Xiaomi's Mi 3 smartphone

Lithuania says built-in cybersecurity risks found in Chinese-made Xiaomi and Huawei phones

Drexel Hamilton

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Vilnius, Lithuania — Lithuanian cybersecurity experts are urging the country's government agencies to abandon the use of Chinese-made smartphones after an investigation identified security vulnerabilities and censorship concerns with certain devices. Lithuania's National Cyber Security Center said it found four major cybersecurity risks for devices made by Huawei and Xiaomi, including two relating to pre-installed apps and one involving personal data leakage, and warned against using these two brands.

There's also the risk of possible restrictions on freedom of expression with Xiaomi phones, which contain a content-filtering feature for 449 keywords or groups of keywords in Chinese characters. The center warned the function could be activated at any time and did not rule out the possibility that words using Latin characters could be added. According to the Lithuanian report, apps receive updated lists of censored words and phrases and are capable of blocking them.

- *U.S. and allies accuse China of widespread cybercrime*

The phrases include "Free Tibet," "Voice of America," "Democratic Movement" and "Long Live Taiwan Independence." Although the content-filtering feature was disabled and no censorship was performed on the phones the Lithuanian center inspected, the center warned the function could be activated at any time.

A Huawei representative in China referred CBS News to a previous statement issued to media outlets, saying simply that the company's phones do not send user's data externally...

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What We Think:

The potential security exploits alleged to be embedded in mobile phone hardware produced by Chinese telecom companies is increasingly becoming an issue from a security standpoint. Especially in light of the increasing global roll-out of 5G networks and its (5G) associated infrastructure. China's Digital Silk Road strategy which is a component of its overall "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) incorporates a variety of programs and undertakings globally which have raised concerns regarding the intelligence-collecting capabilities that successful and unchecked implementation of these programs would present.