

Driverless cars—a terrorist delight



Car found in Times Square, which later proved to contain cans of flammable liquid and other explosive devices via New York Daily News

Unless you have been on a desert island or a mountaintop with no news, you've no doubt heard about all the hacking going on. Banks get hacked. The Cloud gets hacked for nude photos of celebs. The Department of Defense, Army Command Center and White House have all been hacked. Sony got hacked—big time. Drones get hacked. The F-35 Joint Strike fighter—the most expensive military plane in history—had its plans stolen from Lockheed-Martin by hackers (China?) —before the plane ever flew! What's next? Driverless cars! Driverless cars are a coming terrorist/hackers' delight.

Major automakers all seem to be developing their own versions of driverless cars. There's no doubt the technology exists. The latest Mercedes S-Class includes a lot of it. Google is into this area too. Such innovations might be a real benefit to the growing number of senior citizens who really shouldn't be driving—but still do.

The worrisome issue is that the outcome could be that driverless cars work just fine but are a terrorist/hackers' delight and ultimate bombing tool! Imagine a driverless car, operated by hackers and filled with explosives, which could be driven or parked

anywhere, and then detonated. No one would think a regular looking car was unusual—until it exploded!

One of the newer hacker gangs—the Syrian Electronic Army—has already declared its intentions, and gained global credibility. Who might be part of this SEA? ISIS, perhaps? Who knows, or better yet, who should know? Then there are hackers from China, North Korea, other middle-Eastern elements (Iran, Yemen, etc.) and of course Russia.

How do terrorist hackers find their way into controlling a car? Systems such as GM's OnStar and Mercedes mBrace already connect people's cars to networks that allow two-way contact. Chevrolet is advertising actively how "connected" its cars are. The question is, connected to what, and whom? Once inside the car's control systems, it isn't a big leap to imagine getting into the controls for cruise control, braking, locking/unlocking, accident/airbag reporting, and more.

This is all the access a clever group of terrorist hackers need to meddle with the car's control systems. Imagine the awful results of such mischief, and even greater harm if the hacker's intent is evil and not merely malicious. Here is just one example of what can be done:

<http://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/archive/2015/May/Pages/ResearchersHackIntoDriverlessCarSystemTakeControlofVehicle.aspx>

[Disclosure: My 2010 book, The Chinese Conspiracy, opens with a hypothetical NYC scene in which hackers have turned all the traffic lights green—at the same time! Imagine the havoc that results. Now imagine hackers can control cars to use them as weapons, or to run interference for other nefarious activities.]

Of course the automakers will build in all sorts of safeguards and security, but that is little comfort when hackers have already penetrated systems at high profile targets like the Pentagon, the US Army Battlefield Control, the Department of Defense—and the White House—and actually hacked one or more of the recently connected autos (that we know about).

The list of hacked systems grows daily. Nation states like China lead the hacker hit parade, but they are far from the only threats. Russian hackers are high on the list of attackers, and this totally ignores thousands of clever, individual hackers—some of them very young—who successfully hack secure systems every day. Just use this link to see what is already out there.

<https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=driverless+cars+hacked&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>

The list of potential hackers accessible to terrorist organizations or rogue nation-states is large and growing. The question is: who's "playing defense" against this kind of threat? Certainly no one in the White House.

The president is busy playing golf, going to fund-raisers, and figuring out who else will step up to stop ISIS' march across the Middle East. Oh, yes, he's also trying to fix the VA, keep anyone from finding out everything the IRS really did, or admit what really happened at Benghazi or... help Hillary dodge indictment. Meanwhile, the Secretaries of State and Defense are preoccupied with the Middle East unrest, North Korea's antics, and much more, with little or not strategy to rely upon.

No place on the to-do list is defense against such cyber-attacks, especially when those originate with terrorist-hackers. Maybe it should be on somebody's list to watch. Or will we find out that no one was watching when everything goes down at once, like the story in *The Chinese Conspiracy*, and the terrorist demands come flying at us like ISIS beheading videos?

Then somebody—perhaps our feckless president—will be “surprised and upset”, but it will be too late. Until then, remember you read it here: Driverless cars are a terrorist delight, and they are coming soon to a town near you.