

FBI: Hacking tool info could be of use to 'hostile entities'

January 31 2017, by Eric Tucker



In this Feb. 17, 2016 file photo an iPhone is seen in Washington. The FBI is defending its decision to withhold information on how it unlocked an iPhone used by one of the San Bernardino, California, shooters. The Justice Department in January 2017 released heavily redacted records in response to a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit from The Associated Press and other media organizations. (AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster, File)

The FBI on Monday defended its decision to withhold documents on

how it unlocked an iPhone used by one of the San Bernardino, California, shooters, saying the information could be exploited by "hostile entities" if released to the public.

The Justice Department earlier this month released heavily censored records in response to a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit from The Associated Press, Vice Media and Gannett, the [parent company](#) of USA Today. Among the information withheld were details about how much the FBI paid last year to a third party to unlock the work phone of Syed Rizwan Farook, who along with his wife killed 14 people at a holiday party in December 2015, as well as the identity of that vendor.

In a court filing Monday that sought to justify those redactions, the Justice Department argued that the information it withheld, if released, could be seized upon by "hostile entities" who could develop their own "countermeasures" and interfere with the FBI's intelligence gathering. The government also argued that disclosure "would result in severe damage to the FBI's efforts to detect and apprehend violators of the United States' [national security](#) and criminal laws through these very activities and methods."

"The withheld information is also very specific in nature, provided during a specific time period, and is known to very few individuals," Justice Department lawyers said.

The FBI in its most recent filing broadened the legal arguments it had used earlier this month, when it released about 100 pages of largely redacted documents, saying for the first time that national security was at risk and that the records were entirely exempt from disclosure under the law. It has moved to keep 23 additional pages fully secret.

The Obama administration had imposed a "foreseeable harm" standard for withholding records under the Freedom of Information Act, saying

that "openness prevails" in the face of doubt and that "speculative or abstract fears" are not sufficient for withholding documents.

The media organizations sued in September to learn how much the FBI paid and who it hired to break into the phone of Farook. The FBI for weeks had maintained that only Apple Inc. could access the [information](#) on its phone, which was protected by encryption, but ultimately broke or bypassed Apple's digital locks with the help of an unnamed third party.

In the records released this month, the FBI censored critical details that would have shown how much the FBI paid, whom it hired and how it opened the phone. The files had been marked "secret" before they were turned over under the lawsuit.

© 2017 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: FBI: Hacking tool info could be of use to 'hostile entities' (2017, January 31) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-01-fbi-hacking-tool-info-hostile.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.