Republicans, who were the focus of Pichai’s rare two-day swing through Washington last week.

Still, they are likely to press Pichai on the matter when he testifies at a yet-unscheduled House hearing expected later this year. In September, GOP Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) blasted Google at a different hearing — where company executives declined to appear — because Google had ceased aiding the government on AI tools “that are designed not just to protect our troops, and help them fight in our country’s wars, but to protect civilians as well.”

Further troubling Cotton and his peers are reports that Google is "working to develop a new search engine that would satisfy the Chinese Communist Party's censorship standards," he said at the September hearing. Over the summer, Cotton and three other GOP lawmakers similarly criticized Google for aiding Chinese companies while withdrawing from partnerships with the DOD.

Project Maven marked the first known use of advanced AI in an operational combat zone, inspiring a broader debate over the potential dangers of deploying powerful machine-learning technology and “weaponized AI” into a theater of war.

[Google bans development of artificial intelligence used in weaponry](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2018/06/07/google-bans-development-of-artificial-intelligence-used-in-weaponry/?utm_term=.d1b711554227&itid=lk_interstitial_manual_23)

The AI for Project Maven, known officially as the Algorithmic Warfare Cross-Functional Team, relies on the same style of "computer vision" techniques now key to consumer image-recognition software, including Google’s.

Marine Col. Drew Cukor, a Project Maven chief, said last year the AI would complement human analysts in performing the time-consuming task but would “not be selecting a target [in combat] … anytime soon.” Military officials say AI-tagged drone footage could offer crucial intelligence needed to pinpoint terrorists and reduce civilian casualties.

Google faced a widespread backlash this year over its involvement in Project Maven, including from more than 3,000 workers who addressed an open letter to Pichai saying “Google should not be in the business of war.” Critics said the AI could be used to target more devastating drone strikes and marked a concerning step toward “killer robots” and other lethally autonomous machines.

In June, Google [said](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2018/06/01/google-to-drop-pentagon-ai-contract-after-employees-called-it-the-business-of-war/?utm_term=.50f3c08d248d&itid=lk_inline_manual_29) it would not extend its 18-month DOD subcontracting deal when it expires in March. It also [unveiled](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2018/06/07/google-bans-development-of-artificial-intelligence-used-in-weaponry/?utm_term=.f913a3286659&itid=lk_inline_manual_29) a set of AI ethical principles, including an internal ban on developing AI that could be used in weapons or “to cause overall harm.” The guidelines were general and did not include detail on how they would be practically enforced.

Gregory C. Allen, an adjunct fellow for the Washington think tank Center for a New American Security, said Google’s sudden reversal was an embarrassing communications fiasco for an important DOD initiative and threatened to sour the company’s “very promising prior courtship.”

“Google’s credibility as a company you can trust with vital national security work was badly hurt by the Maven pullout,” Allen said.

**quelques rappels de méthodologie**

**L’introduction**

L’introduction est là pour **commencer avec une accroche**, « the hook », qui vous permettra de faire la différence. Cette accroche est **de préférence une citation, un fait d’actualité** (cf article sur les citations d’accroche en anglais). On enchaine avec une petite mise en contexte, et on soulève l’intérêt du texte, que l’on souligne par la présence d’une problématique. Le tout doit être **court mais complet et logique.**

**Le résumé**

Le résumé n’a pas besoin d’être linéaire. Ici, l’article est assez long, et se répète dans les faits. Inutile de tous les citer, mais il convient de garder une logique de résumé. Enfin, je vous conseille de terminer le résumé par une phrase résumant elle-même l’idée essentielle du texte, pour montrer que **vous ne vous éparpillez pas** : soyez dynamiques lorsque vous l’énoncez (soignez votre body language). De quoi ensuite enchainer sur votre commentaire en ayant compris le challenge principal du texte.

**Le commentaire**

C’est la **partie la plus importante de votre exposé. Le commentaire est la majorité du temps en 3 parties.** Je vous conseille de faire une première partie plutôt descriptive sur la situation, une deuxième partie sur les solutions à apporter et les problèmes soulevés et enfin une dernière partie sur les conséquences. Ici, on a cherché à faire un plan en 3 parties. Comme pour un plan de dissertation, il faut faire en sorte que les trois parties aient un vrai sens ensemble. **Le contenu permet au jury d’avoir de la matière pour un débat en reprise.**

**La conclusion**

Vous devez vraiment éviter de faire un simple résumé de tout ce que vous venez de dire. Vous pouvez par contre résumer en une phrase le problème que le texte cachait. Elle peut se composer d’une citation si cela n’a pas déjà été le cas en introduction. Dans l’idéal, il faut ouvrir sur le futur, et surtout **donner votre avis**, pour que le jury connaisse votre position.

