

# The TRUTH About Internet Freedom, And Digital Hegemony | Tech-CEO D. Gorodyanski

Today I'm talking to David Gorodyansky. David is a Silicone Valley Tech-Entrepreneur who developed and mass-deployed one of the most important technologies of the internet age, I'm speaking of course about Virtual Private Networks. David founded a company called AnchorFree which developed HotSpot Shield, one of the most successful VPN services out there. This video is not sponsored by any VPN service, I just genuinely want to talk about the fulfilled and unfulfilled promises of the internet-age and I can't think of someone more perfect for this than an entrepreneur who himself has been involved in building part of the online world as we know it.

## #M3

You can have privacy on the Internet. You can have Internet freedom. But what a VPN doesn't help you with is it doesn't help you with the information you're seeing targeted by the social media algorithms. It doesn't help you with the information you're seeing from the legacy media. You're going to access all the information in the world. Cool. That's fine. But that doesn't mean that you can find the truth. It doesn't mean that you can find different opinions. You can be stuck in an echo chamber. A VPN doesn't help with that. So I think the monopolization of the Internet, the way that Sir Tim Berners-Lee, the founder of the Internet, described it to me, his concerns about the monopolization of the Internet by these five companies, that's a very real issue.

## #M2

Hello, everybody. This is Pascal from Neutrality Studies. And today I'm talking to David Gorodyanski. David is a Silicon Valley tech entrepreneur who developed and mass-deployed one of the most important technologies of the Internet age. I'm speaking, of course, about virtual private networks, or VPNs. David founded a company called AnchorFree, which developed Hotspot Shield, one of the most successful VPN services out there. And just to be clear, this video is not sponsored by any VPN service. I'm just genuinely interested in talking about the fulfilled and unfulfilled promises of the Internet age. And I can't think of somebody more perfect for this than an entrepreneur who himself has been involved in building part of the online world as we know it today. So, David, welcome.

## #M3

Thank you, Pascal. I'm excited to be here.

## #M2

Well, thank you very much for making the time because this issue of Internet freedom and freedom of speech, and also just the architecture of the Internet that allows us to do all of this, is very dear to my heart. A lot of things that we are able to do today, including these conversations here, are enabled by Internet technologies. Just yesterday, it occurred to me that we developed nuclear capabilities 80 years before we developed Zoom capabilities. It's kind of crazy to think about. So this is what I would like to ask you. But can we start maybe with yourself a little bit? How did you get started, or how did you end up in the tech space? And how did you develop a VPN service that I think became also politically important, for instance, during the Arab Spring? Could you tell us that story a bit?

## #M3

Yeah, absolutely. Happy to. So, you know, in college, I was very inspired by meeting Muhammad Yunus, who won the Nobel Peace Prize for getting 100 million people out of poverty by creating micro-lending. And I thought, what am I going to do with my life, my energy, and my youth to do something that meaningful and impactful? And for me, I was thinking, what are big problems affecting billions of people that we can address and try to solve? I knew that whether I was going to start a business, an organization, or an NGO, it was going to be through this lens of devoting my time and energy to addressing problems affecting billions of people. At the time, I realized that security online and privacy were big problems and becoming bigger and bigger.

And now, of course, they're enormously big. And we'll talk about that in a minute. But, you know, they've just exponentially grown over the years. In the early days, I was, I think, like 23 or 24 years old when I started AnchorFree. So that was back in 2009, 2010? Yeah, exactly. We started in the 2007-2008 timeframe. And I've got to say, by the way, that I sold the company in 2018. So nothing I say here has anything to do with the view of the company. They're all my personal views. I'm not involved. The company's been sold a long time ago. But the way we started it was really thinking about, okay, privacy and security are going to be massive problems in the world affecting billions of people.

I'm 24 years old, and I want to spend the next decade of my life trying to address these important issues. What we didn't understand initially is how connected privacy and security are with internet freedom and freedom of speech. We didn't make that connection initially. We thought protecting your data online is important, period. And what we learned over time is we started right just before the Arab Spring. We saw basically during the Arab Spring that we left our offices one evening and we had zero users from the Middle East, not a single one. The next morning, we walked into our office and we had a million users from Egypt, one million in one night. And we said, well, what's going on in Egypt? We have no idea. We don't know anyone in Egypt. We've never done any marketing in Egypt.

