

THE LATEST IN TERRORIST TRAINING: PLAYING ANGRY BIRDS

I confess, I don't really know what Angry Birds is, except that my tweener niece was hot on the game a year ago.

But apparently it must be a key part of terrorist training (which makes me worried about my niece), because the NSA gathers up cell phone data the Angry Birds app leaks.

The National Security Agency and its UK counterpart GCHQ have been developing capabilities to take advantage of "leaky" smartphone apps, such as the wildly popular Angry Birds game, that transmit users' private information across the internet, according to top secret documents.

[snip]

From some app platforms, relatively limited, but identifying, information such as exact handset model, the unique ID of the handset, software version, and similar details are all that are transmitted.

Other apps choose to transmit much more data, meaning the agency could potentially net far more. One mobile ad platform, Millennial Media, appeared to offer particularly rich information. Millennial Media's website states it has partnered with Rovio on a special edition of Angry Birds; with Farmville maker Zynga; with Call of Duty developer Activision, and many other major franchises.

Rovio, the maker of Angry Birds, said it had no knowledge of any NSA or GCHQ programs looking to extract data from

its apps users.

“Rovio doesn’t have any previous knowledge of this matter, and have not been aware of such activity in 3rd party advertising networks,” said Saara Bergström, Rovio’s VP of marketing and communications. “Nor do we have any involvement with the organizations you mentioned [NSA and GCHQ].”

Millennial Media did not respond to a request for comment.

This is all very predictable (and will undoubtedly finally launch a conversation about data spillage on mobile apps).

But seriously. How many Angry Bird players does NSA really claim it has a valid foreign intelligence purpose to target?