

# AT&T Stops Adding Hidden Web Tracking Codes On Cellphones

BY JACK GILLUM

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — AT&T Mobility, the nation's second-largest cellular provider, said Friday it's no longer attaching hidden Internet tracking codes to data transmitted from its users' smartphones. The practice made it nearly impossible to shield its subscribers' identities online.

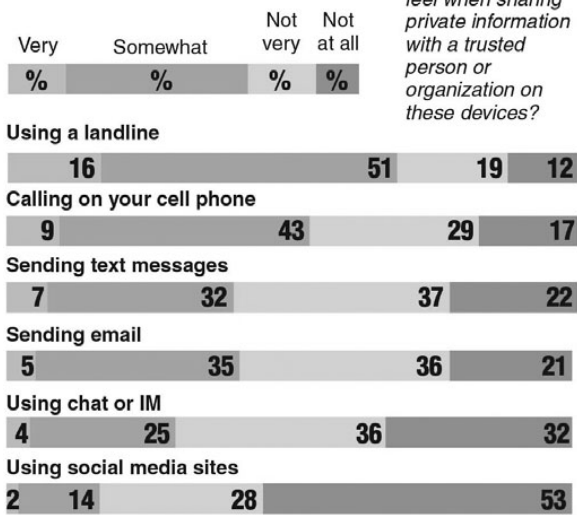
The change by AT&T essentially removes a hidden string of letters and numbers that are passed along to websites that a consumer visits. It can be used to track subscribers across the Internet, a lucrative data-mining opportunity for advertisers that could still reveal users' identities based on their browsing habits.

Verizon Wireless, the country's largest mobile firm, said Friday it still uses this type of tracking, known as "super cookies." Verizon spokeswoman Debra Lewis said business and government customers don't have the code inserted. There has been no evidence that Sprint and T-Mobile have used such codes.

"As with any program, we're constantly evaluating, and this is no different," Lewis said, adding that consumers can ask that their codes not be used for advertising tracking. But that still passes along the codes to websites, even if subscribers say they don't want their data being used for marketing purposes.

The tracking codes are part of the latest plan by the cellular industry to keep

## How secure do you feel communicating?



Source: Pew Research Center  
Graphic: Greg Good, Tribune News Service

tabs on users and their devices. While the codes don't explicitly contain personal information, they're unique and nonetheless sent to websites alongside personal details that a user may submit voluntarily — like a name or a phone number.

That means enough data can transform a large chunk of random digits into a digital fingerprint that's as identifying as a Social Security number. AT&T said Friday its tracker was part of a testing project that's been phased off of its network.

"This is more like a license plate for your brain," said Jacob Hoffman-Andrews, a senior staff technologist with the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a civil liberties organization that opposed the practice.

"Everything you wonder about, and read, and ask the Internet about gets this header attached to it. And there are ad agencies out there that try to associate that browsing history with anything that identifies you."

For mobile users, the quest for online privacy isn't easy. Even if subscribers wanted to switch service providers to what they think is a more privacy-friendly carrier, they would likely be slapped with hundreds of dollars in early termination fees before leaving.

The magazines Wired and Forbes first reported last month that Verizon and AT&T were inserting the tracking numbers, even if their subscribers wanted to opt out. The investigative website ProPublica also dis-

covered that Twitter's advertising arm was using Verizon's tracking codes, which could be used to build a dossier about a person's behavior on mobile devices.

Some cell providers already collect and store the approximate location of their subscribers' phones, according to government documents from 2010. That has raised alarm among privacy advocates, who fear government investigators can obtain such personal data and even track Americans' movements without their knowledge or consent.

Consumers' interest in privacy and their digital anonymity has intensified in recent years, following revelations by former National Security Agency analyst Edward Snowden. Top secret NSA documents he leaked to journalists revealed the NSA was collecting the phone records and digital communications of millions of citizens not suspected of a crime, prompting congressional reform.

On Thursday, The Wall Street Journal reported that the U.S. Marshals Service was flying airplanes above American cities to secretly collect certain cellphone information from criminals while incidentally gathering data from innocent Americans. The Justice Department would not confirm the practice, but said in a statement Friday the Marshals Service "does not maintain any databases for the purposes of retaining cellphone information of the general public."

