

Government Collaboration with Online Gaming Companies Raises Privacy Concerns

May 18, 2024 - A recent report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) indicates that the federal government is actively monitoring the activities of online gamers. The report suggests that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) have been actively engaging with gaming platforms to root out what they deem as domestic violent extremist content.

The GAO report states that mechanisms have been established for federal agencies to share information with and receive information from gaming companies, including popular platforms like Roblox, Discord, and Reddit. This unprecedented cooperation raises significant privacy concerns as it potentially involves monitoring the online activities of individuals without proper oversight or transparency.

The report indicates that the DHS intelligence office holds regular meetings with gaming companies to exchange information about online activities promoting domestic violent extremism or activities violating the companies' terms of service. Additionally, the FBI is receiving tips from gaming companies regarding potential law-breaking and extremist views for further investigation, indicating that the personal privacy of the users of these platforms isn't of any concern to the gaming companies themselves.

This collaboration between government agencies and gaming companies could lead to the indiscriminate monitoring of individuals' online behavior without proper safeguards in place. Without proper oversight, there is a risk that individuals could be unjustly targeted or subjected to intrusive surveillance without due process.

The program also raises an alarm about the potential violations of the Fourth Amendment, which protects against unreasonable searches and seizures. Monitoring individuals' online activities without a warrant or probable cause could infringe upon their right to privacy and freedom of expression. And since the report doesn't define what content is considered to be "domestic violent extremism," these fears are justified. The government appears to be leaving the definition up to whomever is reviewing the content. If so, that's a very dangerous precedent.

by Jim Malmberg

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