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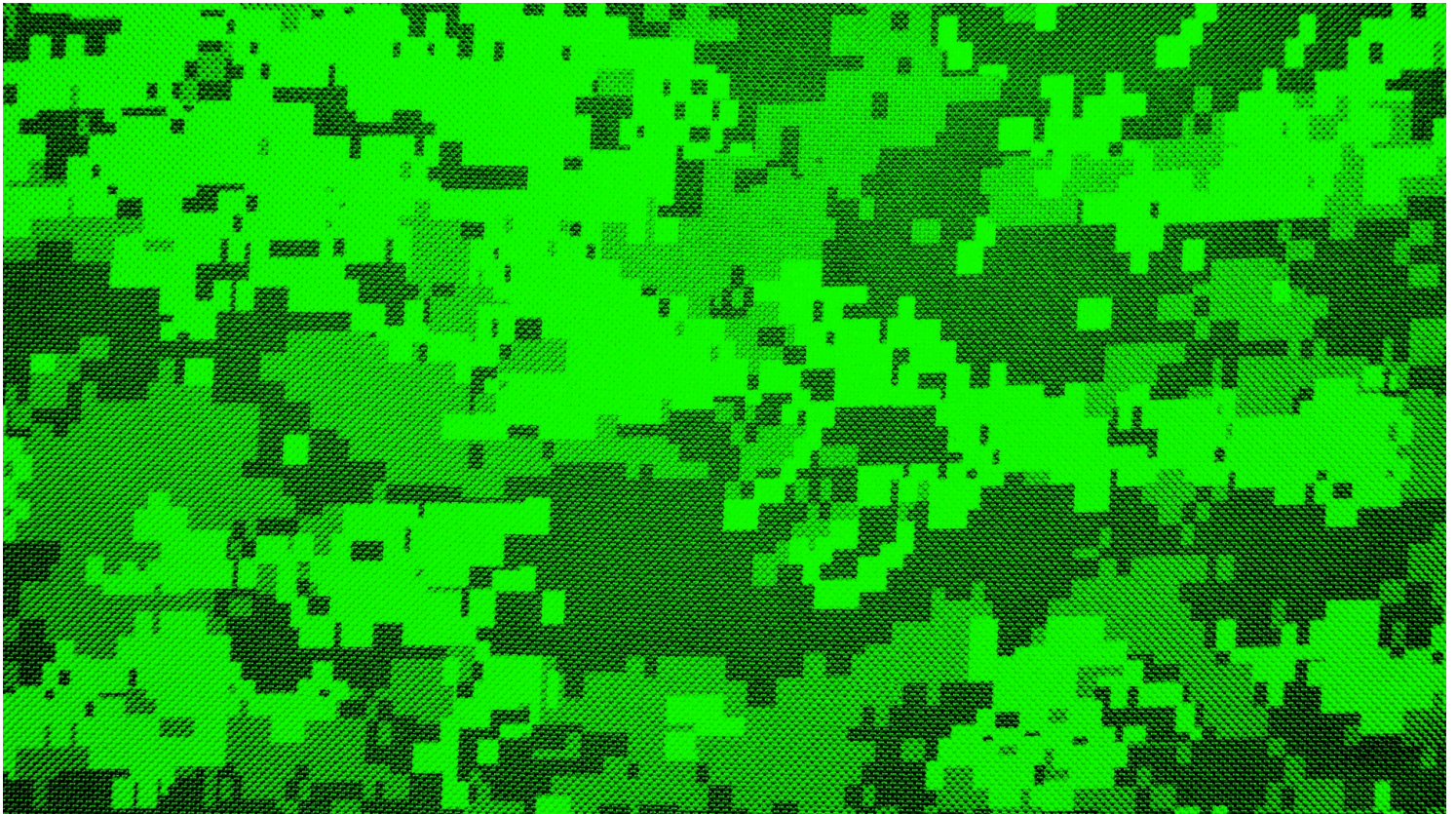
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JOSEPH COX DHUV MEHROTRA SECURITY FEB 11, 2025 11:00 PM

The Murky Ad-Tech World Powering Surveillance of US Military Personnel

A Florida data broker told a US senator it obtained sensitive data on US military members in Germany from a Lithuanian firm, which denies involvement—revealing the opaque nature of online ad surveillance.



PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES

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Last year, a me oker,
Datastream Group, was selling highly sensitive location data that tracked United States military and intelligence personnel overseas. At the time, the origin of that data was unknown.

