

Chinese hackers dig for government secrets, security expert claims

<http://www.scmagazine.com/uk/news/article/736639/chinese-hackers-dig-government-secrets-security-expert-claims/>

Chinese hackers breached US and UK government systems to steal top-secret strategy information and frustrate the military, according to a security expert at McAfee.

Yesterday *The Guardian* newspaper claimed Chinese hackers attacked the computer networks of British government departments, including the Foreign Office, but officials in Whitehall refused to comment on the incident. This closely followed revelations in the *Financial Times* that Chinese attackers, including members of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), were behind the Pentagon military computer network hack in June.

Greg Day, senior security analyst EMEA at McAfee, believes the hackers were trying to obtain sensitive government details and disrupt the flow of information within the US and UK administrations.

“Cyber espionage is one of the most powerful tools out there today,” he said. “We have already seen this at a business level with the theft of intellectual property. If hackers can discover what the government and military are working on, where it has bases and where its secret agents are located, they have a wealth of knowledge to use against that nation.”

Day also thinks that rival countries will increasingly use distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks against governments and in particular the armed forces.

“We are going to see more DDoS attacks in the military space going forward,” he warned. “If a country prevents a rival nation from communicating with its army or interrupts the flow of information that is hugely powerful.”

In May, Estonia was hit by a series of DDoS attacks, which crashed websites for the government, banks and political parties. The Baltic nation publicly accused Russia for starting a cyber war, following a dispute over the removal of a Soviet war memorial in the Estonian capital Tallinn.

Day says there are “very clear parallels” between the two incidents and the so-called “patriotic hacking”, where computer experts attack the systems of its perceived enemies, is only going to increase.

“The Estonia cyber attack gained huge media attention, and we are only going to see more of this now as it becomes more visible. This is cyber warfare and the floodgates have been opened.”

His comments come as a Labour MP accuses the British government of being “weak” in the aftermath of the hacking attack. Andrew MacKinlay, a member of the Commons foreign affair committee, said: “This is clearly an area where the government has decided not to comment. It's very weak. They seek to appease the Chinese, they should be more robust and indignant.”

