

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

March 2, 2021

Sundar Pichai
Chief Executive Officer
1600 Amphitheatre Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043

Dear Mr. Pichai,

I write to inquire about Google's recent decision to establish an entire Google Cloud region in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the large-scale privacy concern this creates for Americans and people around the world.

In an official blog on December 21, 2020, Google announced unprecedented plans to establish not just a data center but an entire Google Cloud region in KSA. As I am sure you are aware, these Google Cloud regions can store data from all over the world and serve as backup data centers for U.S. citizens and American companies. Data can include credit card information, private communications, personal health records, and other types of sensitive data. In the United States, Americans have a 4th Amendment right to privacy against government surveillance, but the same cannot be said for KSA.

I am concerned that Google's decision to establish data centers and a Google Cloud region in Saudi Arabia will potentially allow KSA to have access to countless American's sensitive personal information and business records. KSA has repeatedly shown a complete disregard for free speech, privacy, and human rights. The most recent example is The Office of the Director of National Intelligence report "Assessing the Saudi Government's Role in the Killing of Jamal Khashoggi" that found Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman approved the operation in Istanbul to capture and kill Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.¹ This example is only one shocking example of how human rights are treated in Saudi Arabia.

Over many years, the State Department has repeatedly highlighted KSA's human rights abuses in its Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. Indeed, the State Department's most recent report on KSA highlighted multiple egregious examples of the monarchy's anti-privacy practice of controlling and manipulating data and restricting individual freedom, including the following²:

- "Dissidents with large social media followings were targeted for offline harassment and surveillance."
- "Authorities used the cybercrimes law and the counterterrorism law to restrict freedom of expression, including by prosecuting numerous individuals under these laws on charges related to statements made on social media."
- "The government did not respect the privacy of correspondence or communications and used the considerable latitude provided by the law to monitor activities legally and intervene where it deemed necessary."
- "The government can ban or suspend media outlets if it concludes they violated the press and publications law, and it monitored and blocked hundreds of thousands of internet sites. There were frequent reports of restrictions on free speech."

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/02/26/us/report-jamal-khashoggi-killing.html>

² <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/saudi-arabia/>

- “Media outlets reported that authorities gained access to dissidents’ Twitter and social media accounts and in some cases questioned, detained, or prosecuted individuals for comments made online. The counterterrorism law allows the Ministry of Interior/SSP to access a terrorism suspect’s private communications as well as banking information in a manner inconsistent with the legal protections provided by the law of criminal procedure.”
- Although KSA cites having “no political prisoners,” the report concludes: “At least 120 persons remained in detention for activism, criticism of government leaders, impugning Islam or religious leaders, or ‘offensive’ internet postings.”
- “The government reportedly collected information concerning the identity of persons peacefully expressing political, religious, or ideological opinions or beliefs online. According to Freedom House, authorities regularly monitored nonviolent political, social, and religious activists and journalists in the name of national security and maintaining social order.”

There is no doubt that storing data in KSA presents a clear and immediate threat to the privacy and security of that data, including, possibly, that of U.S. citizens. For example, Google announced that Snapchat, which has over 17 million users, will be an anchor tenant for the KSA Cloud. There was little response from the U.S. government at the time, and I believe this announcement deserves more scrutiny. I am deeply troubled by Google’s plans and request the following:

1. Will Google permit the operation of services that store enterprise or personal information in the Saudi Google Cloud region?
2. Will data from customers outside KSA be processed, stored, or pass through the Saudi Google Cloud region?
3. How does Google reconcile KSA’s disregard for international norms around rule of law, privacy, and freedom of expression with the storage of personal data within KSA’s borders?
4. How will Google respond to KSA officials’ inevitable demands, under cover of law, for metadata and content, decryption keys, or other data stored in their Saudi Google Cloud?
5. Did Google determine any need to negotiate and document protections to govern law enforcement and other official demands for data stored in or simply moving through the Saudi Google Cloud? If yes, what assurances did Google seek and receive?
6. Will Google provide services to the Saudi military and intelligence apparatuses? If yes, what steps have they taken to ensure that their services will not be used to monitor Saudi dissidents in the Kingdom and outside?
7. In 2018, Diane Greene, Google Cloud’s CEO, was scheduled to attend the Future Investment Initiative in Riyadh, but abruptly pulled out after Jamal Khashoggi’s disappearance. Does the recent ODNI report tying KSA to Jamal Khashoggi’s murder give Google any concern about operating a Google Cloud region in Saudi Arabia?³
8. Has Google entered into any agreement with KSA that would stop Google from cooperating with U.S. intelligence agencies?

I appreciate your attention to this matter. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Warren Davidson
Member of Congress

³ <https://gizmodo.com/google-pulls-out-of-saudi-conference-as-the-world-still-1829778375>