U.S., British hackers face the music

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Only two days after U.S. federal authorities sentenced a 21-year-old to five years in prison for hacking computers, the British government ruled that one of its citizens should be extradited to the United States for hacking into military networks.

On Wednesday the Bow Street magistrates court of London ruled that Gary McKinnon should be handed over to U.S. authorities for being "the biggest military hack of all time."

The 40-year-old McKinnon was arrested in 2002 for hacking into the computer networks of the U.S. Army, Air Force, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the Department of Defense by Britain's National Hi-Tech Crime Unit, but the United States has since been pressing for his being tried in a U.S. court for his crimes. According to the U.S. government, McKinnon caused over $700,000 in damages as a result of his hacking, illegally accessing 97 government computers from his home computer in London.

If McKinnon is found guilty by U.S. jurors in Virginia, where he is expected to be tried on computer and fraud charges, he could face decades in prison in addition to paying up millions of dollars in fines.

For his part, McKinnon said he never meant to cause damage or disrupt security through his activities.

"My intention was never to disrupt security. ... I have to reiterate I didn't do the damage. I have admitted all the way down the unauthorised access

and, yes, I do regret it," he told the London court before they made their final decision.

McKinnon's lawyers, meanwhile, said they will seek to appeal the ruling to the British Home Secretary John Reid, who must give his personal approval so that McKinnon can be handed over to U.S. custody. He will also likely appeal to the British High Court so that he will be able to remain and be tried in Britain.

Meanwhile on Monday, Jeanson James Ancheta was sentenced to 57 months in prison by U.S. District Judge Gary Klausner for selling access to software that can control computers to deliver spam and hack Web sites. In addition to selling access to botnet software that allowed users to send spam, Ancheta also directed infected computers to download adware, which made advertising appear on a screen and harm the computers but netted him $107,000 in commissions from the advertising companies.

In total, he hijacked about 400,000 computers between 2004 and 2005, including those at the Naval Air Facility at China Lake, Calif., and the Defense Information Systems Agency in Falls Church, Va.

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