We have no idea what's going on. And what we found was that the government of Egypt during the Arab Spring started to censor information, news sites, social media, Twitter, Facebook, et cetera. And the people in Egypt, on their own, with no efforts from us, found AnchorFree's Hotspot Shield product and decided to basically use it to get around the censorship and to access a free and open internet. The same thing happened in Libya, in Tunisia, and really all over the Middle East. About a third of the population in the Middle East started to use our product for internet freedom, for getting around censorship. And we thought, wow, privacy and security are very deeply connected to internet freedom and to freedom of speech.

Because basically, if you want to have internet freedom, you want to have the right to privacy. In other words, you'll be afraid. If you're in a country like Saudi Arabia or Egypt during the Arab Spring or whatever, you may often be concerned about voicing your opinions unless you have the right to privacy. And so privacy and security are deeply, deeply connected. And people used our product both to protect their privacy and to gain the freedom to access whatever information they wanted online. So that, to me, was like, wow, there are 2 billion people living in places of censorship. There are billions of people that have restricted freedom of speech, including in some of the developed markets. And there's, you know, billions of people that need privacy and security.

And so we said, you know, this business really, we're going to build it around these basic human rights. The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights lists internet freedom and privacy as basic human rights. And we said, what is a better way to impact a billion people and solve a billion-person problem than addressing these very important human rights and making them central to the actual product that we build? You know, a lot of companies build, like they sell Coca-Cola, and then they have a department that's focused on doing something good for the world. My point of view has always been if you're an entrepreneur and you want to build a product that changes the world, the good that you create has to be in your product.

It can't be a department on the side that does the good stuff while your product does something that perhaps isn't good. You have to have a product that does good, inherent in its sort of DNA and its creation. And so that's what we've done. You know, one fascinating thing is that over the last decade, before we sold the business, every geopolitical event, every major revolution, uprising, and every major privacy and security breach anywhere in the world caused a massive spike in our usage. For example, having a million users join us in Egypt overnight kept on happening over the course of about a decade.

So we would see something happening in Latin America, something happening in Turkey, something happening in the U.S., in Europe, and we would see these massive spikes in usage. And very often reporters, journalists would come to us and say, hey, you know, can you tell us where the next, you know, where's the next revolution? Where's the next, you know, because we could see these big spikes right away. Whenever something would happen somewhere in the world, people wanted to protect their data, their security, their privacy, and gain internet freedom. They would jump on our platform and do that. So I can talk a lot about it. But maybe you want to ask a few questions on it.

## #M2

Yeah, yeah, I do. Because, you know, what you're doing or what you build is highly interesting also from a political and even a philosophical point of view. On the one hand, data privacy and freedom of speech and so on are hugely interesting. On the other hand, what we also see is, especially when we talk, let's say, about the Arab Spring or about a couple of these color revolutions that we saw in Eastern Europe, you know, we see also manufactured political dissent that, of course, is rooted in real local grievances. And the real grievances are what lead people then to seek these ways of communicating and so on. And that's what leads to a user base, right?

But inherently, you know, the criticism that could be voiced is, oh, so your technology helped foster color revolutions. On the other hand, these technologies also help get around censorship even at home, even in Europe right now. I mean, if you're living in most EU countries, if you want to access Russia Today, the homepage, you need to use a VPN service because the EU blocks the IPs of these sites. So in a sense, you know, technology is forced into this neutral position as in it depends on how you use it, right, on what you use it for. So what are, for instance, the moral challenges that you were facing or that came to mind when you developed these VPN protocols and ways to circumvent government-induced policies?

## #M3

Well, so first of all, we were, as technologists, right? Our technology was never political in any way and wasn't intended by anyone to have any political implications. But it was really, you know, to your point of neutrality, technology is neutral. It's like you can use Google to find information about how to do something good, bake a cake, I don't know, or how to do something bad, right? You can use Google for different reasons in the same way. You know, you could use social media in the same way you could use cybersecurity products. So really, we never really intended for our product to be used for any revolutions. We intended for it to be used for privacy and internet freedom.

And, um, I'll tell you that even, um, people who have always been very much against any kind of revolutions or uprisings have reacted positively over the years to our products simply because it provides freedom to access information and privacy. And those are important human rights. It doesn't provide a platform for political action. That's not its intention, and that's not what it does. As a matter of fact, I'll tell you this. We had two parts to our business. One was a consumer app, which is what I've been talking about. People download the app and use it to be private and secure online and to access whatever information they want. The other part of the business was a software development kit, a piece of our technology that other applications could integrate into their products. And this technology was, you know, we never had any salespeople.

