

US pushes cyber-war confrontation with China

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A federal grand jury has indicted five officers of the Chinese Peoples Liberation Army on computer hacking, economic espionage and other charges, officials of the US Department of Justice announced at a press conference Monday morning.

The indictment is unprecedented under international law, as it aims to criminalize actions allegedly carried out not by individual hackers, or “rogue” elements, but by serving officers in the armed forces of a major country. It is calculated to provoke a confrontation between the US and Chinese governments.

“These represent the first ever charges against known state actors for infiltrating US commercial targets by cyber means,” Attorney General Eric Holder said at the press briefing, emphasizing that the Obama administration was undertaking a major escalation in its anti-China policy. “The range of trade secrets and other sensitive business information stolen in this case is significant and demands an aggressive response.”

The five men, named as Wang Dong, Sun Kailiang, Wen Xinyu, Huang Zhenyu, and Gu Chunhui, are said to be officers in Unit 61398 of the Third Department of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army, based in Shanghai. Each faces 31 counts of computer and economic crimes. While none is in US custody, the charges would carry lengthy prison sentences.

The alleged targets of the hacking include Westinghouse Electric Co., United States Steel, Alcoa Inc., Allegheny Technologies Inc. (ATI), U.S. subsidiaries of SolarWorld AG, and the United Steel Workers union, which represents some workers at those companies.

Westinghouse is the major US builder of nuclear power plants, and built four such facilities in China in 2010-2011. The other companies entered into production agreements with Chinese companies during

that time, or were engaged in trade litigation, as was the USW. The Chinese officers supposedly used cyber-warfare techniques to gain access to internal e-mails and other confidential materials at all six organizations.

The indictment is an act of monumental cynicism. The revelations of former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden, which began almost exactly one year ago, have demonstrated that the US government is by far the world’s largest “hacker,” with tens of thousands of employees and tens of billions in resources devoted to invading computer systems all over the world and stealing e-mails, text messages, communications metadata, address books and every other form of electronic data.

The US government collects the content of the voice, text and e-mail communications of nearly everyone on the planet. It has engineered back-door entry into the business activities of Internet service providers and e-mail providers like Google, Microsoft and Yahoo to bypass their security and encryption and conduct illegal surveillance of their customers. It has broken into corporate servers, either electronically or physically, to install monitoring devices.

The NSA particularly targets for surveillance strategic companies like Huawei, the Chinese manufacturer of servers and routers, aiming to use Huawei machines as a vehicle for spying on the company’s customers, corporations and governments throughout Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe.

The US television networks gave enormous play to the indictments in their Monday evening broadcasts, without a hint of the grotesque contradictions in the US government action. One can only imagine the reaction in Washington, and in the American media, if China were to indict NSA director Keith Alexander, who recently retired, or his successor Admiral Michael

Rogers, on charges of espionage, hacking and information theft.

President Obama has admitted the near-universal scale of US electronic surveillance, and has refused to discuss “no-spying” agreements even with close US allies like German Chancellor Angela Merkel, whose cellphone the NSA tapped for more than a decade.

At the press conference yesterday, Holder tried to justify indicting China for actions that pale in comparison to those of the vast US intelligence apparatus. Spying on American corporations “is a tactic that the US government categorically denounces,” Holder said. “As President Obama has said on numerous occasions, we do not collect intelligence to provide a competitive advantage to US companies, or US commercial sectors.”

Even if this were true—and there is no reason to believe it is—Holder’s suggestion that spying for competitive business advantage is worse than spying for reasons of “national security” is sheer nonsense. In the next sentence, moreover, he conceded that the two were inextricably entwined, declaring, “Our economic security and our ability to compete fairly in the global marketplace are directly linked to our national security.”

In effect, the indictment is a declaration by Washington that all other countries are to be judged by one standard (and judged by the United States), while the US government is above the law.

Holder is already notorious for his declaration last year that the president of the United States has the right to order the drone-missile assassination of any person on the planet, without any judicial review and regardless of international law.

Even the compliant American press admitted that the indictment of the five PLA officers was fraught with contradictions.

The *New York Times* noted, “The United States spies regularly for economic advantage when the goal is to support trade negotiations; when the United States was trying in the 1990s to reach an accord with Japan, it tapped the Japanese negotiator’s car. It is also widely believed to be using intelligence in support of major trade negotiations now underway with European and Asian trading partners.”

The *Washington Post* wrote that Snowden’s revelations undermined the US campaign against

alleged Chinese hacking: “Beijing has pointed to disclosures by Snowden of vast NSA surveillance activities—including spying on Chinese companies—to assert that the United States is the greater aggressor in the area.”

The heavily publicized espionage indictments are part of an escalating campaign of US political, diplomatic and military provocations against China, begun by Obama in 2011 with his declaration of the “pivot” to Asia. The United States would begin moving the bulk of its military forces to this region, he announced, shifting its focus after more than a decade of wars in the Middle East.

Over the past six months, the anti-China campaign has intensified. Washington has encouraged China’s neighbors, including Japan, the Philippines and Vietnam, to press their claims in conflicts over small and uninhabited islets in the East China Sea and the South China Sea more aggressively.

Last month US defense secretary Chuck Hagel made his fourth trip to the region since he took office a year ago, baiting China with threats that the US would back Japan militarily in the event of a conflict over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands.

Soon afterwards, President Obama made a similar trip, stopping in Japan, South Korea, Malaysia and the Philippines, where he signed off on an agreement giving the US military virtually unlimited access to facilities in the country.

US officials leaked a detailed account of stepped-up military options against China for publication by the *Wall Street Journal*. The measures include B-2 bomber flights along the Chinese coast, naval exercises just off coastal waters with aircraft carrier task forces, and increased surveillance operations.

While the Obama administration and the US media portray China as an aggressive and threatening power, the US military budget remains nearly five times as large, US bases ring China’s Pacific Coast, while the US arsenal of nuclear warheads and intercontinental ballistic missiles dwarfs China’s nuclear capability.



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