Once upon a time, Silicon Valley heralded a dream that seemed unstoppable: technology was destined to transcend national boundaries, dissolve authoritarianism, and usher in a globally interconnected liberal utopia. Alphabet's Eric Schmidt famously praised the internet as "one of humanity's greatest achievements," while Facebook's executives confidently declared their platform's mission of global connection to be intrinsically good—even if it brought unintended consequences along the way. But the dream has turned sour, and the prophets of connectivity are waking to a cold reality: in choosing geopolitical sides, tech leaders risk losing the world.

A decade ago, Silicon Valley imagined technology as the universal solvent to authoritarianism's grip—Bill Clinton's unforgettable metaphor compared controlling the internet to "nailing Jello to the wall." Social media briefly seemed poised to empower protests in Tehran, Cairo, and beyond, prompting enthusiastic praise from Washington officials. Technology companies basked in the limelight, proudly exporting American liberal values via code and cloud alike.

## Once architects of the open web, Big Tech companies now risk becoming pawns in a transatlantic power struggle that could permanently fracture the internet

Yet that bright vision has faded. Now, as a new Trump administration returns to power, the same firms once seen as allies in liberalizing autocracies find themselves caught between America's shifting geopolitical loyalties and Europe's rising distrust.

Trump's posture toward Europe has always leaned contemptuous, but his new administration has dialed up the disdain, sparking alarm in Brussels, Berlin, and Paris. Far from focusing

solely on China, Trump has directed his antagonism at America's traditional allies, dismissing European regulators as impediments and pressuring Brussels to roll back its hard-won digital sovereignty protections. Tech giants—Alphabet, Meta, Microsoft—have rushed toward the new administration's embrace, hoping that a friendlier White House might help deflect European regulatory pressures.

But Silicon Valley's embrace of Trump risks turning a difficult relationship with Europe into an existential rupture. Europe has grown weary of relying on American cloud, platform, and satellite services whose allegiances increasingly seem directed by Washington politics. Today, many in Europe view their dependence on American technology not merely as a competitive disadvantage, but as a strategic vulnerability—a digital chokehold Washington might tighten whenever convenient.

Consider Elon Musk's Starlink: indispensable to Ukraine's fight against Russian invasion, yet subject to American political whims. Washington's suggestion that Starlink's lifeline could be used to pressure Ukraine politically has sent shivers down Europe's collective spine. If Starlink can be weaponized, why not Amazon Web Services, Microsoft's Azure, or Google Cloud?

For Silicon Valley, losing European trust is no trivial matter. Alphabet alone draws more than $100 billion in annual European revenues. A rupture would leave these tech firms isolated from their most lucrative overseas market, forced to navigate a newly walled-off Europe building its own cloud and satellite infrastructure, immune from American leverage.

In aligning themselves with Trump's vision, Silicon Valley risks trading its global future for a fleeting seat at America's political table

History suggests that such transatlantic splits are not easily mended. A decade ago, Edward Snowden's revelations fractured the U.S.-European relationship, prompting Brussels to erect digital protections against American surveillance. Today, European courts and regulators—unswayed by political compromises—stand ready to sever the data-sharing arrangements that underpin tech companies' business models across the Atlantic. This severance, once unimaginable, is rapidly approaching inevitability.

Tech executives who once professed independence from political meddling are now parading their proximity to the White House, cozying up to Trump at Mar-a-Lago and hoping to shape Washington's policies. The irony is profound: companies that once touted their global vision and neutrality now risk being identified as instruments of U.S. geopolitical aggression.

Europeans, rightly fearful, are beginning to reconsider their technological dependency. Just as Trump's disdainful rhetoric drives deeper wedges between Washington and Brussels, Silicon Valley's willingness to align with the administration sends a chilling message to European regulators, judges, and the public. Increasingly, Europe's answer is clear: create digital autonomy and fortify European tech sovereignty—before it's too late.

Should this happen, it would spell disaster for U.S. tech companies, diminishing American influence, profits, and innovation. Silicon Valley, having long dreamed of connecting a fragmented world, may soon find itself trapped behind new digital barriers it helped erect. Schmidt's prophecy that Europe could "break the global internet" may yet materialize—but this time, Silicon Valley will have no one to blame but itself.

It's time for Silicon Valley's leaders to reconsider their reckless geopolitical wagers. A global internet, once their crowning ambition, is too precious to sacrifice on the altar of short-term political convenience. By aligning themselves too closely with a hostile White House, tech giants risk losing far more than access to lucrative markets; they risk losing their very raison d'être.