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Sunday, October 25, 1998 Published at 01:08 GMT

War of words on the Internet



The Kashmir a Paradise homepage - hackers hardly give up

By Laurence Peter at BBC Monitoring

Hacking, previously dominated by teenage computer whizzkids, often with no particular axe to grind, now looks set to become a propaganda weapon.

Recent cyber-attacks on an Indian army Website and a pro-Albanian Kosovo site both bear the hallmarks of nationalist ideological campaigns, and in Belarus, hackers posted defamatory material on President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's own Web pages.

Strangers in Paradise

On 16 October, 1998, the Indian news agency PTI reported that "suspected Pakistani intelligence operatives" had "hijacked the Indian army's only Website, Kashmir A Paradise, which gives the Indian view on Kashmir.

The Website's guestbook, where users can leave comments, was "full of anti-India superlatives and four-letter adjectives," PTI reported, describing the attack as "part of a cyberwar launched ahead of the Indo-Pakistani talks," which began in Islamabad that day.

PTI quoted unnamed defence ministry officials as saying there was an urgent need to have an Internet policy to counter such attacks, but in August an Indian supreme court lawyer, Pawan Duggal, told PTI that India was "totally ill-equipped to tackle the onslaught of cyber crimes".

The Kashmir A Paradise site was soon back to normal,



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but a week after the attack the homepage still warned: "Desperate hacker keeps on trying," "3 attempts in 3 days".

Revenge of the Black Hand

On 20 October, 1998, the Kosovo Information Centre (KIC), which supports the party of the ethnic Albanian leader, Dr Ibrahim Rugova, reported that "hackers claiming to be members of the Serbian terrorist organization Crna Ruka [Black Hand] hacked its Web page.

The hackers posted a copy of the Serbian national symbol, and captions in Serbian and English:

"Welcome to the Web page of the biggest liars and killers!", and "Brother Albanians, this coat of arms will be in your flag as long as you exist!"

The KIC said visitors were "outraged by this hacking", the provider in New York was contacted to prevent further intrusions.

The pages were restored, but the hackers soon returned with a vengeance.

"This site is hacked by Serbian Hackers Team Crna Ruka. Long Live Great Serbia!!!", their new posting read.

Earlier, the independent Belgrade-based news agency Beta reported that a Serb hacker had forced a Swiss Internet provider to withdraw an edition of the Kosovar Albanian newspaper Glas Kosova from the Internet, by posting anti-Kosovo Albanian messages on the newspaper's Website.

The provider managed to contact the hacker in Poland, who said he was a Yugoslav student. But when he noticed he was being monitored, he damaged the hard disk of one of the Swiss provider's computers, Beta reported.

New Challenge for Russian Spooks

The Russia TV channel last year reported that there were "regular attempts by hackers to penetrate the state authorities' computer networks".

The head of Russia's Federal Agency for Government Communications (FAPSI) warned that abuse of modern communications technology could "affect the psychology of nations".

In neighbouring Belarus, the Website of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has been repeatedly hacked into, the Russian daily Komsomolskaya Pravda reported.

On one occasion, hackers opened a new Website with an image of Lukashenka "which starts turning, before your very eyes, first into Hitler, then into Stalin, then

back into Lukashenka," the paper said in July.

Race to stay ahead

Governments are now urgently trying to stay ahead of the game as information technology becomes ever more sophisticated and widespread.

- In March, Israeli police arrested an 18-year-old believed to be the hacker who broke into the Pentagon's computer system.

The police had received help from the US authorities, and several other suspected hackers were detained for breaking into other systems, including that used by the Israeli parliament.

- The first prosecutions were brought in Russia and China this year against computer hackers.
- In July, investigators in Shanghai arrested a hacker who had attacked a network in the city, breaking into the codes and accounts of most of its users.

A Hong Kong-based news agency reported that the 22-year-old hacker was a computing and mathematics graduate.

- In January, a court in Sakhalin, in Russia's Far East, put a hacker on probation for three years for copying commercial and confidential information.

He was fined about \$3,000, the ITAR-TASS news agency reported.

- The Polish Government, however, adopted a rather less alarmist position on the problem after a hacker had broken into the database of the Ministry of Economics.

"It saddened me to read that the hacker is now working for some private company", Prime Minister Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz told Polish radio.

"I would like to employ him in the government service," he said.

BBC Monitoring (<http://www.monitor.bbc.co.uk>), based in Caversham in southern England, selects and translates information from radio, television, press, news agencies and the Internet from 150 countries in more than 70 languages.

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