

When the Dutch secret service came knocking on my door

This is the account of how the Dutch secret service (AIVD) approached me in 2013, and how I understand the events that took place. I was a student until summer 2013, and after OHM2013 was hired at an internet service provider. I also did some technical consulting and digital security trainings for Publeaks during that time. This is all prior to my involvement in Tails.

It is important to tell the whole story, the run up to the approach, the approach itself, how and when it happened, and discuss the aftermath. This is not an isolated incident but rather a pattern of harassment of hackers and other communities. With the new Dutch security services law coming up now, the services will gain additional measures and more power, I think this story is more relevant than ever.

Being surveilled?

It's 2013, the year of the Snowden leaks, the arrests and trials of some people associated with Lulzsec, and OHM2013 - the Dutch hacker camp that takes place every four years.

OHM2013 was not without its controversy. The primary sponsor was Fox-IT, an IT-security company that is deeply involved with the Dutch government and has helped catch teenagers doing some DDoS attacks. Fox-IT is also rumored to have had contracts with the Mubarak regime in Egypt.

Due to this fact, some of us decided to organize NoisySquare, to put the resistance back in OHM. We had our own tipi tent organized as an additional track in the OHM2013 program. Lectures, workshops, panel discussions and our meeting circles were hosted in this tipi.

A couple of months before OHM2013 would start, my aunt received a phone call from somebody who claimed to be my friend and was looking for my mobile number. However, I never gave any of my friends my aunt's phone number. My aunt was alarmed, she asked who she was speaking to,

and made it clear that she found this a rather strange conversation. The person on the phone didn't really identify himself, and my aunt hung up.

For a while I thought one of my friends was trying to prank me and my aunt, and I soon forgot about the incident.

When I was in Germany in May of that year, I went to an event that was about Chelsea Manning and Collateral Murder (Wikileaks released video footage of a US Apache helicopter attacking and killing Reuters journalist Namir Noor-Eldeen, driver Saeed Chmagh, and several others in a public square in Eastern Baghdad), me and my then partner left the event and found that our mobile batteries were losing charge even though we were not using the phone. The situation with the battery normalized after I returned to the Netherlands.

Later in the year, I had the same experience with my phone while attempting to help with the build-up of OHM2013. My phone battery was draining quite quickly, even though I wasn't using it. I asked whether other people had the same issue and was told that the GSM towers were probably overloaded, even though nobody else was having any of these issues.

This is where it starts getting a little weird, I assumed it must have been an IMSI-catcher but I couldn't back up this claim with actual evidence. But the same insane battery drain happened while the phone wasn't being used much. During OHM2013, I lost my phone. I only got it back after OHM2013 when somebody returned it to the lost and found box and a friend managed to bring it back to me.

When I got the phone back, I saw someone had been trying to call me from a number I did not recognize. I later learned it belonged to an AIVD agent, as he left his mobile phone number with my father.

Hans Turksma, AIVD

Just before OHM2013 took place, I had dropped out of my university studies and on top of that I was a bit of an emotional mess after a romantic

break-up. I have a feeling that the intelligence service pried on this mental state of mine.

On a Monday afternoon 2 weeks after the OHM2013 event, a stranger approached my parents' home. He rings the doorbell, no reply, he tries a few more times, nobody is home, my parents are walking the dogs. He continues to wait in front of the house for some time and leaves soon after.

He comes back the following day, now there are people home. My stepmother opens the door, the man identifies himself as Hans Turksma, from the 'Ministry of Interior' and explains he's looking for me. My stepmother explains that I'm not home and invites him in. But he doesn't want to come in and they continue talking at the door. My stepmother calls to my father to explain that there is someone looking for me.

My father asks whether he works for the AIVD and after asking the question several times, Hans Turksma acknowledges that he works for the AIVD and that he would like to speak to me. My dad asks why Turksma is interested in speaking to me, he's surely not here to offer his son a job. Turksma makes it clear he isn't there to offer a job but rather to "see how the image of the AIVD can be improved among the hacker community". How Turksma would like to do this remains unclear. My dad explains to Turksma that he never wants to see him again near his house or near his son, and to stop the harassment. Turksma indeed, never came back.

While Turksma was at my parents' house, I was having a meeting at a provider to run our first Dutch Tor exit nodes. After I went to the library to check some e-mails, my dad calls, "Hey Jurre, don't freak out, but there was someone from the AIVD at the door looking for you."

My heart skips a beat. My head has too many questions. I hang up and remove the battery from my mobile phone. At this point I stopped using mobile phones for a while.

At the time I was freelancing and people expect to call me and that I will pick up the phone during the day. Imagine trying to explain that you just had an AIVD agent at the door looking for you. The faces are priceless.

Uninvited guest

Some weeks later at the end of August, we were having a Publeaks meeting at an outdoor cafe in Amsterdam Noord. It's early and the terrace is abandoned, we sit down and shortly after, a man who looked like he was in his fifties sits down next to us, orders a coffee, pays immediately in cash and watches us the entire time listening in on our conversation. As soon as we talk more informally, he gets up and leaves on his bike.

After a while, all these little coincidences become a pattern. I was told I was being paranoid and might be delusional. Some people even expect the AIVD to roam around the hacker world to look for the "bad guys" and would be disappointed if they didn't.

Unfortunately, there is a big downside for the people who've been asked to inform on their peers and friends. It's not exactly a nice feeling. And, you're left with questions: Am I being followed? Will I get charged with some bullshit charge? You start being more careful in how you communicate with people. How do I explain this to any future or current partners? These interactions make you change a little bit as a person.

