



Gathering of national security team in Silicon Valley signals tech's critical role in terrorism fight

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This was originally posted at Tech Policy Daily on Friday January 8, 2016, at [this link](http://www.techpolicydaily.com/technology/gathering-of-national-security-team-in-silicon-valley-signals-criticality-of-technology-in-terrorism-fight/) (<http://www.techpolicydaily.com/technology/gathering-of-national-security-team-in-silicon-valley-signals-criticality-of-technology-in-terrorism-fight/>).

With [last night's news](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obamas-top-national-security-officials-to-meet-with-silicon-valley-ceos/2016/01/07/178d95ca-b586-11e5-a842-0feb51d1d124_story.html) (https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obamas-top-national-security-officials-to-meet-with-silicon-valley-ceos/2016/01/07/178d95ca-b586-11e5-a842-0feb51d1d124_story.html) that most of President Barack Obama's national security team is headed to Silicon Valley today to meet with technology leaders to discuss the use of technology by terrorists, we clearly have passed the point where the intersection of technology and terrorism is a minor item. As [reported](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obamas-top-national-security-officials-to-meet-with-silicon-valley-ceos/2016/01/07/178d95ca-b586-11e5-a842-0feb51d1d124_story.html) (https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obamas-top-national-security-officials-to-meet-with-silicon-valley-ceos/2016/01/07/178d95ca-b586-11e5-a842-0feb51d1d124_story.html) in the Washington Post,

Among those set to attend a meeting Friday with Silicon Valley top executives are Attorney General Loretta E. Lynch, FBI Director James B. Comey, Obama counterterrorism adviser Lisa Monaco, Director of National Intelligence James R. Clapper Jr., National Security Agency Director Michael Rogers and Deputy Secretary of State Anthony J. Blinken.

Companies planning to send senior executives include YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Microsoft and LinkedIn. Apple chief executive Tim Cook is also expected to participate.



(http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/RTX1Z5RX_national_security_team_dec_2015-e1452524321118.jpg)

President Barack Obama delivers a statement at the National Counterterrorism Center, December 17, 2015. With the President (L-R): Nicholas Rasmussen, Director, National Counterterrorism Center, Attorney General Loretta Lynch, James Clapper, Director, Office of National Intelligence, Vice President Joe Biden, Secretary John Kerry, Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson and James Comey, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigations. REUTERS/Carlos Barria.

I doubt there has ever been a meeting outside of Washington, DC, as big as this one and involving so many key national security players. The fact that government leaders are the ones trekking to Silicon Valley to see the technology leaders indicates which group holds more sway. The [agenda for the meeting](http://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/documents/politics/us-government-meeting-with-technology-executives-on-counterterrorism/1842/) (<http://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/documents/politics/us-government-meeting-with-technology-executives-on-counterterrorism/1842/>) includes these topics:

- How can we make it harder for terrorists to leverage [sic] the internet to recruit, radicalize, and mobilize followers to violence?
- How can we help others to create, publish, and amplify alternative content

that would undercut ISIL?

- In what ways can we use technology to help disrupt paths to radicalization to violence, identify recruitment patterns, and provide metrics to help measure our efforts to counter radicalization to violence?
- How can we make it harder for terrorists to use the Internet to mobilize, facilitate, and operationalize attacks, and make it easier for law enforcement and the intelligence community to identify terrorist operatives and prevent attacks?

I don't believe technology companies will have much to contribute on the first agenda item other than to bulk up their policies prohibiting illegal activities. On the second and third agenda items, those questions are best left to government entities, nongovernmental organizations, and moderate Muslim leaders to answer. Silicon Valley shouldn't become engaged in evangelism — that isn't its role. It also shouldn't do the government's job for it by becoming de facto subcontractors to security activities. It is one thing for a technology company to develop software under a government contract for government to use in its activities. It is another thing altogether for a technology company to voluntarily help government entities "identify recruitment patterns" and "provide metrics to help measure our efforts to counter radicalization" on users of its commercial software.

It simply makes no sense for technology companies to engage in the second and third items. Doing so will make them targets of terrorist organizations. It also will ensure the terrorists stop using their software applications, thereby undermining the value government entities would get from them anyway. Lastly, it will distract them from doing what they do best, which is developing technology for consumers to legally use however they wish.

On the last question, however, Silicon Valley should have a lot to say. In my report "[National Commission on Terrorists' Use of Technology Needed](https://www.aei.org/publication/national-commission-on-terrorists-use-of-technology-is-needed/?utm_source=paramount%20&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=mediamayerencryption&utm_content=report) (https://www.aei.org/publication/national-commission-on-terrorists-use-of-technology-is-needed/?utm_source=paramount%20&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=mediamayerencryption&utm_content=report)," released earlier this week, I detail the current encryption debate on whether Congress and the president should force technology companies to insert "backdoors" into their software so law enforcement can track terrorists who use encrypted technology. This debate is a critical one for America to have, as one answer could leave us highly vulnerable to terrorist attacks, and another answer could represent an unprecedented use of federal power that harms consumers and weakens Silicon Valley. I proposed that we should have:

. . . a national commission of experts [] analyze the issues involved in encryption and provide Congress and the president with

recommendations on how best to protect private-sector equities while giving law enforcement the necessary tools to protect us from increasingly sophisticated terrorists. Because both law enforcement and the private sector have legitimate concerns over how best to move forward on encryption technology, allowing a commission to deliberate on the issue outside of the spotlight of congressional hearings and the prying eyes of our enemies is the safest course of action.

Unlike most think tank reports that contain tidy solutions, this report acknowledges this issue's complexity and the need for expert analysis to fully evaluate the available options. The solution proposed, however, is more than mere process aimed at kicking the can. A properly structured, manned, and directed national commission can give America the best chance of making the least-worst choice.

Let me be clear: if Congress does nothing, we make it easier for terrorists to attack us, because we tie law enforcement's hands once terrorists use encrypted technology to evade them. If Congress requires technology companies to add backdoors to their software, we likely chase consumers, including terrorists, to applications made outside of the United States, undermining our technology industry.

The proposed commission would have six months to complete its work. I hope the bulk of the meeting time in Silicon Valley zeroes in on the fourth agenda item. We need to tackle the issue of encryption quickly, as our enemies won't stop trying to attack us.

This article was found online at:

<http://www.aei.org/publication/gathering-of-national-security-team-in-silicon-valley-signals-techs-critical-role-in-terrorism-fight/>