

Report: Iran's paramilitary launches cyber attack

March 14 2011, By NASSER KARIMI , Associated Press

(AP) -- Iranian hackers working for the powerful Revolutionary Guard's paramilitary Basij group have launched attacks on websites of the "enemies," a state-owned newspaper reported Monday in a rare acknowledgment from Iran that it's involved in cyber warfare.

The report followed an announcement in January that Iran had formed its first cyber police unit in an attempt by authorities to gain an edge in the digital world.

The Internet has also been a key outlet for Iran's opposition since the 2009 disputed presidential election. In addition, Iran has been trying to boost its web defenses after the Stuxnet computer worm made its way into computers involved with the country's controversial nuclear program.

Gen. Ali Fazli, acting commander of the Basij, was quoted by state-owned IRAN paper as saying Iran's cyber army is made up of university teachers, students and clerics. He said its attacks were a retaliation for similar attacks on Iran, according to the semi-official Mehr news agency. There were no further details about the possible targets or the time of the attacks.

"As there are cyber attacks on us, so is our cyber army of the Basij, which includes university instructors and students, as well as clerics, attacking websites of the enemy," Fazli said. "Without resorting to the power of the Basij, we would not have been able to monitor and

confront our enemies."

So far, the Revolutionary Guard - Iran's military-industrial powerhouse - was believed linked to the secretive "Cyber Army" that emerged to fight opposition websites and blogs after President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's disputed re-election in 2009.

In February, Guard chief, Gen. Mohammad Ali Jafari, signaled that the force supports the cyber army, describing it as a "defensive, security, political and cultural need for all countries." Jafari claimed at the time that the Guard have been successful in [cyber warfare](#).

Iran has been seeking to master the digital world as a crucial step to prepare for what it calls "soft war," which includes fighting against cyber attacks such as the Stuxnet computer worm that Iran said was aimed at sabotaging its uranium enrichment program.

Iranian officials claimed there were no setbacks in nuclear operations from Stuxnet but a November report by the U.N. nuclear agency said Iran's enrichment program was temporarily shut down in a possible link to the worm's infiltration at the Natanz nuclear facility.

The origins of Stuxnet are unclear. But it's considered a highly sophisticated malware designed to attack industrial systems and could have been aimed at the centrifuges used in uranium enrichment. Washington and others worry that Iran could eventually produce nuclear material for warheads, but Iran insists it only seeks to enrich uranium for energy and research.

The country has also been wary about Western cultural influences while trying to gain the upper hand in cyberspace against web-savvy opposition groups. Opposition groups use proxy servers and other tactics to stay ahead of authorities.

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