

What's Wrong with WhatsApp

Description

What's wrong with WhatsApp (hereafter WA)?

- It's giving away your data to US intelligence agencies. And these are not mere words, on November 29, 2021, the US media declassified a document on what kind of data is given away by which messenger.

WA gives away your metadata every 15 minutes, including who you've texted, or called. Who is in the same chats with you and when you text there. That's a lot even without the content of the messages themselves. In fact, the intelligence services can monitor you online, who you text and when, and if you back up your WA to iCloud or Google Drive, they get all your messages too. As the cooperation on warrants is established with them too. Yes, everything is on warrants, but writing a warrant for an enemy of the state? Not a problem.

What about Telegram? Terrorism warrants will only give away your phone number and IP address. Much more modest, not critical.

- WA is leaky. There was a great story in the media about how the Israeli commercial company NSO Group sold a special spy virus (Pegasus) to intelligence agencies around the world, working through hacking of WA. It targeted prominent journalists, politicians, and businessmen, including the world's richest man at the time, Jeff Bezos. The CIA and NSA try to look for such vulnerabilities themselves, and if they find them, they try to keep them secret. If they repeat the successes of their Israeli colleagues, the WA on your phone will turn into a full-fledged spy, and leak all the data they have access to (geolocation, photos, correspondence, files).

WhatsApp may agree to "not shut down the vulnerability for a while due to a requirement of the authorities", they are affiliated. The hacking story is real, the vulnerability was fixed after the scandal, and the author of these lines read the technical details of how this spyware works.

No such serious vulnerabilities were found in Telegram. No spyware was spread through it. Telegram's code is open and has been scrutinized more thoroughly by experts around the world.

- When there's nothing to lose and the White House's pressure on the company is exceptionally strong, WA could be turned into full-fledged spyware. To do that, just release an update. Yes, it will be seen all over the world by researchers, but a lot of invaluable data will be collected in the meantime. WA will lose its reputation in individual countries, but the western media will support its "help against dreaded Russia". It's entirely possible, it won't ruin the company, but it's far from a core product.

Telegram? The White House has no such leverage on them.

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