## Russian Troops Hold Drills In Serbia

NIKINCI, Serbia (AP) — Camouflage-clad Russian soldiers parachute from the sky, armored vehicles fire live rounds on an open field after being dropped from military transport jets and helicopters fire missiles against enemy positions.

Although the flat terrain resembles the Ukrainian war zones, this is not an armed Russian intervention against its neighbor. It's the first-ever joint Serb-Russian military exercise in Serbia, the Balkan country that has been performing a delicate balancing act in between its Slavic ally Russia and Western Europe, with which Belgrade wants to integrate.

The "anti-terrorist" drill on Friday — the first such by the Russians outside the former Soviet Union — of elite Russian troops in northern Serbia, not far from NATO-member Croatia, has stirred controversy both here and abroad.

"Serbia's government wants to try and keep everyone happy," said prominent Balkan political analyst Tim Judah. "So, the U.S. helps finance and modernize Serbia's army now while Serbian soldiers train with Russians. In normal times there would be little to say about this, but post-Crimea, these are not normal times anymore."

Although Serbian officials say they respect Ukraine's territorial integrity and do not support Russia's annexation of Crimea, they have refused to impose sanctions against Russia like the EU and the U.S. have. Russia and Serbia have traditionally close historic and cultural ties, and Moscow has backed Belgrade's bid to maintain its claim over Kosovo — a former Serbian province that declared independence in 2008 with the support of Washington and its allies.

## Hagel Orders Shakeup To Fix ICBM Force

MINOT AIR FORCE BASE, N.D. (AP) — The Pentagon will spend an additional \$10 billion to correct deep problems of neglect and mismanagement within the nation's nuclear forces, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel declared Friday, pledging firm action to support the men and women who handle the world's most powerful and deadly weapons.

Hagel ordered top-to-bottom changes in the nuclear arsenal's management, which he said had been allowed over the years to backslide, afflicted by broken and missing equipment, poor leadership and inadequate training and staffing.

Hagel told a Pentagon news conference Friday morning — before flying to Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota where many of the nuclear force troubles began — that the Defense Department will boost spending on the nuclear forces by about 10 percent a year for the next five years, saying there is no problem on this issue the Pentagon can't fix. That would be a total increase of about \$10 billion over the five years. Currently the Pentagon spends about \$15 billion a year on the nuclear mission.

"The internal and external reviews I ordered show that a consistent lack of investment and support for our nuclear forces over far too many years has left us with too little margin to cope with mounting stresses," said Hagel, who was flanked by senior Air Force and Navy officers. "The root cause has been a lack of sustained focus, attention and resources, resulting in a pervasive sense that a career in the nuclear enterprise offers too few opportunities for growth and advancement."

## Iraqi Forces Score Major Victory Over IS

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iraqi forces drove Islamic State militants out of a strategic oil refinery town north of Baghdad on Friday, scoring their biggest battlefield victory since they melted away in the face of the terror group's stunning summer offensive that captured much of northern and western Iraq.

The recapture of Beiji is the latest in a series of setbacks for the jihadi group, which has lost hundreds of fighters to airstrikes by a U.S.-led coalition in a stalled advance on the Syrian town of Kobani. On Friday, activists there reported significant progress by Kurdish fighters defending the town.

Iraqi security officials said government forces backed by allied militiamen took control of Beiji and also lifted a monthslong Islamic State siege on its refinery — Iraq's largest. However, two military officials reached by telephone in Beiji late Friday said there was still some fighting going on at the refinery, but reinforcements had been sent in and Iraqi forces were poised to retake it.

## Hong Kong Activists Plan Trip To Beijing

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong student leaders plan to fly to Beijing Saturday to try to meet China's top officials to press their case for a greater say in choosing the territory's next leader.

Eason Chung, a member of a student group that played a main role in organizing street protests that started nearly two months ago, said Friday that he and two others had bought plane tickets for the trip.

If they are allowed to enter mainland China, they will go straight to China's legislature to seek talks with Premier Li Ke-qiang and other officials.

The students have already asked the Hong Kong government's No. 2 official as well as former leader Tung Chee-hwa to arrange a meeting but their requests have been rebuffed.

"When those bridges between the Hong Kong government and Beijing rejected all our demands, we think they are not doing their due responsibility, so we'll go ourselves," said Chung, a member of the Hong Kong Federation of Students.