Our company was all engineering, and so we didn't have any salespeople. We just said, here's our technology. If anyone wants to integrate it and use it, you're welcome. And, you know, companies in

the cybersecurity space, I would say 70% of the largest security companies in the world, including Japan, where you're based, Latin America, Europe, obviously in the US, even in Russia, all over the world, integrated our technology to provide VPN services to their customers, to their users. And so it was never, you know, again, this was really good technology that I think created a really good impact for millions and millions of people around the world. By the way, I should tell you, at the time we sold the business, we had 650 million people install the application globally, 650 million people.

## **#M2**

No, it's a fantastic achievement. And seriously, honestly, I think VPN is one of the most important parts of the modern internet just because it allows individuals to decide for themselves which firewalls they want to bypass, which censorship they want to get around, or how far they want to protect themselves. I'm just thinking about my friends in China. The ones who want to access sites in the West that their government doesn't like need to use a VPN. My friends in the EU, even researchers who just want to know what RT writes, need to use a VPN to get there.

It's—this connects to maybe the second part—this question of the internet. You know, the internet itself was supposed to be this free space, right? Back in the 1990s, early 2000s, this free space where everybody could develop themselves and everybody could connect with each other. But what we found out is that pretty quickly, governments stepped in and started compartmentalizing that. And also the way we started using the internet with Facebook, with Instagram, with social media, which are platforms that compartmentalize where we spend time, right? It didn't quite become that super open place, did it?

## **#M3**

Exactly. So I have a couple of comments that are right on this point. The first is people use VPNs not only to circumvent censorship but also for privacy and security. One comment on privacy that I think is really important to understand is that people want to be private. People value their right to privacy. Again, it's part of the UN's Declaration of Human Rights, personal privacy. But nobody besides us, the people, wants us to be private. Nobody. Hackers try to hack our data; they don't want us to be private, and a lot of people use VPNs to protect themselves from hackers. It has nothing to do with censorship.

You know, censorship is one part of it, but there are millions of people here in the U.S. By the way, the U.S. was our number one country at AnchorFree. Our number one country became, over time, the U.S. Initially, it was the Middle East, but over time, the U.S. became our number one country because a lot of people are concerned about hackers who want to exploit data. Data brokers—I don't know if you know this—but the data broker industry is \$200 billion. These are companies none of us have ever heard of, crawling cookies, putting cookies on our browsing behavior, and basically selling our data. That's a \$200 billion industry.

And then, of course, there are companies like Facebook and the like who mine our data and buy, trade, sell, and try to exploit our data. And so there are governments, hackers, Facebook, data brokers—there's a whole list of people or entities who want to exploit user data. And almost nobody is interested in protecting it except for us, the people. We're interested in protecting it. And so I think sometimes that maybe there should be some kind of new organization that is by the people, for the people, that protects cybersecurity and privacy. Because really, nobody besides the people has an interest in protecting our privacy.

Now, on the point you made about the Internet's intention of being this place for democracy and the reality sort of being different, you're absolutely right. You know, when I sold the business, the last dinner I had before leaving the company was with Tim Berners-Lee. Tim Berners-Lee is considered the father of the Internet. He created the HTTP protocol. So we had dinner, and he said exactly what you were just referring to, which is, he said, "Look, when I was creating the Internet, I really thought the intention was to democratize information and give everybody sort of equal access to the world's information and make it very democratic."

The reality of what happened, he said, was that five companies monopolized the Internet, right? So Google, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft, and Amazon, and maybe a few others, created these monopolies around the Internet and control a wide part of it. Which kind of, you know, here's the guy who created the Internet, sharing this sort of—he was disillusioned in a way. He was concerned. He was deeply concerned.

This was back in 2019. This was before COVID, before all of the things that have happened over the last decade. You know, in 2019, he was very, very concerned about the future of the Internet. Like, here's the father of the Internet—we had dinner, and he was very concerned. And so, what we see six years, you know, fast-forwarding six years to 2025, well, the data broker industry has grown to \$200 billion, as I mentioned—massive. We see Internet-connected devices, IoT devices, have grown massively, which has created an exponential amount of consumer data that is being mined, attacked by hackers, mined by data brokers, sold, and resold.

