The battle of the FBI versus Apple has all the makings of a bad-made-for-television movie. There are the bumbling cops, apparently befuddled by technology, facing off against the world's most unlikely freedom fighter in the form of Apple CEO Tim Cook.

What the FBI asked the court to do violates free speech rights and puts the security and privacy of millions of people at risk.

Another issue is the battlefield chosen by the FBI which has had issue with Apple's tight encryption since Apple launched its iOS 8 operating system in June 2014. There are many cases when government agencies would like access to people's smartphones but by picking this battle, the FBI is forcing Apple to defend the privacy of a mass shooter because of the wider implications.

President Obama has warned against taking an "absolutist stance" on the case.

"It's fascinating our phones above every other value and that can be the right answer," he has said.

WHAT'S AT STAKE FOR APPLE

A recent Pew Research Centre poll found 51 per cent of Americans believe Apple should concede to the FBI's request. But if the FBI win the fight here, it will be easier for the government agency to force technology companies to unlock their systems wherever law enforcement comes knocking.

Apple CEO Tim Cook last month wrote an open letter to Apple customers saying "we have no sympathy for terrorists". But Apple had to look beyond this dispute, knowing that if it were to make a tool to enable government access then other governments might also demand its use.

"They're saying only instead of playing a game, they're trying different pin combinations."

The FBI isn't saying how it has tricked 24 different vehicles from 19 manufacturers to open the door so it can access information that may be on a work-issued iPhone 5c used by Syed Farook, the man in the San Bernardino mass shooting in December that killed 14 people.

Now, the FBI is saying that it was wrong. They still want to hack the phone but now "an outside party" has shown them the way.

American Civil Liberties Union lawyer Alex Abdo says "this suggests that the FBI either doesn't understand the technology well enough or wasn't telling us the full truth earlier when it said that only Apple could break into the phone. Either possibility is disconcerting."

The trouble with thinking of the fight in such simple terms is that there is so much at stake. As one commentator put it, it's a matter of deciding whether you want to be a citizen or a patriarch first.

In fighting the FBI's request, Apple argued a court order forcing it to create a software tool was "the equivalent of a master key, capable of opening hundreds of millions of (encrypted) locks - from restaurants and banks to stores and homes."

Apple is at pains to point out it has worked with the FBI in handing over all the information it has in this case and has advised them on how to access any further information on the phone. But it draws the line at being forced to uncover information it does not have.

"A CONSTANT WAR OF TECHNOLOGY"

Encryption, in this case, is being held up by the FBI as a barrier between the good guys and the bad guys. But encryption is vital to almost everything we do, from internet banking to basic business communications.

This week German vehicle security expert Troy Zdziarski believes the FBI is forcing it to create a software tool that could be used to unlock a smartphone.

"Only instead of playing a game, they're trying different pin combinations."

"This technique is kind of like cheating at Super Mario Bros. with a save-game, allowing you to play the same level over and over after you keep dying," he says.

"It's fetishising our phones above our own government."

Apple's is open setting of East Point Reserve.

Another issue is the battlefield chosen by the FBI which has had issue with Apple's tight encryption since Apple launched its iOS 8 operating system in June 2014. There are many cases when government agencies would like access to people's smartphones but by picking this battle, the FBI is forcing Apple to defend the privacy of a mass shooter because of the wider implications.

"We need to decide as a nation how much power the government should demand that a government agency can conscript a company into service and that being forced to write software is a violation of freedom of speech."

"This technique is kind of like cheating at Super Mario Bros. with a save-game, allowing you to play the same level over and over after you keep dying," he says.

Leading iOS Security expert Jon-athan Zdziarski believes the FBI is right - there is a way to hack the phone without forcing Apple's hand.

"Data theft, ransom and extortion are already running at over 100 per cent annual growth rate as personal data remains a prime target for financial gain from criminals."

"The worry of terrorism and consequences of using secure social networks and mobile devices remains a high priority for citizens and national defence; creating a complex and plausible issue for working out the right legal and social response in the new connected society and digital economy."

Aside from civil rights arguments,隐私 has now become a key marketing tool for technology companies. When Barack Obama became president, he kept his old BlackBerry because it was considered more secure.

But that was long before Apple and others introduced more advanced security tools and fingerprint scanners into their devices and, indeed, long before BlackBerry faded away to just having one per cent marketshare in a market it once-dominated.

This week, Cook kicked off the launch of the latest iPhone at Apple's headquarters by explaining why he could not succumb to the FBI demand.

"We need to decide as a nation how much power the government should have over our information and our privacy," Cook said. "We did not expect to be in this position at odds with our own government."

"We owe it to our customers and to our country. This is an issue that affects all of us and we will not shrink for this responsibility."

"We have a responsibility to protect your data and privacy."

WHAT THE FBI WANT

The FBI wants access to the mass shooter's work-issued iPhone 5c used by Syed Farook, the man in the San Bernardino mass shooting in December that killed 14 people.

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