

Interpol swoop nets 25 suspected 'Anonymous' hackers

February 28 2012



A masked hacker, part of the Anonymous group, is pictured in Lyon, France, in January 2012. Interpol has arrested 25 suspected members of the 'Anonymous' hackers group in a swoop on over a dozen cities in Europe and Latin America, the global police body said Tuesday.

Interpol has arrested 25 suspected members of the 'Anonymous' hackers group in a swoop covering more than a dozen cities in Europe and Latin America, the global police body said Tuesday.

"Operation Unmask was launched in mid-February following a series of coordinated cyber-attacks originating from Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Spain," said Interpol, based in the French city of Lyon.

The statement cited attacks on the websites of the Colombian Ministry

of Defence and the presidency, as well as on Chile's Endesa electricity company and its National Library, among others.

The operation was carried out by police from Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Spain, the statement said, with 250 items of computer equipment and mobile phones seized in raids on 40 premises in 15 cities.

Police also seized credit cards and cash from the suspects, aged 17 to 40.

"This operation shows that crime in the virtual world does have real consequences for those involved, and that the Internet cannot be seen as a safe haven for criminal activity," said Bernd Rossbach, Interpol's acting director of police services.

However, it was not clear what evidence there was to prove those arrested were part of Anonymous, an extremely loose-knit international movement of online activists, or "hacktivists."

Spanish police said earlier they had arrested four suspected hackers accused of sabotaging websites and publishing confidential data on the Internet.

They were accused of hacking the websites of political parties and companies and adding fangs to the faces of leaders in photographs online, and publishing data identifying top officials' security guards, Spanish police said.

The operation, carried out after trawling through computer logs in order to trace IP addresses, also netted 10 suspects in Argentina, six in Chile and five in Colombia, Spanish police said.

They said one of the suspects went by the nicknames Thunder and Pacotron and was suspected of running the computer network used by

Anonymous in Spain and Latin America, via servers in the Czech Republic and Bulgaria.

He was arrested in the southern Spanish city of Malaga.

Two of the suspects were in detention while one was bailed and the fourth was a minor who was left in the care of his parents.

In Santiago, deputy prefect Jaime Jara said police confiscated computer equipment belonging to five Chileans and a Colombian, aged between 17 and 23.

Jara said the suspects appeared to have hacked web pages in Chile, Colombia and Spain.

The six suspects did not know each other and were released after voluntarily giving statements, police said, though they will likely be ordered to appear in court to face possible charges relating to online crimes.

Anonymous has in recent weeks targeted the websites of a series of police organisations, with subgroup "Antisec" on Friday vandalising the website of a major US prison contractor.

Anonymous took credit Thursday for an online raid on the Los Angeles Police Canine Association and previously attacked websites of the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Anonymous has notably defended WikiLeaks when it was facing a funding cutoff and recently collaborated with the anti-secrecy site for the release of a swathe of emails from Texas-based private intelligence firm Stratfor.

In December 2010, Anonymous attacked the websites of Mastercard, PayPal, Visa and others for blocking donations to WikiLeaks after it began releasing thousands of classified US diplomatic cables.

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Citation: Interpol swoop nets 25 suspected 'Anonymous' hackers (2012, February 28) retrieved 21 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-02-interpol-swoop-nets-anonymous-hackers.html>

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