And then we have social media, which are using their algorithms to basically put people into these echo chambers, also based on mining data, right? Also based on your data, putting people in these echo chambers of only seeing what they already believe, creating this confirmation bias where they don't see any other opinions. So they think that anyone with a different opinion must be crazy because they've never seen anyone with a different opinion, as all the things they see on their social media feeds are from people who agree with them. So that's created basically a big, big issue, I think. And then you have legacy media. So you have social media, which puts you in these echo chambers by mining your data and trying to understand what you like and not showing you anything else.

And then you have legacy media, which has just lost all credibility, I think, over the last few years. I think ever since the Iraq War until now, they've just been losing credibility every day. So I think

that's why people kind of said, okay, I can't trust the legacy media anymore. Because, you know, I'm going to go to social media, but then social media is also full of misinformation and all kinds of issues. So you can't really trust that because these algorithms put you in this echo chamber where you're not seeing other opinions. So then you end up at a point where people are just very closed off to hearing any opinions or information that they may disagree with.

Um, and then, you know, that leads to the issues we're seeing today in the world, where you see people and nations that should be talking, should be engaging in dialogue and diplomacy, and for the last, you know, three, four years, they haven't, right? And that's creating a big, big problem for the world. But, you know, I think part of the issue is, you know, technology and geopolitics are very interconnected, right? Yeah. And all of these things are connected: internet freedom, freedom of speech, privacy, social media, legacy media, misinformation, AI. It's all very, very connected. So the next frontier, I think, is basically around AI-driven misinformation. AI algorithms will create information, whatever they want, and basically detecting what's human-made and what's AI-made.

## **#M2**

Yeah. The AI question is a whole separate kind of scary potential future if we don't find an AI version of a VPN in order to protect us from that. But the question to my mind is, do you think technology ultimately drives society and societal behavior, or is it the innate societal behavior that ultimately drives technology? So when it comes to the compartmentalization of the internet and finding yourself in your own little bubble, I mean, that happens in everyday life as well, right? So there's a social aspect to it that technology then just serves.

On the other hand, technology creates new potential for, let's say, harmful societal developments. How do you view that interconnection? And should technology be regulated by... the collective, and you know the collective we have is our governments? I mean, there are very good reasons to say certain things need to be forbidden: child pornography, illegal weapons trade, right? A lot of us would agree we don't want that on the wild west internet. Yes, so I think the answer is yes to all of the above.

## **#M3**

But, you know, the question of whether technology drives societal change or society drives technology, I kind of think the answer is both. It's like a circle. One drives the other, and the other drives it. In other words, technology is kind of neutral, and it's used by people the way they want to use it, in one sense. On the other hand, these large technology companies make money by basically monetizing user data or putting people into echo chambers where they're seeing ads and information targeting one group versus another group, which are very different. So, part of the issue is also the economic incentives of these technology companies. Right. Are they making money?

Are they making money from exploiting user data and therefore causing harm to society? Or are they making money in other ways, ways that perhaps are not harmful? I agree with you that some information on the Internet is bad. As a matter of fact, we ran a database. Most security companies, you may know this, run a fairly standard database of bad websites on their servers that they block. That's not the same thing as censoring access to news or social media. It's just like malware and things that are clearly bad. So everybody blocks that. We did that. We block bad sites, and all the other security companies do too. So that's standard stuff.

**#M2**

So just to be clear, even using some VPN services, the VPN service itself might block certain sites.

**#M3**

Basically, there are widely accepted lists of bad sites.

**#M2**

Yes.

**#M3**

that are basically malware sites, right? Or dangerous, I don't know, whatever, right? So yeah, there are pretty much standard lists that everybody blocks. I don't know. Who makes the list? Usually, they come from cybersecurity associations. And you have things like the Electronic Frontier Foundation, privacy NGOs, and others that look at that. So it's not like there's some malicious government.

**#M2**

No, no, but this is a crucial point. I mean, I wasn't aware that VPN services do that. But if they do, then the question is, who makes the list? Because the list maker could sneak in one or the other site.

**#M3**

No, no, no. Basically, no. The list is made by large cybersecurity companies, audited by 100 auditors, and looked at by every NGO in the privacy space. If somebody tries to sneak something in there, that would come out in two seconds. So no, no, no. I think there's really no issue with that. And the thing is, if you look at VPN traffic, it mirrors normal internet usage. So 99% of VPN traffic looks exactly like the internet: Google, YouTube, Facebook, X, Twitter, Snapchat, and so on. That's news sites. That's what 99% of VPN traffic is. So people think, oh, if I'm going to be private, am I going to do something that I wouldn't normally do?



