

Warning of major hacking attack on the USA

WASHINGTON, USA: Cyber attacks might be taking a toll now, but just wait: a survey of experts says things are likely to get even worse in the US over the next decade.



Pew's Lee Rainie believes that US businesses and state institutions will be under persistent attack from cyber-criminals and individuals will face growing attempts to steal money or personal data. Image: [The Digital Shift](#)

A majority of cyber-security experts surveyed in a poll by Pew Research Centre all see the likelihood of major damage from a cyber-attacks in the coming years.

From the 1,600 experts polled, 61% answered "yes" to the question: "By 2025, will a major cyber-attack have caused widespread harm to a nation's security and capacity to defend itself and its people?"

"Widespread harm," the survey explained, would mean significant loss of life or property, damage, theft in the tens of billions of dollars.

"There was almost unanimous agreement among these experts that individuals could be more vulnerable and businesses could persistently be under attack," said Lee Rainie, a co-author of the report and Director of the Pew Research Centre's Internet Project.

"They said essential utilities are a vulnerable target and theft and economic disruptions could be substantial," she added.

Deterrent could come from counter-attacks

The remaining 39% surveyed said major damage from a cyber-attack could be avoided.

"Some confidently pointed out that the threat of counter-attack might deter the worst," said Janna Anderson of Elon University's Imagining the Internet Centre, which conducted the study with Pew.

"And many used the Cold War as a metaphor, saying severe harm is unlikely due to the threat of mutually assured disruption. Some said cyber-threats are being exaggerated by people who might profit most from creating an atmosphere of fear."

Some of the experts said the cyber-threats are already here, or on the horizon.

"A bellicose China might 'cyber-invade' the military capabilities of Japan and South Korea as part of the conflict around the China Sea, leading to the need to reconfigure their electronics, at huge cost," said Stowe Boyd, Lead Researcher for Gigaom Research.

"Israel and the United States have already created the Stuxnet computer worm to damage Iran's nuclear refinement centrifuges," he said.

Deaths from cyber attacks seem likely

Those threats have already harmed the US as well, an expert pointed out.

"People have died from faulty equipment producing gas pipeline explosions and from drone bombings of civilians. US companies have lost billions worth of business as foreign customers no longer trust their products and services," said



Elon University Professor Janna Anderson says that the threat of a major counter attack by US computer security personnel may prevent some governments from launching cyber-attacks against the country. Image: [About Me](#)

Judith Perrolle, a Professor at Northeastern University.



Stowe Boyd at Gigaom believes the Stuxnet worm was created by US intelligence to defuse Iranian nuclear bomb capabilities but that worm was used against the US itself and caused widespread damage to computers there. Image: Gigaom

The report comes a day after the top US cyber-official said the country's military is looking to flex its muscles in cyber-space as a "deterrent" to hackers eying American targets.

Also this week, US security researchers said in two separate reports that the Russian and Chinese governments are probably behind widespread cyber-espionage that has hit targets in the United States and elsewhere.

One team of researchers led by the security firm Novetta Solutions said it identified a hacker group believed to be acting on behalf of Chinese government intelligence.

A separate report by the security firm FireEye said a long-running effort to hack into US defence contractors, Eastern European governments and European security organisations is probably sponsored by the Russian government.

The Pew survey is part of a series of reports tied to the 25th anniversary of the World Wide Web. The survey was not a based on a random sample but a selected group of 1,642 experts and scholars.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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