By Ron Amadeo

From ARS TECHNICA | Original Article

Googler: "The strongest possible statement I could take against this was to leave."

A General Atomics MQ-9 Reaper/SAF / Airman First Class Adarius Petty

Despite protests from employees, Google is still charging ahead with a Department of Defense collaboration to produce machine-learning software for drones. Google hasn't listened to a contingent of its employees that is unhappy with Google's involvement in the military-industrial complex, and

now a report from
Gizmodo
says "about a dozen" employees have resigned over the issue.

The controversial program, called "Project Maven," sees Google applying its usual machine-learning and image-recognition expertise to millions of hours of drone footage collected by the military. The goal is to identify people and objects of interest. While a Google spokesperson says the program is "scoped for non-offensive purposes," a letter signed by almost 4,000 Google employees took issue with this assurance, saying, "The technology is being built for the military, and once it's delivered, it could easily be used to assist in [lethal] tasks."

The petition asked that Google immediately cancel the project, saying, "We believe that Google should not be in the business of war."

Opposition to the project isn't just coming from inside Google. An open letter from the International Committee for Robotics Arms Control expressed solidarity with the protesting Google employees and was signed by over 200 researchers and academics in artificial intelligence. The letter says Google should "commit to not weaponizing its technology" and terminate its contract with the DoD.

“If ethical action on the part of tech companies requires consideration of who might benefit from a technology and who might be harmed," the letter reads, "we can say with certainty that no topic deserves more sober reflection—no technology has higher stakes—than algorithms meant to target and kill at a distance and without public accountability.”

One resigning employee questioned why Google is even bothering with such a controversial program when it is already so massive. “It’s not like Google is this little machine-learning startup that’s trying to find clients in different industries," the anonymous employee told Gizmodo. "It just seems like it makes sense for Google and Google’s reputation to stay out of that.”

“Actions speak louder than words, and that’s a standard I hold myself to as well,” another resigning employee told Gizmodo. “I wasn’t happy just voicing my concerns internally. The strongest possible statement I could take against this was to leave.”

Further Reading: ***Google helps Pentagon analyze military drone footage—employees "outraged"***