And the answer is not really. You know, we surveyed our users and asked them because we didn't know where our users went since the product's totally anonymous. But we surveyed our users and asked them, like, what's important to you? Why do you want to be private? And most people said, I want to be private when it comes to my health. Like, I'm searching on Google for something related to health. I don't want my insurance company to find out. My health, my wealth, anything finance-related, or my family. You know, I'm talking to my wife. I don't want that conversation to be used by data brokers for whatever reason. Things like that.

So I think for the most part, you know, and this is interesting because coming back to your first question, like how we started the company, when we first went out and met with investors in Silicon Valley, we said we're building this product for privacy and internet freedom. The pushback we got from investors in the early days was, well, you know, why do I want to be private? I have nothing to hide. That was one thing. And the other thing was internet freedom. Well, that sounds like something that affects countries in the emerging markets. And that's ROW, rest of the world. And why do we care about the rest of the world? That was kind of the early feedback.

Then we actually said, other countries are not the rest of the world. They're actually most of the world. So we kept on explaining to them that most of the world is actually outside the U.S. and that internet freedom was an important human right and could be a great business. And privacy—millions of people want to be private, not because they have something to hide, but because they have a lot to protect. And so we tried to explain. In the early days, the venture capital community in Silicon Valley did not understand those things. They said, ah, privacy and internet freedom, we don't care. Then we raised the first \$11 million in funding from friends and family and people we knew, big angels, and so on.

Then we became big. And when we became big, Goldman Sachs came in. They said, you guys are one of the top apps in the App Store. You have millions of people using your product. This is so important to the world. And they invested \$52 million into the business. Well, when that happened, all the venture capital firms that told us that this is not important came to us and said, oh, my God, can we invest? This is so aligned with our values, internet freedom and privacy. This is so aligned with our values. And I thought, well, I mean, I don't know. You said that this is a rest of the world problem, but—so anyways, you see how people change.

## **#M2**

I mean, on the one hand, there's, of course, the aspect of jumping on board the trade too late and then making excuses. On the other hand, we've also learned a couple of things, especially over the last couple of years, that the Western countries are not as benign as we thought when it comes to privacy issues, right? I mean, when was this idea? I think it was 2021, 2022, when the United States, under Joe Biden, wanted to create an agency to defend against misinformation, and he had to shelve the idea ultimately. He wanted to create a whole agency and give it to this crazy lady—I

forgot her name as well—to basically monitor the internet for misinformation and create a database of sites that should not be accessed and that even should be punished if they broadcast something wrong. I mean, these ideas are around in people right in the West.

### **#M3**

They are. They are. I mean, we saw the speech that J.D. Vance just made in Munich on the topic of European censorship and freedom of speech in Europe, which I think is important. It's important to understand that those things are happening in the West as well. I mean, obviously, we had the Snowden revelations, a big revelation.

### **#M2**

And the Twitter files as well, showing that the government directly tries to take away information from the public space that is protected even in the United States, right?

### **#M3**

Yeah. So, again, it's like governments are interested in our data. Hackers are interested. Data brokers are interested. Companies like Facebook are interested. Everybody wants our data. Everybody wants to control freedom of speech. The only people who want to proliferate privacy, internet freedom, and freedom of speech are we, the people. The people. Because all these entities have no interest in that. They have an interest in the contrary. And, you know, I've seen this go from—it was very interesting to me because I thought freedom of speech and internet freedom were challenges in emerging markets, you know, the Middle East and so on. But then we have people here in the US arguing for banning TikTok. And these are the same people that have criticized China for censoring Facebook and Twitter.

And I kind of think, well, we've got to decide, are we going to take a principled view that internet freedom, privacy, and freedom of speech are values, right? If these are our values, we've got to stick to them. We can't be hypocritical and say, well, you know, it's bad when China does it, but if we do it, it's okay. I was honestly shocked when I saw so many people in Congress wanting to ban TikTok, not because I like TikTok. I don't use TikTok, and I don't really care about TikTok one way or the other. So it's not that I have some affinity for it. I don't care about TikTok in particular, but I was very surprised that people who for years seemed to advocate for freedom of speech and internet freedom as core values all decided to start censoring the internet. To me, that was very surprising. And, you know, you see a lot of hypocrisy like that, unfortunately.

