

HACKING JOHN BRENNAN, HACKING OPM

In Salon, I've got my take on the hack of John Brennan's AOL account by a 13-year old stoner.

While I think it sucks that WikiLeaks posted unredacted data on Brennan's family, I'm not at all sympathetic to Brennan himself. After all he's the guy who decided hacking his SSCI overseers would be appropriate. He's one of the people who've been telling us we have no expectation of privacy in the kinds of data hackers obtained from Verizon – alternate phone number, account ID, password, and credit card information – for years.

But most of all, I think we should remember that Brennan left this data on an AOL server through his entire Obama Administration career, which includes 4 years of service as Homeland Security Czar, a position which bears key responsibility for cybersecurity.

Finally, this hack exposes the Director of the CIA exercising almost laughable operational security. The files appear to date from the period leading up to Brennan's appointment as White House Homeland Security Czar, where a big part of Brennan's job was to prevent hacks in this country. To think he was storing sensitive documents on an AOL server – AOL! – while in that role, really demonstrates how laughable are the practices of those who purport to be fighting hackers as the biggest threat to the country. For at least 6 years, the Homeland Security Czar, then the CIA Director – one of the key intelligence officials throughout the Obama Administration – left that stuff out there for some teenagers to steal.

Hacking is a serious problem in this

country. Like Brennan, private individuals and corporations suffer serious damage when they get hacked (and the OPM hack of Brennan's materials may be far more serious). Rather than really fixing the problem, the intelligence community is pushing to give corporations regulatory immunity in exchange for sharing information that won't be all that useful.

A far more useful initial step in securing the country from really basic types of hacking would be for people like Brennan to stop acting in stupid ways, to stop leaving both their own and the public's sensitive data in places where even stoned kids can obtain it, to provide a good object lesson in how to limit the data that might be available for malicious hackers to steal.

I would add, however, that there's one more level of responsibility here.

As I noted in my piece, Brennan's not the only one who got his security clearance application stolen recently. He is joined in that by 21 million other people, most of whom don't have a key role in cybersecurity and counterintelligence. Most of those 21 million people haven't even got official notice their very sensitive data got hacked by one of this country's adversaries – not even those people who might be particularly targeted by China. Like Brennan, the families of those people have all been put at risk. Unlike Brennan, they didn't get to choose to leave that data sitting on a server.

In fact, John Brennan and his colleagues have not yet put in place a counterintelligence plan to protect those 21 million people.

If it sucks that John Brennan's kids got exposed by a hacker (and it does), then it sucks even more than people with far fewer protections and

authority to fix things got exposed, as well.

John Brennan should focus on that, not on the 13 year old stoner who hacked his AOL account.