British defence ministry faced 1,000 cyber attacks in a year

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Foreign intelligence agencies and criminal organisations launched more than 1,000 cyber attacks on Britain's defence ministry last year, a minister has revealed.

In a speech outlining the growing threat to Britain from cyberspace, defence minister Liam Fox said late Tuesday that London was fighting a "continuous battle" to defend its cyber security from hostile forces.

The warning came after US defence contractor Lockheed Martin revealed it repelled a major cyber assault last month and amid growing international concern about the ability of hackers to target government

systems.

"There is a continuous battle being waged against us, day in and day out," Fox told business leaders in London.

"Our systems are targeted by criminals, foreign intelligence services and other malicious actors seeking to exploit our people, corrupt our systems and steal information.

"To give you an idea of the challenge, last year the MoD (Ministry of Defence) blocked and investigated over 1,000 potentially serious attacks.

"This threat is growing in scale and sophistication -- my department is a prime target."

In a new national security strategy unveiled last year, Britain listed cyber attacks alongside international terrorism as one of the biggest threats facing the country.

Fox added that cyber security would be a major concern when awarding defence contracts in future, warning that "intellectual property in defence and security industries is at risk from a systematic marauding."

Washington is developing the first military guidelines for the age of Internet warfare.

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates called for a comprehensive international dialogue on cyber attacks at a security conference in Singapore at the weekend after Chinese hackers were blamed for attacks on US targets.

Beijing has denied being behind the attacks.

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