### **#M2**

Yeah, we can't escape it, right? We can't escape the discussion. So the question then is, how do technology companies also interact with that? Because they become important political actors in

their own right. The decisions they make influence things. I remember this case where the FBI needed to get inside the phone of a terrorist who killed himself in the US. They wanted to force Apple to add a backdoor to make sure they could get in. Apple refused and said, look, if we breach this frontier, this barrier, then all hell will break loose. Even though in this case we understand why, we can't set the precedent. And then there's these cases, and I would like to know your opinion on this one.

What do you do with, or how do you think about, cases when we have a contradiction between the law and societal interest? Let's take copyright. Copyright is enshrined all over the world, and we have clear copyright protection that includes books. Any book I write and publish with one of these publishers will be copyrighted until 70 years after my death. Even though I wrote it and I don't get any money for it, it is copyrighted. It will belong to the publisher until 70 years after my death. Now, I think this is horrible because this book also still costs about \$100 or \$80 to buy because these publishers sell to libraries, not to private individuals, because they want to maximize profit.

So this is fair and square and legal. But societal interest might be to get access to what's in these books for free. And we have homepages like that, the most important one being Library Genesis, LibGen. Libgen.is. Since last week, I cannot access it anymore, and I can see that my browser just doesn't load it. It's not offline. It doesn't load it. So I think that on some level now the domain probably got blocked. Actually, I don't know. I don't know why. But it's offline. This online site offers millions of books for free. Pirated. But in this sense, piracy is in the interest of the general public. How do you think about these cases?

## **#M3**

Well, it's very complicated, and it's going to be much more complicated in the coming years with AI writing books. And who's that going to belong to? If Google builds a new AI model or OpenAI builds a new AI model, and that AI model produces a lot of books, does that belong to the company that owns the AI model? Or if I use ChatGPT to help me write a book or create software, does that intellectual property belong to me or to ChatGPT? So those are legal questions. You know, I'm not a legal scholar. This is a question for legal scholars. I can tell you one thing, though: we see that when society really, really wants something, laws can adapt. And one example of that is Uber. Uber ride-hailing was illegal in the U.S. I don't know about other countries. I don't know about Japan, where you are. I have no idea.

But in the U.S., we had taxi cabs, and the idea of ride-hailing was not legal. You had to get a special medallion to be a taxi cab driver, and it cost a lot of money. I think it cost like \$100,000 or something to get the medallion. There was a line. So when Uber started, basically they weren't really legal. They were like half-legal. And they changed the law. So many people wanted to use the service that the law adapted to the society, right? To the change in society. But it was very hard. I don't know if you watched the Uber movie. It's very good. If you haven't seen it, you should watch it. But it's amazing. It was very hard for them, very hard to make that change. And, you know, that's

the thing about entrepreneurship that I like. Most people accept the world the way it is. Entrepreneurs see the world not the way it is but the way it should be.

## **#M2**

Mm-hmm.

## **#M3**

And they try to disrupt the status quo to change the world to their vision of it. And I think there's something beautiful about that. Because if you're always stuck in the status quo, and if you just accept the status quo—the world is the way it is, that's it—you're never going to have progress and change. But if you are constantly pushing against the status quo, constantly trying to think differently, and come up with new ideas, I think that's the way progress is made.

And so that kind of comes back around to the point about when people are stuck in echo chambers, just reconfirming their beliefs, when people are not talking to those with different opinions, when nations are not able to send their diplomats to talk to each other, simply to have dialogue, we have real, real problems when that happens, right? As we have seen in our lives and in our world over the last few years. So I think it's so important that we have the freedom to access information, the freedom to speak our minds, the freedom and the ability to listen to other people, the freedom to protect our data from whoever we want to protect it from. And having that freedom leads to dialogue between people and between nations.

## **#M2**

Yeah, that would be absolutely the optimal case. I mean, I wouldn't be able to run this YouTube channel if we didn't have technologies that allow us to connect even via video and even add more people, right? This is important technology. In a sense, it's dumb in the sense that it's very basic. It just allows people to exchange. But this exchange is what grows networks and movements, right? This is then where the political part comes in. Do you think that the future political landscape of the planet, in general, the way that things are working, because you have connections to many places outside of the US, right? You're globally connected. Is the political drive going to be one towards more interconnection or one towards more compartmentalization overall? I mean, will we need more VPNs? Will we need more technologies that will allow us to connect with each other? Or do you see now a change in the political mindset of global leaders?

