

Cameron, or The Modern Cnut

by Abigail Brady (morwen.net)

"We just can't keep up," said the advisor, who said he was from the security services. "Not through the usual legislative processes. What we need is a general power to add communications technologies to a proscribed list."

"With ministerial oversight," replied the Prime Minister.

"Of course," said the advisor. "We've drafted a bill with that in mind. It will operate a lot like the Misuse of Drugs Act."

--

"There's been a lot of pushback on this," said the Prime Minister. "The Information Commissioner and the head of the Government Data Service have both threatened to resign."

"Frankly, unsurprising. What sort of reaction do you expect from people whose job you are going to make a bit more complicated? It's just posturing."

The Prime Minister nodded. This man was cold, but he wasn't wrong. They were looking for a compromise. Well, he wasn't going to give them one.

--

WHATCHAT REFUSES TO COMPLY WITH NEW INTERCEPTION LAW

WhatChat announced that it would refuse to comply with the new UK interception law, one of only a few major social networking companies to make such a stand. MyFace, twitbit and rollr have all - grudgingly - signed up to the interception programme. WhatChat's Chief Technology Officer explained that complying with the government's demands would be impossible. "We don't ourselves have access to the messages. They are encrypted." WhatChat operates out of San Francisco, but employs ten people at a Holborn-based sales and marketing office.

--

"How's the feeling on the ground?" asked the Prime Minister. "You got your shopping list. Lots more intelligence on terrorists, yes?"

The advisor winced. "We need WhatChat too."

The Prime Minister winced back. "I have been told that it has a, what, 1% market share."

"It has a niche appeal to certain communities."

"There's not a lot we can do, though, is there? They're quite happy to write off their London office."

"There's plenty. Get the website blocked. Go after Apple. It's still on the App Store. Google, too.."

--

WHATCHAT UK BLOCK INEFFECTIVE

WhatChat's website was blocked in the UK yesterday - for about six hours, before the company worked around it by changing IP addresses of its messaging servers. The company declined to issue a statement to the press, saying that this was merely a coincidental reorganisation of its operations, and that it was not taking a stance against the UK. Apple and Google complied with the demand to remove the app from their stores last week.

--

The Prime Minister was furious. "How dare they do this?"

The advisor nodded. "Complete contempt for the law. For order."

"What can we do? If we block them again, is there anything to stop changing 'IP addresses' again."

"Very little. We need to adopt a more comprehensive approach if we are to win against these paedophiles."

"Paedophiles? I thought we were talking about terrorists."

"They have links," said the advisor.

The Prime Minister shuddered. "What do we do?"

"Our fundamental problem is we can't intercept because the communications between WhatChat and the users are encrypted. I consulted a number of IT experts. Several just said it was impossible. But we had some good suggestions. We could block something called port 443."

"What's that?"

"It's used for 'secure' connections by websites. It was invented for banks and shops, of course, but these human trafficking gangs have hijacked it. I'm told, if we block it generally, it'll result in a lot of disruption. So we need a licensing scheme!"

--

WEBSITE LICENSING AGENCY URGES HTTPS OPERATORS TO REGISTER BEFORE DEADLINE

The newly formed Website Licensing Agency has reminded operators of https websites that they need to register their IP blocks within the end of the week, otherwise users of the main British ISPs will be unable to access their sites.

--

"What" asked the Prime Minister, "is a VPN?"

"Virtual private network."

"And why do you need to ban them?"

"They... can be used to evade other blocks."

The Prime Minister sighed.

--

DISCORDIAN BOMB IN RATCHESTER LEAVES 23 DEAD, 5 INJURED

...Police have revealed that the cell communicated by the use of GPG encrypted email, and that though they were able to get the actual email records from Google, they were still unable to decrypt the messages sent within them...

--

The Prime Minister was livid. "All these powers, all these blocks, and they're still not enough."

The advisor couldn't meet the Prime Minister's eyes. "No."

"If you've been holding back on asking for anything, for fear I'd say no, now's the time. Should we ban GPG? Should I talk to the company who makes that?"

"That might be difficult. I have another idea."

--

GOVERNMENT TO BAN GENERAL PURPOSE COMPUTERS

Critics have warned that the Prevention of Terrorism (No. 12) Order's wording is dangerously vague and could lead to the popular card game "Magic: The Gathering" being banned.

--

"What is a one-time pad?"

"It's an encryption tool. It was devised surprisingly late, actually, considering it is an infallible form of cryptography."

"Infallible? It has a downside, though, as we're only just hearing of it?"

"You have to cart actual pads of random numbers around. The idea is you have the same random numbers in two places, encrypt with one copy, decrypt with the other. And you burn through them quickly, you never reuse the same random sequence."

"Damn. So we'll have to ban the import of all random numbers into the country? Treat them as contraband?"

"They'll still be able to generate them in the UK."

"For heaven's sake, are you asking me to ban all sources of randomness in the UK?"

"...yes?"

"Then just tell me. We need to do it, for the sake of the children!"

--

FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION BEGS EXEMPTION FROM ENTROPY ACT

--

"It's cold in here," said the Prime Minister.

"Fires", said the advisor, "are a source of entropy. They could be used by terrorists."

"Can I at least have something to eat?"

"No. Cells convert food to work through oxidation."

"Perhaps, in retrospect -" started the Prime Minister. He did not finish.

Heat Death looked at the calendar, and smiled. He could knock off a few billion years early.