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Chinese hackers 'using ghost network to control embassy computers'

(James Lauritz/Digital Vision)

China's cyber-hacking operations are becoming increasingly sophisticated

Mike Harvey, Technology Correspondent

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A spy network believed to have been controlled from China has hacked into classified documents on government and private computers in 103 countries, according to internet researchers. The spy system, dubbed GhostNet, is alleged to have compromised 1,295 machines at Nato and foreign ministries, embassies, banks and news organisations across the world, as well as computers used by the Dalai Lama and Tibetan exiles.

The work of Information Warfare Monitor (IWM) investigators focused initially on allegations of Chinese cyber-espionage against the Tibetan exile community, but led to a much wider network of compromised machines. IWM said that, while China appeared to be the main source of the network, it had not been able conclusively to identify the hackers. The IWM is composed of researchers from an Ottawa-based think-tank, SecDev Group, and the Munk Centre for International Studies at the University of Toronto.

They found that the foreign ministries of Iran, Bangladesh, Latvia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Brunei, Barbados and Bhutan had been spied on remotely, and the embassies of India, South Korea, Indonesia, Romania, Cyprus, Malta, Thailand, Taiwan, Portugal, Germany and Pakistan hacked.

The operation is thought to be the most extensive yet uncovered in the political world and is estimated to be invading more than a dozen new computers a week. Other infected computers were found at the accountancy firm Deloitte & Touche in New York.

The IWM report said: "GhostNet represents a network of compromised computers in high-value political, economic and media locations in numerous countries worldwide. These organisations are almost certainly oblivious to the compromised

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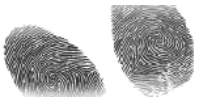

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