The Many Downsides of Banning Encrypted Communication

While the beginning of encrypted email and instant messages bringing about the end of wiretapping and eavesdropping is an interesting idea, there are a few primary reasons why doing a cost-benefit analysis is far more one-sided than it first seems. The first is simply that a shift to encrypted emails is not a question of if, but instead a question of when. It therefore is somewhat unimportant which side the cost benefit analysis ends up favoring as there is no choice anyways. The second though, explains why that inevitability is not something we should be overly concerned about. This is because concern that spy agencies being unable to spy has never before in recorded history been of any concern to the public. Agencies such as the CIA, the FBI, and the NSA have always spied and always will spy as it is part of their job description. The public should not need to concern itself with helping out government spy agencies. The last reason is that the seeming end of eavesdropping for these spy agencies for them is not a dead, but instead simply a difficult puzzle to solve. And everyone knows that necessity is the mother of invention.

The day United States citizens truly need to worry about governmental agencies’ abilities to spy is the day those agencies have outlived their purpose. It is the explicit job of these agencies to spy on the enemies of the United States in order to gain important information we can use against them. If they cannot do their job they no longer have any usefulness to the nation.
If we compare this situation to the way we would react these spy agencies were not government agencies and were instead private companies, there would be no question. Essentially what the question is asking is whether we should stop the advance of technology in order to aid spy agencies. Let us think of this in terms of private companies in order to make a comparison. If these agencies were private companies, this advance in technology would symbolize a change in the industry possibly threatening the company with obsolescence. No one would ever consider limiting the advance of technology or a shift in the industry simply to help a specific company succeed. In addition these changes in industry can sometimes be simply another challenge for the company who sometimes passes with flying colors, ultimately resulting in a better company than existed before. A perfect example for this is Amazon.

Amazon began its existence as a book seller; its’ original motto was “Earth’s Biggest Bookstore” (D’Onfro). While they did exceedingly well in the bookselling business, creating almost a monopoly in the industry, founder Jeff Bezos realized that paper books were a dying industry. With the onset of the technological age, the bookselling industry would never have much significant growth. It might last for a while longer, but eventually it will slowly peter out as digital books begin to totally replace physical books. Realizing this Bezos decided to expand to other industries. Knowing he would be expanding though, Bezos figured out a way to use the headway Amazon had made in the bookselling industry and apply it to the other industries they decided to enter. Amazon used the information about consumers they got from selling books to consumers and used them to market smarter to consumers. They sold books to consumers at such low prices that they lost money, because they were not selling books with the goal of making a profit. Amazon realized they could sell books for the sole purpose of data mining. And not only
that they could do it, but that doing so would be more advantageous to the company in the long run than profiting off the books themselves. When Bezos decided to expand he already had information about the preferences of millions of consumers and knew how best to market to them.

More recently, Amazon realized that the fastest growing field was the technology industry and so they decided to release a tablet to compete with Apple’s iPad: the Kindle Fire. Staying with their tradition of undercutting the existing industries, Amazon sold the Kindle Fire for drastically less than the Apple iPad. While it was well-known that the iPad is a superior technological instrument, to many it was not so superior that it was worth all the additional money an iPad cost (Stone). This is how Amazon has been successful. Each time they realize they are no longer ahead of the curve they move until they are. No one ever proposed helping Amazon by limiting technological growth. And for Amazon, it was a good thing they did not, because it was the challenge of being in an industry that is shrinking that forced Amazon to change direction. Without that challenge, Amazon would not be nearly as successful as it is today. In this same way, the spy agencies may even grow and improve because of the challenges encrypted email and messaging gives them. They may have to grow as a collective industry, but growth only leads to improvement.

One of the most famous examples for a great achievement being made from a great challenge to the espionage community was the Turing machine. During World War II, the German Navy used a code for all its communications called enigma. The code was widely regarded as almost impossible to crack. Nevertheless, the English decided to put their best men on the job. One of those men was the famous Alan Touring, a graduate student at Princeton at the
time. Turing realized that to try all the possible combinations himself would be impossible, but he could create a machine that would try the combinations for him. In devising this machine, Alan Turing actually created the first computer. Without the incredible challenge of solving the enigma code, Turing would never have needed to create the world’s first computer. This is certainly one case that does seem to point out that necessity truly is the mother of invention.

In summation it is preposterous to suggest that the U.S. ban encrypted email and messaging simply for the ease of governmental espionage agencies. It should be the job of those agencies to discover valuable information about America’s enemies, not the responsibility of the government to stop the progress of technology to make it easier. And additionally it is frequently large challenges such as this would be for the espionage industry that lead to great technological breakthroughs. Ultimately, banning encrypted email and messaging would be bad in every possible way.

Bibliography


