

French interior minister backs FBI in Apple battle

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French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve speaks at George Washington University in Washington, DC, March 11, 2016, during a discussion on fighting terrorism.

French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve voiced support Friday for President Barack Obama's administration in its efforts to get Apple to unlock the iPhone of one of the San Bernardino attackers.

"I completely understand the US administration's concerns, which I share," Cazeneuve said during a talk on counterterrorism at George Washington University.

The FBI is pressing Apple to develop a system that would allow the law enforcement agency to break into the suspect's locked iPhone, a demand the tech company claims would make all its devices vulnerable, including to criminals and dictatorships.

The French minister expressed hope that a solution would be found with all tech giants.

"I don't think it's necessary to wrestle" with Apple and other companies that provide encryption because "they have an interest to be our partners," Cazeneuve said.

"The digital ecosystem, that's democracy. If democracy cannot defend itself" against violent extremists, "the ecosystem falls apart," he added.

"The citizens who today tell us 'privacy' and 'freedom' will tomorrow ask us 'but what did you do to protect us'" from new devastating attacks, Cazeneuve said.

He pressed for procedures under a judge's authority to access encrypted content.

Cazeneuve is due to meet with Obama's Homeland Security Advisor Lisa Monaco and Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson.

He is also expected in New York to meet with city police where he is expected to discuss the resilience of major cities hit by large-scale attacks, according to his aides.

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