At a later point in time, it became clear to me that more people have been approached and asked to become informants. I have not been explicitly asked to become an informant, but from what I understand by talking with Buro Jansen & Janssen is that this is probably the real reason for approaching me.

I never called the mobile phone number that was left by Hans Turksma. I never spoke to them, nor did I ever agree to inform.

Time and time again we see people being approached and manipulated in different communities. Some of them are not even politically active, nor are they activists, some just want to throw a party with some of their hacker friends. These are the same people who organize events or started

hackerspaces. We aren't those bad guys they think we are, we haven't been accused of a crime and yet we are still being harassed.

Another approach - Sabu?

In 2017 I learned that another approach had taken place. The security services approached a Tor exit node operator and Msc student of the TU-Delft. It became clear that the security services would like to infiltrate hackerspaces, hacker events throughout Europe, and especially the Chaos Computer Club and free software projects like Tor and Tails. It looks like this is an international effort.

They offered the Delft student a get-out-of-jail card if he gets caught hacking for assignments from the security services. I'm no law expert, but that sounds like it could be slightly illegal, even under the new law.

Now, you might wonder: Where have I heard of something similar to this? It smells a lot like the Sabu case, the hacker turned informant who hacked and snitched on several hackers, notably the Lulzsec hackers and Sigurdur "Siggi" Thordarson from Wikileaks, who also turned out to be an FBI informant. Both cases proved to be quite a success for the American government. Perhaps there is now an international effort to ruin more people's lives.

All of this is giving me the creeps. It's not exactly good for your mental health to know, <if true> that someone is really trying to get you. You don't know the purpose nor how they will do it. Will they employ honey traps? Do they want to put backdoors in the software? Even though they promised the Dutch parliament not to place backdoors in the software? If a foreign agency succeeds in whatever technique they might employ and share it with the Dutch agency, will the Dutch "whitewash" the access that way?

I've become very distrustful over the years of people and especially of the government and how they try to rip communities apart. I think the approach totally freaked me out and changed me a little bit and not exactly for the better.

Why not sit down with them

Some people have asked why I didn't sit down with them to tell them what I think about all of this. Some will say, this might help to catch some potential bad guys so what's the fuss?

I disagree because you might be approached, you politely decline, and they never return, right? Well, some people are being harassed for long time, where the AIVD will try to persuade you to become an informant with a slew of manipulative tricks; they don't take no for an answer in most cases. They will offer all kinds of rewards but in the end they will always drop you after they used you. They got what they needed and you are no longer interesting.

And there is something else. The people who they pick often have no perspective, they are in debt and easy to manipulate for the service. If they want out of the informant role, they are pressured by the service who will threaten to snitch on them to family and friends. So much for democracy and oversight ...

My answer is clear: I don't talk with people who are selected to work for the service and educated to perform manipulative tricks on their targets. There is a power imbalance between us - they can lie, I can't lie. They suffer from not being able to self-reflect. Should I trust some black box organization on their "blue eyes"? Or on the service's track record, since its inception, of harassment of anything or anyone that's slightly critical of the democracy?

With the stories so far, the next couple of years will be quite interesting for the tech community. We'll see more attempts of the services trying to recruit informants, giving them direct access to databases or networks. Let's hope they never try to recruit people who work for the NCSC in the Netherlands and try to force them to inform on the community.

If you really want to protect democracy and you care about the rule of law, say no to becoming an informant. To those working at the security services: leak more documents or at the very least, ask for a self-reflection course.

Ways forward

First of all, it's ok to say NO. It's legal to refuse to collaborate. If you're unsure about what they might ask of you, contact a lawyer, contact the CTIVD to submit a complaint, or contact Buro Jansen & Janssen.

If you're based in the United States of America, I encourage you to read the following text: <https://crimethinc.com/2017/05/17/if-the-fbi-approaches-you-to-become-an-informant-an-faq-what-you-need-to-know>.

Some of this, I think, comes down to consent. The security services might try to continue to lure you into their web, even though a one-time firm "no" should be enough to back them off. Unfortunately, when it comes to recruitment of informants, you might have to say no multiple times.

And that's really bad, especially if you haven't done anything wrong, or illegal, and your own government is trying to persuade you to do possibly illegal things to fulfill their needs to conduct cyberwar or destroy communities.

However, I'd like to propose some ways to create a more resilient and emphatic community.

- 1) I'm open to creating a group of people who have been approached, and see what we can do as a group of people, for example, submitting a complaint to the CTIVD.
- 2) We can create a "Frequently Asked Questions" document, like the one from Crimethinc, according to our local laws in the countries we're based in. What can they ask for? Can you decline? What could this mean? What to do when you are approached and they're giving you a hard time?

3) Empathy, if somebody has been an informant and has been (hopefully) naive and wants out, we should help them get out and perhaps rejoin the community at a later stage through restorative justice processes.

4) Don't accuse your peers of being feds, agents or informants without credible evidence that proves your case. Don't destroy someone else's life. Investigate rumors thoroughly and if sure present facts in a decent manner.

5) Write down your story when it happens, while the information is still fresh in your head. This can help in the future when you hear of similar stories and it can aid in understanding the aim of the operation in question.

In short: (from Crimethinc)

- Non-cooperation is the best way to protect our communities and movements against state repression.
- If they are approaching you about informing, they probably have a weak case if they have a case at all.
- You do not have to cooperate. You have the right to remain silent.
- Contact a lawyer as soon as possible.

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My KeyID: 0x9586d84b70dcae8c

My fingerprint: EBDD 1240 CBC8 91C2 6C48 75D0 9586 D84B 70DC AE8C

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