

ANOM sting is landmark in tech race against crime: expert

8 June 2021



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The global police sting against organised crime revealed on Tuesday will prove a landmark in the technological arms race with the underworld, an industry expert said.

The use of ANOM, a supposedly encrypted communication device planted with criminals in more than 100 countries, highlights the technological battle between police and [criminal gangs](#) worldwide, said David Weinberger, who heads the research arm into global crime at the Paris-based Institute of International and Strategic Relations.

What does Operation Trojan Shield tell us?

New encrypted technologies are being used extensively by traffickers and criminals of all kinds. They had a significant head start with the advent of

methods for encrypting telephone communications. But now, [police forces](#) are managing to overtake them and deal them hard blows with what (in this case) can be viewed as a Trojan Horse.

Isn't that a misnomer?

In every period of history, we see that [criminals](#) can have a technological advantage over law enforcement, which, after a while, manages to adapt and regain control.

We saw this with the use of cars in the 1970s and 1980s, mobile telephones through utilising different handsets and chips, and then encrypted messaging platforms such as WhatsApp.

There, we realised that they were using secure global systems. The criminal groups thought they were out of reach, but since EncroChat (an [encrypted communications](#) network infiltrated and then dismantled in 2020 by France and the Netherlands), we are entering a new phase.

Law enforcement agencies have succeeded in infiltrating these encrypted messaging systems on the one hand and in setting up dedicated systems on the other.

This is a case that, along with EncroChat, is a milestone in the recent history of the fight against crime.

So criminal groups have huge investment capacities?

Some [criminal groups](#) can invest significant amounts in research and development. In drug trafficking, we have seen this in camouflage methods, transport methods, custom-made submarines, techniques for making false documents.

It is not uncommon for a criminal organisation to

lose a means of transport worth several million euros, without this posing any real financial problem. These groups can invest tens of millions of euros in this kind of thing.

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What is the next step in this technological race?

You can imagine anything. They must already be trying to find ways of getting around it, knowing that communicating securely is a major issue. We can imagine new networks, satellite or otherwise.

In Mexico, there are homemade networks that make it possible not to use traditional networks. We know that there is an internationalisation of criminal activities. It has become easier and easier to coordinate trafficking, to transport illegal goods around the world and this has increased the importance of communications.

What about the old-fashioned carrier method?

One of the strategies for getting around this technological war may be to go back to extremely simple systems, such as messengers or pigeons... We know that the more technology there is, the more opportunities there are to be hacked and monitored.

We have seen this with telephones: many traffickers have gone back to mobiles from the 2000s because they are much less susceptible to hacking. But we are in a period of globalisation of economic activities. And criminal activities are intertwined with the [real economy](#), so they follow the same trends.

With a little delay?

More like one step ahead. The motivation of criminal organisations can be summed up with two points: the activity is extremely lucrative, and the risks run up to incarceration or death. So there is a very strong motivation to be at the cutting edge of methods and technologies.

Furthermore, compared to public bodies or private companies, they are not limited by regulatory or normative constraints. This gives them more flexibility.

APA citation: ANOM sting is landmark in tech race against crime: expert (2021, June 8) retrieved 27 May 2022 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2021-06-anom-landmark-tech-crime-expert.html>

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