

Britain 'under constant attack in cyberwar'

The Government has warned a cyberwar is being waged against Britain with key computer networks coming under attack every day.

By Chris Irvine

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Lord West of Spithead, the Security Minister, said a mixture of state-sponsored hackers and "those operating at a terrorist level" regularly tried to break into key networks such as banking, electricity and telecommunications.

Although he said the Government was confident about its cyber-defences, he said: "If you take the whole gamut of threats, from state-sponsored organisations to industrial espionage, private individuals and malcontents, you're talking about a remarkable number of attempted attacks on our system - I'd say in the thousands.

"Some are spotted instantly. Others are much, much cleverer."

Lord West said the most serious threat came from terrorist-backed hackers trying to break into systems such as the National Grid.

Meanwhile state-sponsored organisations were more likely to want to conduct industrial espionage and steal commercial secrets.

He did concede threats to the national infrastructure were assessed as part of the National Risk Register, and the Government was confident about the country's cyber-defences.

Earl Zmijewski, an analyst with Renesys, a company that monitors internet traffic, said: "We're building this house of cards at the moment - connecting elements of our financial systems, as well as the systems which control nuclear power or water distribution, to the internet, and it's a very open environment. I can launch an attack on you from anywhere."

Lord West's warning comes as security experts in the US said they had uncovered evidence of Russia have carried out state-sponsored cyber-warfare against Georgia by attacking government computer networks during the recent conflict.

The Russian Government admitted the possibility that individuals based in Russia might have been responsible for the attacks - overloading several sites based in the central town of Gori, causing them to collapse - but denied state involvement.

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