**Déroulement d’une colle**

(intro)

In The Great Dictator’s final speech from Charlie Chaplin’s classic *The Dictator*, Chaplin called for a  separation between science and war, with his famous words « Don’t give yourselves to these unnatural men – machine men with machine minds and machine hearts! You are not machines! You are not cattle! You are men! ». Aiming towards a rehumanization of technology is and has always been **at the center of many debates**. Using drone videos as a way to track down enemies and detect their position has been one of the latest technology used by Google for the American Government. This technology has in turn **sparkled some intern turmoil**, an interesting and crucial debate which brings many actors forward. This article from the Washington Post counts the recent events which surrounded Google’s newest program, Project Maven.

(résumé)

The article **starts off by explaining** the aim of such a program. We learn that Google chief executive Sundar Pichai has very recently visited the Pentagon to talk over the recently stopped Project Maven. **This program** uses Artificial Intelligence to detect vehicles and buildings from videos recorded from drones. The technology behind this program has raised **protests** and **petitions** amongst workers, so Google has decided it would not renew its program with the Pentagon.

**Throughout the article**, we learn that this decision is justified by Google by its initial goals, which were to work for « cybersecurity, training, military recruitment, veterans’ health care, search and rescue », points which aren’t directly linked to slaughter from distance. **On the other hand**, the Pentagon, represented by Bob Work, argues that Google doesn’t bear in my mind that this technology could potentially save lives, an excuse which has been used for ever by the American army in its war against terrorism. **Even more**, the Pentagon accuses Google of working with the Chinese communist party to improve the country’s censorship and cybercontrol of the population.

These cold relationships and sudden mobilization from the Google engineers therefore lead to Google deciding not to renew its 18 months contract with the Pentagon.

**And so the main idea that this article brings up** is that engineers are finally imposing limits to the technology they create for the society’s welfare, costing Google to lose some credibility and clients.

**At this point in my reasoning**, I think we should center our debate around the limits that should be placed on research. To what extent should research be used by firms and governments ? More broadly, should firms work for their government ? In order to fully understand the importance that this article gives to the Google’s decision, **I would first illustrate** the importance that technology has had in our fears, to then see in a **second part** that technology’s current advancement requires limits, **therefore** reorientating the scientists viewpoints.

(commentaire)

**The technology we use have always alimented our fears and imagination…**

Many historians and politicians argue that we are currently working through our **Third Industrial Revolution** (Jeremy Rifkin), discovering new paths and creating a new economy based upon **data processing**. Placing limits and understanding the array of possibilities created is a new challenge that this new era proposes.

More specifically, **in literature and cinema**, the idea that autonomous robots could take over the world has forever been at the center of many movie scenarios, feeding the imagination of many film makers. Philip K.Dick’s *Blade Runner* and the newest *Blade Runner 2049* are two examples of books and films which were skyrocketed to the top of the charts due to the new definition Dick gave to technology, and the imagination he had for our future.

Yet Google’s program has drawn us closer to a more realistic approach to this fantasy that has always fed our imagination. Having machines capable of destroying any target, just like in *Star Wars*, appears more than ever possible, **so should we fear or praise such an evolution ?** This question therefore poses new challenges which present the need to impose limits to the technology we use.

**However, the array of possibilities poses a clear number of limits we should raise :**

I would first argue that the debate **presents limits in terms of jurisdiction**. To make it short, does a country **have the right** to kill from distance using technology ? Could this technology in turn be used by terrorists ? Even if Google backed down from its program, a clear judicial framework has to be implemented into the current international jurisdiction, to prevent the world from being totally wiped out by machines controlled by evildoers.

Such a technology, more than be tamed, must be either controlled by the right person, or be boycotted. **This is why I defend the idea that we have to praise Google’s decision to stop Project Maven.** I do not believe that the technology could save lives, because if it’s thoroughly distributed, than it would be easy for brigand or undemocratic regimes to use it against people which haven’t done anything wrong. More recently, studies have shown that airstrikes from drones will have more negative effects than positive, by killing by mistake civilians.

History shows us that limits have always been drawn around the newest technology men have created, in terms of time limits, control and of course jurisdiction, a turning point being, for me, nuclear weapons. Challenges come and go as cycles, **and I do believe that this technology can not be commercialized.**

**These limits change the scientists’ and engineers’ viewpoints**

This is where we come to the common idea that the problem is not the technology itself but the use we make of it. With this article, we have seen that scientists are realizing the limits and dangers of the technology they have created. It takes a lot of courage and little common sense to be able to draw back from a huge and lucrative project for the American government, so this decision is neither ill-timed neither neglected.

**To illustrate my point**, I would use **this summer’s Korean crisis.** In a similar situation to the 1962 missile crisis, the world saw in 2018 the hypothetic and unsure start of a nuclear war between the United States of America and North Korea. Thankfully the world did not implode, and reasoning, diplomatic talks, contributed to the appeasement of tensions. I do not believe like skeptics that we are running to our own loss, but I do believe that we are at least capable of taming today’s technological challenges.

(conclusion)

**To sum up**, it took Google a lot of risks to stop Project Maven, losing lots of funds and sponsors. **I argued** that we can only praise Google’s initiatives, **and I think that** it’s plainly not with more weapons that we will be able to secure our societies.