

Spam downloads surge among WikiLeaks supporters

December 10 2010, By RAPHAEL G. SATTER , Associated Press



A protestor wears tape over his mouth as supporters of WikiLeaks and its founder Julian Assange gather in Sydney, Friday, Dec. 10, 2010. WikiLeaks' extensive releases of secret U.S. diplomatic cables have embarrassed U.S. allies, angered rivals, and reopened old wounds across the world. U.S. officials in Washington say other countries have curtailed their dealings with the U.S. government because of WikiLeaks' actions. (AP Photo/Rick Rycroft)

(AP) -- Wikileaks supporters on Friday downloaded increasing amounts of the spam-shooting software used to attack companies seen as hostile - a development that could challenge even Internet giants such as PayPal and Amazon.com during the crucial Christmas shopping season.

U.S. data security company Imperva says downloads of the attack program used to bombard websites with bogus requests for data have jumped to over 40,000, with thousands of new downloads reported

overnight.

"It's definitely increasing," Imperva Web researcher Tal Be'ery said in a telephone interview from Israel.

The freely available software, dubbed "Low Orbit Ion Cannon," is a critical part of the campaign by "hacktivists" seeking to take revenge on sites they believe have betrayed WikiLeaks, which has outraged American officials by publishing hundreds of thousands of classified U.S. diplomatic cables and military intelligence reports.

Users who download the software essentially volunteer their computers to be used as weapons that volley streams of electronic spam at targeted websites. The more computers, the greater the flow of data requests, and the better chances are of overwhelming the targeted website.

The cyberguerillas, who gather under the name Anonymous, have had mixed results so far. Attacks directed at the main pages of [Visa](#) Inc. and MasterCard Inc. succeeded in making them inaccessible, in MasterCard's case for several hours. Attacks on online payment company [PayPal](#) Inc. have periodically rendered a small part of its website inoperative.

But other planned attacks, on London-based Moneybookers.com or Amazon.com, have either fizzled or been called off.

All five sites have severed their links to WikiLeaks over the past weeks and months, many citing suspected "terms of use" violations. The moves angered WikiLeaks supporters and alarmed free speech advocates, many of whom claim that the companies are caving in to U.S. pressure to muzzle the controversial website.

WikiLeaks has been careful to distance itself from Anonymous, saying

"we neither condemn nor applaud these attacks."

A press release circulated under the Anonymous name Friday said the group - which it refers to as an "Internet gathering" - was acting out of a desire "to raise awareness about WikiLeaks and the underhanded methods employed by the above companies to impair WikiLeaks' ability to function."

Imperva said Friday that it had monitored Anonymous supporters boasting about bringing in huge numbers of extra computers to back the attacks - something it said might challenge Amazon.com at one of the retailer's busiest times of the year.

But Be'ery stressed the boasts were unconfirmed, and the Anonymous statement said its members did not want to alienate the public by causing online havoc over the holidays.

"Simply put, attacking a major online retailer when people are buying presents for their loved ones would be in bad taste," the press release said.

Dutch police said Friday they were investigating whether hackers were responsible for taking down the websites of police and prosecutors in the Netherlands after the arrest of a 16-year-old suspected cybercriminal.

Dutch media reported that Anonymous tried to take down the two police sites in an apparent revenge attack. Both sites were only sporadically reachable Friday morning.

In Australia, WikiLeaks supporters held rallies in Brisbane and Sydney on Friday. In Sydney, more than 500 people gathered outside Town Hall, some waving signs that read, "Hands off WikiLeaks, We deserve the truth," and "Don't shoot the messenger."

One man sealed his mouth shut with tape on which the words "NO LEAKS" had been written.

The U.S. Department of Justice, meanwhile is considering whether to charge those behind the leaks under the espionage act or other laws, while U.S. diplomats, deeply embarrassed by WikiLeaks' disclosures, have struggled to contain the fallout.

"The deplorable Wikileaks disclosures put innocent lives at risk, and damage U.S. national security interests," U.S. Ambassador to London Louis Susman wrote in an editorial Friday in The Guardian newspaper.

"There is nothing brave about sabotaging the peaceful relations between nations on which our common [security](#) depends," he added.

The U.S. may soon be facing more than WikiLeaks as an opponent.

A former WikiLeaks spokesman plans to launch a rival website Monday called Openleaks that will help anonymous sources deliver sensitive material to public attention. Daniel Domscheit-Berg made the claim in a documentary by Swedish broadcaster SVT airing Sunday but obtained in advance by the AP.

[WikiLeaks](#) founder Julian Assange remained in jail ahead of a Dec. 14 hearing where he plans to fight extradition to Sweden to face sex crimes allegations.

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