Report: Hackers attacked Google from China schools

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In this Jan. 18, 2010 file photo, women walk past the Google logo outside the Google China headquarters Beijing, China. Citing the sensitivity of the talks, Google officials won't say how the negotiations have gone since the company issued its Jan. 12 threat to shut down its China-based search engine and possibly leave the country altogether if the government doesn't tear down the so-called "Great Firewall" that blocks certain information and images.(AP Photo/Ng Han Guan, file)

(AP) -- The Internet attacks that may end up driving Google Inc. out of China originated from two prominent schools in the country, according to a story published late Thursday.

The New York Times reported security investigators have traced the hacking to computers at Shanghai Jiaotong University and Lanxiang Vocational School in China. The newspaper attributed the information to

unnamed people involved in the investigation.

Google didn't immediately respond to requests for comment.

The company revealed on Jan. 12 that digital thieves had stolen some of its computer code and tried to break into the accounts of human rights activists opposed to China's policies. The sophisticated theft also targeted the computers of more than 30 other companies, according to security experts. A security weakness in Microsoft Corp.'s Internet Explorer Web browser is believed to have created an opening for the hackers.

The digital assault was serious enough to prompt Google to confront China's government about censorship rules that weed out politically and culturally sensitive topics from search results in the country. Google says it's prepared to shut down its China-based search engine and possibly shut down all of its offices in the country unless the ruling party loosens its restrictions on free speech.

Google and the government are still discussing a possible compromise.

The threat to leave China triggered speculation that Google suspected the country's government might have been involved in the computer attacks. Google has only said it believes the attack originated from within China.

China's government has denied any involvement while continuing to insist publicly that Google must obey its restrictions against showing links deemed to be subversive or pornographic.

The National Security Agency and other specialists in digital forensics have been trying to identify the source of the attacks against Google and the other companies for weeks. The inquiry led to computers at the two schools, with some evidence suggesting the attacks may have started 10

months ago, the Times reported.

Jiaotong University boasts one of China's top computer science programs, according to the Times' story. Lanxiang is a large vocational school that trains some computer scientists for the Chinese military, the Times said.

Spokesmen for the two schools told the Times that they hadn't heard U.S. investigators had implicated them in the attacks.

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