Report: Bezos-hired sleuth suspects sexts stolen by “government entity”

Enlarge / Jeff Bezos.
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Yesterday Jeff Bezos alleged that David Pecker, CEO of the company that publishes the *National Enquirer*, attempted to blackmail Bezos by threatening to publish nude photos of Bezos. The married Bezos allegedly sent the explicit photos to another woman, broadcaster Lauren Sanchez.

One of the big unanswered questions in the story is how the *National Enquirer* obtained the photos. One obvious possibility is that someone hacked Bezos’ phone—or possibly Sanchez’s.

But in an interview on MSNBC, *Washington Post* reporter Manuel Roig-Franzia pointed to a different possibility. The *Post* is owned by Bezos, and while Roig-Franzia says he hasn’t talked to Bezos directly, he has talked to Gavin De Becker, a legendary security consultant who is working for Bezos. “Gavin De Becker told us that he does not believe that Jeff Bezos’ phone was hacked,” Roig-Franzia said. “He thinks it’s possible that a government entity might have gotten hold of his text messages.”

This raises more questions than answers. The most obvious

question is which government agency might have obtained the information. American law enforcement and intelligence agencies are able to obtain the contents of text messages, but they are supposed to do so only with judicial oversight. And it's hard to imagine why a court would sign off on this.

"Government entity" could also refer to a foreign government. In his Thursday post, Bezos alleged that Pecker had ties to the government of Saudi Arabia and is "sensitive" about having them revealed. The Russian government has a history of stealing private communications from antagonists of Donald Trump, including Hillary Clinton's 2016 campaign chairman John Podesta. Either government might have reasons to want to embarrass Bezos.

But foreign governments like Saudi Arabia and Russia aren't supposed to have access to Americans' private communications. If they did gain access, it would likely be through some kind of hacking—though it could be by infiltrating a telecommunications provider rather than hacking into Bezos's or Sanchez's phone directly.

It's a safe bet that we haven't heard the last of this topic. De Becker is one of the best known investigators in the private sector, and Bezos says he has given him an unlimited budget to figure out how the *National Enquirer* breached his privacy.

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