Why You Should Be Concerned About Wikileaks Latest Announcement on the CIA

March 10, 2017 - It has been a few days since Wikileaks announced the release of what it calls Vault 7; a repository of nearly 9,000 documents on the CIA's hacking abilities. The documents describe the agency's ability to hack cell phones, smart TVs, computers, automobiles and just about anything else that can connect to the internet. Even if you believe the CIA using these tools on Americans, you have to assume that other nations have developed similar capabilities that are targeting us. Here is the good, the bad and the ugly about Vault 7.

According to the documents released, the CIA has developed a vast repository of software tools to hack just about anything that connects to the internet. Wikileaks claims that they have the computer code for these tools. While they haven't released the code to anyone, Julian Assange - the head of Wikileaks - has said that his group is working with affected companies to repair their computer code so that they can prevent spying.

What is apparent from the release is that the CIA focused some of its efforts on specific brands. For instance, they developed tools to target Samsung smart TV's. Those tools allowed the agency to make those TV's appear to be off when in fact their microphones and cameras were actually turned on. This allowed the agency to listen in and view conversations that were taking place in real time. Similar tools were developed for Apple products and for products running Google's Android operating system.

Perhaps the biggest surprise was the revelation the agency is actively developing tools to hack automobiles. In Wikileaks announcement they speculated that this type of hacking could be used to assassinate passengers while leaving virtually no proof of a crime.

The revelations are both good and bad. On the good side, they allow the companies that manufacture internet connected products to examine and fix vulnerabilities in their current systems. On the other hand, they are also going to severely limit the CIAs ability to collect foreign intelligence over the short term. That limitation may also impact the intelligence agencies of other nations, but it may not. There is no guarantee that those foreign agencies havenâ€™t found vulnerabilities

that the CIA hasn't.

Over the long term, the Wikileaks revelations probably won't have a tremendous effect on anyone. As long as computers have been connected to the internet, hackers have found ways to exploit them. While the latest revelations will patch existing known vulnerabilities, hackers will find new vulnerabilities that they will exploit.

Perhaps the biggest take-away from this incident is that anything connected to the internet can be hacked. If you value your privacy, cover up the cameras and microphones in your devices when you aren't using them. And if you don't need a smart TV, buy a dumb one - they are still available and they typically cost a lot less. And if you have internet connected devices that you only use once in a while, unplug them when they're not in use. Even the best hacker can't get to a device that doesn't have any power.

According to Wikileaks, this first release makes up less than 1% of the CIA documents they have obtained so there is more to come.