Federation leader Alex Chow and two deputies, Chung and Nathan Law, are scheduled to depart the former British colony for the Chinese capital on a Cathay Pacific flight at 5 p.m. Saturday.

They had previously considered going to Beijing during a major summit of Pacific Rim leaders that ended Wednesday but decided against it.

The protesters have been occupying streets in three business and shopping districts to oppose Beijing's decision that a panel screen candidates for the territory's inaugural 2017 elections.

## US To Pledge \$3B To Help Poor Nations Prepare For Global Warming

BY SETH BORENSTEIN

AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON — The United States is giving \$3 billion to a U.N. fund to help poorer vulnerable countries prepare for a changing climate and develop cleaner energy.

President Barack Obama will announce the contribution at meeting of world leaders in Australia, the administration said.

The United Nations is trying to raise at least \$10 billion for its Green Climate Fund to help developing nations adjust to rising seas, warmer temperatures and more extreme weather. It also would help the nations come up with energy sources that limit or reduce heat-trapping carbon dioxide emissions from coal, oil and gas.

The American pledge would be the biggest to date and would double contributions to \$6 billion, according to international environmental groups. France has promised \$1 billion, with Germany pledging nearly as much. Sweden, the Netherlands and Switzerland have all pledged at least \$100 million, while Denmark, Norway, Mexico, Luxembourg, Czech Republic and Indonesia have pledged lesser amounts, according to officials at Oxfam America.

The South Korea-based fund, which also accepts money from private charities, was set up by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

It wasn't immediately clear where Obama planned to find the funds. Sen. Timothy Wirth, vice chairman of the United Nations Foundation and a politician who been on both House and Senate budget committees, said he doesn't see how the Obama administration can get the money without approval from a Republican Congress, which he said is unlikely to happen.

But Wirth said that will work out because "almost all of this is going to be done by the private sector." The idea is eventually to have about \$100 billion flowing to the developing nations, he said.

In an effort to ensure other countries also chip in, the White House said its \$3 billion pledge was contingent on the U.S. contribution not exceeding 30 percent of total confirmed pledges. The White House said it expected the U.S. share would decline over time as more countries join the effort.

"Symbolically, I think it shows bold action to keep advancing his climate agenda" despite a Republican Congress that may not even believe in global warming, said Paul Wapner, a professor of international relations and environmental politics at American University.

Chip Knappenberger of the conservative Cato Institute said his preference is for private money to go the fund. And if federal money goes to the fund it should be more to help the nations adapt to a changing climate rather than push greener energy sources, he said.

Along with several environmental activist groups, former Vice President Al Gore cheered the announcement as "strong leadership," heading into intense climate negotiations for a new international treaty next year.

Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., who will likely be the new chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, blasted the pledge in a statement, saying it's part of more than \$120 billion in spending on climate change since the president took office: "President Obama's pledge to give unelected bureaucrats at the U.N. \$3 billion for climate change initiatives is an unfortunate decision to not listen to voters in this most recent election cycle."

## G-20 Summit Starts; Growth Tops Agenda

BY KRISTEN GELINEAU

Associated Press

BRISBANE, Australia — As G-20 summit host Brisbane sweltered through a blistering heat wave, world leaders on Saturday got down to the business of cementing plans to drag a sagging global economy out of the doldrums.

The leaders of the world's 20 largest economies are under pressure to take definitive action at this year's summit, rather than simply producing a set of vague, unmeasurable goals. The International Monetary Fund has warned about a "new mediocre" for the world economy, and the G-20 has vowed to focus on a plan to add \$2 trillion to world GDP.

U.S. President Barack Obama touched down in Brisbane early Saturday to join the other leaders, with talks scheduled to begin in the afternoon.

Meanwhile, the thousands of delegates and media that have descended upon the capital of Queensland, which is aptly dubbed the "Sunshine State," have been greeted by a crushing heat wave, with temperatures expected to reach 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit).

Some of the sweat-stained police officers blanketing the city by the thousands have taken to dumping bottles of water on themselves to cope with the blazing sun. More than two dozen protests have been planned to coincide with the event, on everything from inequality to corporate tax evasion to Aborigine rights.

The summit will conclude on Sunday with the release of an official communique, a rundown of what the countries have achieved and want to achieve in the future. Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott has repeatedly stressed that the main focus of the gathering is to show progress on a previously-announced plan of lifting the global GDP by 2 percent above predicted levels by 2018.

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