US, Britain urge cooperation on cyber threats

June 4 2011, by Philip Lim

The United States and Britain called Saturday for international cooperation against threats to cyber security following a fresh spate of attacks on government and corporate targets.

US Defense Secretary Robert Gates and British Defence Secretary Liam Fox underscored the urgency of the problem at an Asia-Pacific security forum in Singapore also attended by their Chinese counterpart Liang Guanglie.

China denies being the source of attacks on US security systems and the two western officials deliberately avoided singling out Beijing.

Liang is scheduled to address the Singapore conference on Sunday.

Gates said "we take the cyber threat very seriously and we see it from a variety of sources, not just one or another country."

Fox said London will host an international conference on the "war of the invisible enemy" later this year.

"The effect on the economies of this region of a well-planned and well-resourced cyber attack on transnational commercial networks and institutions would be catastrophic, and would impact on us all," he said.

"Cyber attacks are already happening in large numbers and on a regular basis ... which is why we want to convene a proper international conference to see how we can deal with it."

The London talks will include discussions on a potential legal framework, Fox said.

Just days before the Singapore forum, Internet giant [Google](#) said a cyber spying campaign originating in China had targeted Gmail accounts of senior US officials, military personnel, journalists and Chinese political activists.

China said Thursday it was "unacceptable" to blame it for the incidents.

Gates said "serious international tensions" could be avoided if there were rules "that let people know what kinds of acts are acceptable, what kinds of acts are not, and what kinds of acts may in fact be an act of war."

"There is no question that our defence systems are under attack all the time, fairly routinely in fact, and we've taken a number of steps to try and protect ourselves," he added.

On the sidelines of the conference, US aerospace giant Boeing said it was also under "continuous" [cyber attack](#) but there had been no breach of its databases.

The admission by Dennis Muilenburg, chief executive of Boeing Defense, Space and Security, comes as Japanese electronics giant Sony reels from a series of attacks on its networks.

"I think all countries should see the cyber threat as a potential problem for them," Gates said.

"I think that one of the things that would be beneficial would be for there to be a more open dialogue among countries about cyber (threats) and establishing some rules of the road," he said.

Gates said this would help achieve a "clearer understanding of the left and right lanes, if you will, so that somebody doesn't inadvertently or intentionally begin something that escalates and gets out of control."

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