March 23, 2016

To my leaders in the United States Government:

I am writing you today out of great concern for the future of data privacy and security in America. Right now there is an ongoing battle between a particular company and the government over the investigation of a criminals phone. I feel strongly that the United States government is over reaching itself by demanding any company, organization, or individual intentionally weaken or provide known exploits against themselves for the sake of National Security. No one respects our men and women in uniform more than I. What they sacrifice in their efforts to keep our country safe is nothing short of heroic, yet there are many people like myself who do not wish to live under and police state or military regime. While we have all suffered a tragedy, some Americans do not desire their lives to be turned upside down by more laws and regulations that only impact them as law abiding citizens. Such drastic changes would be a serious blow to the personal freedoms and security of Americans and only serve as a bad joke for terrorists and criminals alike who are targeting citizens.

Every day I spend most of my time on a computer. Professionally I work as a systems administrator for one of the big IT companies. I happen to build, harden, and support government servers against attacks from foreign and domestic miscreants. My job is simple: Keep the servers running and protect the data on them. There are no back-doors or built in vulnerabilities. If we need access to something we have to request and document it through proper channels. I was hired alongside some of the best to keep it that way, supporting these government systems and the personal, legal, and financial data they contain. We are serious about our jobs, so much so that when we're off the clock, we often collaborate with one another on better ways to test and harden our own systems. Why? Because people like to attack computers and steal whatever is on them, sometimes just for fun. If you don't believe me, I will be happy to provide you all the failed login attempts against my personal web-server, an number of which originate in China.

All this brings me back to my concerns about government overreach and data security. If I am tasked to protect government servers against data loss, exploit, or vulnerability, yet the government demands a company fundamentally alter its operating system in order to make it easier to hack, does that not create a massive double standard? It certainly screams against every security best practice imaginable. We have enough issues as it is without creating more!

Yes, the mass shooting in San Bernardino was a horrible act of terrorism. No one is arguing otherwise. My heart breaks for those left behind and is enraged against people seeking to harm others. But I'm asking you as my leader...no...I'm demanding...that you not give into fear and rather stand against any effort to force companies and individuals to weaken their own defenses in the name of "National Security". Weakening our people and our companies, the very targets of these attacks, would only create a state of National Insecurity for generations to come, further demoralizing and alienating the very people you are trying to protect. The government should encourage companies and citizens to use the highest standards of security, yet it seems we're being thwarted at every turn from encryption to firearms. Please, for the sake of our nation, help find solutions along side "We, the people" rather than treading down our efforts. I appreciate your service and consideration.

Joshua McDill
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