## **#M3**

Well, you know, I think technology is one thing, and global leaders are a different thing. Sometimes these are two very different worlds. Sometimes, but they're interconnected. They interconnect on certain issues, at certain points, but I do think technology will continue to be interconnected. I think

the world will continue to be interconnected by technology. I think people are going to basically have more and more technological innovation that will connect countries and people and opinions and ideas. So I think that's going to happen. I think that whether global leaders, you know, catch up to that and also, you know, engage in global dialogue and so on remains to be seen. And then, you know, what happens to the legacy media?

Are they going to innovate and reform, or are they just going to continue the old school way and just die out? That's another question that I don't know the answer to. But I know the world that I'd like to see, and that's what I laid out: a world of freedom of speech, of countries talking to each other, of diplomacy, of dialogue, of internet freedom. That's the world I want to see. Privacy protections. I want to see a world without wars. I think we should have peace, and we should do everything we can to promote dialogue, which leads to diplomacy, and diplomacy leads to peace. I think every normal human being should try to advocate for diplomacy in any context.

## **#M2**

The information stream is such that it starts twisting this around. The weird problem that we have is that if you ask 100 people, "Are you for peace?" you will get 100 times the answer, "Yes." I am almost sure. It's really hard to find somebody who says, "No, I genuinely don't like peace." The problem is that we all have different interpretations of what a good peace looks like.

## **#M3**

Exactly. So you're absolutely right. Now I've stopped asking people, "Are you for peace?" I first ask, "Are you for dialogue? And are you for diplomacy? Are you for peace?" It's like you've got to check the boxes because if they like peace but don't like dialogue and diplomacy, then you know where they stand. They don't really want peace, right?

## **#M2**

Yeah, they want their version of peace, their vision. And even if that vision needs to be implemented with bombs, that's still acceptable as a means of implementation of peace, which, of course, is a stupid thing, but a lot of people don't see that. Unfortunately, some people can't see that.

## **#M3**

You know what I find? I try to tell people that you can't understand politics without understanding geography and economics. And a lot of people think they understand politics, but they don't know anything about geography and economics, and therefore they don't really have a full opinion. So they just repeat the boilerplate things that they see on TV and in the news, legacy news, or on social media. And that's unfortunate because, I mean, it's clear to anyone who thinks about it deeply that peace comes from dialogue and diplomacy. You can't have peace without dialogue and diplomacy.

You just have to think about it for five minutes. But unfortunately, common sense is not common, as they say.

## **#M2**

Question. Do you conceptualize the Internet also as a geographic space? Because it's clearly an economic space, right? But is it also a geographic one? Because, you know, one of the frontiers that a lot of states talk about is cyber—cyber war, cyber attacks, cyber defense. I mean, it is conceptualized in these ways. Is that true for you as well? Do you think of it as a geographic space where warfare can take place? I certainly hope that it won't be geographic.

## **#M3**

I certainly hope that it'll be global. For me, splitting up the Internet into geographical influences and all this sounds like a very bad idea.

## **#M2**

But that's exactly why we need VPNs to get around this. The internet is locally or jurisdictionally protected.

## **#M3**

If it stops being jurisdictionally separated, you'll still need a VPN for privacy and security. But if you don't have privacy and security concerns, and the Internet's not geographically separated, and you don't need a VPN, then we're in a very good world. Then we're in a good future, right? So, you know, a VPN solves a problem of injustice, right? Of your data being collected without your consent and exploited and resold, and your right to access information being restricted. If those injustices are solved in the world, then you don't need a VPN, and that's beautiful.

## **#M2**

Yeah, but they won't. I mean, we've lived with these problems for thousands of years, not just decades, right? So the need for this won't go away. The question is... Okay, one more question. How mighty is a VPN? Like, for instance, what is the Chinese government doing in order to prevent people from using VPNs to get around its censorship? If the European Union tomorrow decides, "I need to get rid of this stupid problem that people use VPNs to access RT," if they decide to do that, is there a technological way to, you know, just make sure VPNs can't work? Or is VPN really that deeply...

## **#M3**

Ingrained at a technological level, it will always work. Well, it depends on what kind of VPN you use. Some VPNs are very easy to block, right? Some VPNs have very basic, old-school technology that the censors can easily block, the same way they block Twitter, Facebook, or Google. They block the VPN with no problem. Other VPNs are much more sophisticated, and it's very hard to block them. It depends on the technology that's used. Probably, you know, the other thing that you might find interesting and kind of non-obvious is that a lot of countries, not all, but a lot of countries that censor the Internet buy technology, the firewalls that censor information, from companies here in Silicon Valley. And it's funny because we were providing internet freedom to millions of people, and the people that were trying to censor us on the other side were using technology from a company down the street from us.

