Governments, businesses to discuss cybersecurity threats

May 2 2010, by Chris Lefkow

The Worldwide Cybersecurity Summit, hosted by the EastWest Institute (EWI), opens in Dallas on Monday and will feature three days of discussions on ways to protect the world's digital infrastructure from electronic threats.

Government officials and business leaders from around the world are meeting in Texas this week to discuss what all agree is an area of common and growing concern: cybersecurity.

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Among those scheduled to address the gathering, being held in the wake of sophisticated cyberattacks on Google which the Internet giant said

originated in China, are President Barack Obama's National Security Advisor James Jones and White House cybersecurity coordinator Howard Schmidt.

The EWI, a non-partisan think tank, is bringing together 400 government officials, business leaders and cybersecurity experts from China, France, Germany, India, Russia, the United States and nearly three dozen other countries to "map the dangers and areas of cooperation" in cyberspace.

"The skyrocketing severity and frequency of cyberattacks against businesses, governments and other institutions globally pose an ominous threat to the stability of the international economy and peace itself," according to the EWI.

"Nations have well established rules of the game on land, sea, air and in outer space," it said. "There is a significant lack of such rules in the fifth common domain -- cyberspace."

Ahead of the meeting, the EWI and Public Strategies conducted a survey of government officials, business leaders and cybersecurity experts on their perception of the dangers in cyberspace.

Thirty-four government officials and 103 business executives or experts, many of whom plan to attend the cybersecurity summit in Dallas, responded to the April 19-26 survey, for which they were guaranteed anonymity.

When asked to rate the cybersecurity threat to governments and businesses on a scale of one to 10 with nine or ten representing a "profound threat," more than 80 percent of both groups agreed that the threat ranked a six or higher.

Forty-eight percent of both groups said they faced a "profound threat"

while only three percent from each category said they faced "no threat."

Only four percent of the government officials and eight percent of the business leaders and cybersecurity experts rated the security of government computer systems and those of businesses as "very secure."

Sixty-seven percent of government officials said their computer grid was "not very secure" while 33 percent of business leaders and experts said the computer systems of businesses in their country were not very secure.

"The consensus on threat levels is quite high," said EWI vice president Andrew Nagorski. "There's a general understanding that if there are major cyberattacks this is going to have a major economic impact."

Participants in the survey also agreed that international tensions are likely to escalate if concerns over cybersecurity are not addressed.

Sixty-seven percent of the government officials said that if current cybersecurity policies prove ineffective, "deteriorating relations, angry recriminations and growing distrust" could result among countries such as China, India, Russia and the United States.

Fifty-one percent of the business leaders and experts expressed the same fear.

"This survey demonstrates how much more we need to do to implement policies that keep pace with the breakneck speed of technological advances," said EWI president and chief executive John Edwin Mroz.

"We need private-public partnerships and we need international cooperation to make cyberspace safe and secure," he said. "These results point to an urgent need to build trust, not only between countries but also

between governments and businesses on a global level."

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