

Recent events around the world have brought up the question about the role technology plays in the struggle against political oppression. In regions such as Hong Kong and Belarus, there have been pro-democracy demonstrations that have been met with aggressive responses from the governing body. There has been a recent petition by citizens of Hong Kong against Cellebrite, an Israeli hacking company that had gained fame in 2015 when the iPhone of the San Bernardino terrorists were backdoored into. Cellebrite's technology has been used to break into 4,000 phones of Hongkongers, in a time where pro-democracy protests are considered terrorism due to new security laws, which has increased Mainland China's control of the city.

The true issue here is whether or not a foreign company should be allowed to sell their product intended to strengthen a government's control over its citizens. A further complication is questioning how this is happening when the company never received a license to export their product to the region. Human rights advocates from Israel say that exports to Hong Kong police should have stopped last year when the crackdowns escalated. People inside the struggle have not only gone through the legal route to appeal the use of this technology, but have tried to make a personal plea to those developing the products. When reading that, my mind immediately went to Einstein, whose scientific discoveries eventually led to the development, and use of atomic weapons. He is quoted, "Had I known that the Germans would not succeed in producing an atomic bomb, I would have never lifted a finger."

Although damage has already been done by police forces using what Cellebrite has created, it can stop here. Not only do governments have the responsibility to look after its citizens, but the people developing the technology that is being used, perhaps in an unintended way, have to be accountable for what results. More and more, workers in tech companies are speaking up; Facebook employees have publicly protested Zuckerberg's decision to follow a hands-off approach in dealing with inflammatory and false statements posted by politicians. The same needs to happen with Cellebrite; the company has to either own-up to its intention of selling a product that cripples human rights, or changes need to occur, either from the top or within to make sure that the product is not being used for any malintent.

Some may argue that other companies, such as gun companies, are not liable when their products are used in unintended ways, such as mass shootings (<https://time.com/5653066/mass-shooting-lawsuits/>). I do think though that

social networks and the technology developed by Cellebrite have such a wider reach and need to be held accountable for the abusive ways people use them for. If unforeseen abuses occur, then the company needs to take action so that it is a thing of the past and cannot happen again.