## **#M2**

The internet changes.

## **#M3**

We were battling the censors, but really they were using another Silicon Valley company from which they were buying these firewalls that were trying to censor. So no matter what, it's funny, no matter how you spin it, a lot of the technology comes from Silicon Valley. Although China, of course, has its own technology and it's very sophisticated. But I do hope the Internet will be global and freedom of speech and Internet freedom will be more ubiquitous.

## **#M2**

I have the same hope. It's just like looking at the development of how governments and how people in societies develop technologies. I mean, the oldest thing in the world is that you have a new technology that proliferates information, and then you immediately have forces working against that. You can go back to the printing press of Gutenberg, right? You can go further back. It happens immediately, and we never solve it. We never do. We just get to the next stage, and we never resolve the actual issue. So the issue will stay with us. The question is how we, as civil society, can address that issue and what kind of norms and consensus we come up with, and technologies we develop, to actually get our fair right to free information and free speech. And that's true. So again, there's no silver bullet to make sure that you are completely free on the internet. I mean, even VPNs have their pitfalls.

## **#M3**

Well, I mean, it depends on what you mean by completely free. I think if you use... If you use a VPN to protect your privacy, if you use a good VPN... By the way, not all VPNs are the same. I don't even know what a lot of these VPN products do. Some of them are from companies with no management team. You don't know who's behind them. So you have to pick a good VPN company that provides a

credible VPN. Like we, for example, had during our time building our product, we had independent audits, we had a transparency report we issued every year. So these things are important. It's important to pick the right VPN, but I do think you can have privacy on the internet.

You can have internet freedom, but what a VPN doesn't help you with is the information you're seeing targeted by social media algorithms. It doesn't help you with the information you're seeing from the legacy media. It doesn't help you with any of that. So basically, you can get to a free and open app, and you're going to access all the information in the world. Cool. That's fine. But that doesn't mean you can find the truth. It doesn't mean you can find different opinions. You can be stuck in an echo chamber. A VPN doesn't help with that. So I think the monopolization of the internet, the way that Sir Tim Berners-Lee, the founder of the internet, described it to me, his concerns about the monopolization of the internet by these five companies, that's a very real issue.

## **#M2**

That's interesting. And that issue is still with us, right? I mean, we tend to think that because we live in the current era, we are living in the most modern world ever. But no, this is a basic issue. And these five companies control large parts of the internet in the West, right? You then have other companies in, let's say, Russia and China that control their part of the internet or that are responsible for it. So, no, we live in a fragmented online world, don't we?

## **#M3**

It's fragmented, but I would say it's become more fragmented over the last number of years. And I hope it will swing the other way around and become less fragmented. I hope that we can really start collaborating between nations to build AI, to find ways to also control these things so they don't get out of hand. Build NGOs together with other nations that could not restrict free speech, but that can basically make sure that our AI doesn't take over the world and things like that. So, I think my hope is that the craziness of trying to separate the world into these blocks and separate technology and separate the internet and separate information—I hope all that craziness will go away and we can have a future that's more interconnected, more peaceful, where major global powers come together to collaborate and dialogue while we see peace and work together in innovation versus doing what's been happening for the last few years. So, very hopeful, but who knows? Yeah.

## **#M2**

No, that's why I like you. I like your vision, David. You are absolutely right with the vision. The question is, how do we get there? Because it's not just a problem of people. People are inherently good, I believe, most people. They care. But once you put us together and you create collectives, we start behaving weirdly and we start even doing wars. And we need to get a grip on this. We haven't managed in the last thousands of years. The question is if the internet or if technology will help. But the vision is absolutely correct. So all the entrepreneurs out there, please engage with David to



figure out how we can get there. Do you want to add anything? We'll have to work on it. We'll have to work on it. David, do you publish somewhere where people can read about your analysis or what you do? Where should people go?

### **#M3**

I haven't published recently. I used to write for Forbes and Inc. magazine, but I haven't done it in a long time. I should probably start publishing again.

### **#M2**

Substack's a good place. It's the platform I like very much for long-form publishing. YouTube, the other one, of course. I would like to thank you very much for taking the time, David Gorodianski, and we'll speak again, I'm sure. Thank you, Pascal.