

November 17, 2017

Christopher Krebs
Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Under Secretary
National Protection and Program Directorate
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Mr. Krebs:

I write seeking information about foreign intelligence services using fake cell phone towers in the United States. I am very concerned by this threat and urge the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to improve its efforts to detect such activity.

Fake cell towers, often known as “IMSI catchers” or “stingrays,” impersonate cell phone towers to locate and identify nearby phones and to intercept calls and text messages covertly. IMSI catchers are widely available from surveillance vendors around the world and can be constructed using open source software.

In 2014, security researchers reported that they detected a number of IMSI catchers in the National Capital Region, which they suggested may have been operated by foreign governments. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) subsequently established a task force to investigate the threat posed by foreign governments and criminals using IMSI catcher technology. Unfortunately, the FCC has yet to issue any public findings or guidance since then.

Whether foreign intelligence services and criminals are using IMSI catchers to spy on senior members of the U.S. government is undoubtedly a question worth answering. Foreign government surveillance of senior American political and business leaders would obviously pose a significant threat to our country’s national and economic security.

DHS’s mandate includes the security and resilience of America’s cyber and communications infrastructure. Given this role, I am seeking information about DHS’s awareness of the threat posed by IMSI catchers and the steps DHS has taken to respond appropriately. To that end, please respond to the following questions:

- Has DHS seen any evidence of foreign IMSI catchers operated in the National Capital Region?
 - If yes, was this evidence reported to any congressional committees?
- Does DHS agree that foreign government use of IMSI catchers in the National Capital Region poses a threat to U.S. national and economic security?

- Does DHS currently have the technical capability to detect foreign IMSI catchers in the National Capital Region?
 - If yes, has DHS deployed assets capable of detecting foreign IMSI catchers in the National Capital Region?
 - If no, what would DHS need to have this technical capability?
- Has DHS seen evidence of foreign IMSI catchers in other major U.S. cities and does DHS agree that foreign IMSI catchers in other cities would pose a serious threat to U.S. national and economic security?
 - If DHS has seen evidence of foreign IMSI catchers in other major U.S. cities, what steps has DHS taken to respond?
- Native 4th Generation (4G/LTE) IMSI catchers are now openly advertised by surveillance technology companies. Does DHS currently have the technical capability to detect 4G/LTE IMSI catchers?
 - If not, what resources, if any, has DHS invested to address this advanced surveillance threat?

I appreciate your attention to this important matter. If you have any questions, please contact Chris Soghoian on my staff at (202) 224-5244.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator

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