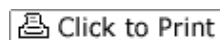




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Estonia suspects Kremlin in Web attacks

- One million computers used in attacks against Estonia
- Minister: IP numbers from Russian governmental offices
- Dispute involves the moving of a Soviet-era war memorial
- Estonia is a key hub for Skype and other Web pioneers

May 17, 2007 - TALLINN, Estonia (AP) -- Estonia's defense minister said Thursday there was a possibility the Russian government was involved in massive cyber attacks that have crippled the Baltic nation's Web sites this month.

The evidence is not enough to prove Russia played a role, "but it indicates a possibility," Defense Minister Jaak Aaviksoo told The Associated Press by telephone.

He said more than 1 million computers worldwide have been used in recent weeks to attack Estonian government and business Web sites since a dispute arose with Moscow over Estonia's moving of a Soviet-era war memorial from downtown Tallinn.

"We identified in the initial attacks IP numbers from the Russian governmental offices," Aaviksoo said, referring to Internet addresses that can be traced.

The attacks have also gotten the attention of NATO, which has sent a cyber expert to Estonia to help amid concerns that the military alliance might also be targeted, a NATO official said Thursday.

The Russian government has denied Estonia's accusations. Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the attackers must have used a fake Kremlin Internet address to tarnish Russian authorities.

Aaviksoo said the attacks were massive and well-organized, targeting government offices and corporations, including the six major banks in the Baltic country.

"They started after we discovered instructions on Russian Web sites telling when, why and what to attack," he added.

Estonia, a nation of 1.3 million, is a European Union and NATO member as well as a key hub for Skype and other Web pioneers.

The so-called "denial-of-service" attacks against Estonian Web sites began after the April 27 removal of the Bronze Soldier, a statue commemorating Red Army soldiers killed fighting the Nazis. Estonia moved the statue from a downtown Tallinn square to a military cemetery outside the city.

Moscow said Estonia was desecrating the memory of Red Army soldiers, but many Estonians consider the statue a bitter reminder of five decades of Soviet occupation.

Estonia's Russian-speaking minority, who make up roughly one-third of the country's population and often complain of discrimination, also protested the move. The statue's move sparked the worst riots in Estonia since it left the Soviet Union in 1991.

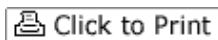
NATO's systems in Estonia have not been hacked, but officials are on the alert as attacks against one NATO member are considered an assault on the whole alliance, said the NATO official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the subject.

The cyber controversy is expected to surface at an EU-Russia summit this week in Samara, southeast of Moscow. It's one of several matters that has soured the EU's relations with Russia. Others include Moscow's targeting of Poland by banning Polish meat and plant imports.

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