

Three thoughts on the FBI's bite at the Apple

I read a [primer](#) in Vox on the developing fight between Apple Computer and the FBI, and it spurred three distinct thoughts in me.

The basic contention is whether Apple should be forced to disable a security feature on the phone of the San Bernadino shooter, so that the FBI can brute-force the phone without fear of it nuking itself after some number of bad guesses (10, I think, but I'm not sure).

Firstly, the author includes the line

The concern is that the government is trying to take advantage of a particularly odious defendant to set a precedent that could have much broader implications.

Well, duh. The defendants in all important civil liberties cases look like terrible people, because those are the people the state most egregiously assaults.

Secondly, there's a thing I don't understand, and would love to hear from someone who knows: To change the behavior, it seems to me, Apple would have to craft a special iOS update. But after that, the crippled update would *have to be installed*. Won't it require knowing the passcode for that to happen? Can Apple force an update down the pipe even to phones that are locked? It seems to me that the request of the FBI is not only odious and an offense to the safety of citizens. It might also be technically impossible.

Thirdly, I am a little disappointed -- assuming what I'm about to say is actually true -- that the NSA or other competent agency doesn't have the capacity to read out the non-volatile memory non-destructively somehow. They could then run an iPhone simulator with the copied data and brute-force it. Every time it froze or self-erased, the agency could just reboot the simulator and try again. This would take

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time but then you wouldn't need any sort of help from Apple.

Or maybe the NSA doesn't want to admit to having such a capacity. :)