Now, a letter sent to US senator Ron Wyden’s office that was obtained by an international collective of media outlets—including WIRED and 404 Media—claims that the ultimate source of that data was Eskimi, a little-known Lithuanian ad-tech company. Eskimi, meanwhile, denies it had any involvement.

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Eskimi’s alleged role—and its denials—highlight the opaque nature of the location data industry: A data broker in Florida claims a Lithuanian company provided data on US military personnel in Germany. That data could theoretically be sold to essentially anyone. But the exact ways in which the data is collected, compiled, and shared remains unclear.

This article was created in partnership with [404 Media](#), a journalist-owned publication covering how technology impacts humans. For more stories like this, [sign up here](#).

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In December, the joint investigation by WIRED, Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR), and Netzpolitik.org analyzed a free sample of location data provided by Datastream. The investigation revealed that Datastream was offering access to precise location data from devices likely belonging to American military and intelligence personnel overseas—including at German airbases believed to store US nuclear weapons. Datastream is a data broker in the location data history, sourcing data from other providers and then selling it to customers. Its website previously said it offered “internet advertising data coupled with hashed emails, cookies, and mobile location data.”

That dataset contained 3.6 billion location coordinates, some logged at millisecond intervals, from up to 11 million mobile advertising IDs in Germany over a one-month period. The data was likely collected through SDKs (software development kits) embedded in mobile apps by developers who knowingly integrate tracking tools in exchange for revenue-sharing agreements with data brokers.

Following this reporting, Wyden’s office demanded answers from Datastream Group about its role in trafficking the location data of US military personnel. In response, Datastream identified Eskimi as its alleged source, claiming it obtained the data “legitimately from a respected third-party provider, Eskimi.com.”

Vytautas Paukstys, CEO of Eskimi, says that “Eskimi does not have or have ever had any commercial relationship with Datasys/Datastream Group,” referring to another name that Datastream has used, and that Eskimi “is not a data broker.” A subsequent email from a company spokesperson says, “Eskimi does not have any commercial relationship with Datastream Group. Without a doubt, Eskimi did not share or sell location data of military personnel or any other data in Germany or Europe with Datastream group.”

In an email response, M. Seth Lubin, an attorney sourced from a reporting collective that it was never intended for use,

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ative, M. Seth Lubin, an attorney sourced from a reporting collective that it was never intended for use,

citing a nondisclosure agreement, and dismissed the reporting collective's analysis as reckless and misleading.

The Department of Defense (DOD) declined to answer specific questions related to our investigation. However, in December, DOD spokesperson Javan Rasnake said that the Pentagon is aware that geolocation services could put personnel at risk and urged service members to remember their training and adhere strictly to operational security protocols.

In an email, Keith Chu, chief communications adviser and deputy policy director for Wyden, said their office has tried to engage with Eskimi and Lithuania's Data Protection Authority (DPA) for months. The office contacted Eskimi on November 21 and has not received a response, Chu says. Eskimi says it found an email from Wyden's staff in the spam folder of a general company email inbox only after the reporting collective inquired about the communication.

Chu says Wyden's staff also contacted the DPA multiple times, "raising concerns about the national security impact of a Lithuanian company selling location data of US military personnel serving overseas." After receiving no response, Wyden staff contacted the defense attaché at the Lithuanian embassy in Washington, DC, according to Chu.

It was only after that, and on January 13, that the DPA responded, asking for more information. "Once additional information is received, we will assess the situation within the scope of our competence and determine the appropriate course of action," the DPA said, according to Chu.

The Lithuanian DPA told reporters in an email that it "currently is not investigating this company" and it "is gathering information and assessing the situation in order to be prepared to take well-informed actions, if needed." If the Lithuanian DPA does decide to investigate any alleged violations of GDPR provisions, Eskimi could face significant consequences—including fines up to €20 million.

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"Google regularly audits its Authorized Buyers program participants, and reviews allegations of potential misconduct," the spokesperson adds.

Regardless of Google's actions, there may be plenty more advertising companies ready to sell harvested location data.

"Advertising companies are merely surveillance companies with better business models," Edwards says.

This story was produced as part of an ongoing reporting project from an international coalition of media outlets, including Netzpolitik.org and Bayerischer Rundfunk (Germany), Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen (Switzerland), BNR Nieuwsradio (Netherlands), NRK (Norway), Dagens Nyheter (Sweden), Le Monde (France), and WIRED and 404 Media (US).

Updated at 7 pm EST, February 13, 2025: In an email following publication, Eskimi denied that it engages in data broker activity and refuted Datastream's claim to Wyden's office that it was the source of the data obtained by the reporting collective. We have updated the article, including the headline, to account for Eskimi's claims.

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