

China cyber warfare skills a risk to US military: report

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Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) naval officers marching past Tiananmen Square in 2009. China's cyber warfare capabilities have reached a point where they would pose a danger to the US military in the event of a conflict, according to a report prepared for the US Congress released on Thursday.

China's cyber warfare capabilities would pose a danger to US military forces in the event of a conflict over Taiwan, according to a report by a US congressional advisory panel released Thursday.

The report by defense contractor Northrop Grumman for the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission said China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) has placed great emphasis on what is known as "information confrontation."

"Chinese capabilities in computer network operations have advanced sufficiently to pose genuine risk to US military operations in the event of a conflict," the report said.

"(PLA) leaders have embraced the idea that successful warfighting is based on the ability to exert control over an adversary's information and information systems," it said.

"PLA analysts consistently identify logistics and (command-and-control) infrastructure as US strategic centers of gravity, which they would almost certainly target," the report said.

The 135-page report outlined a possible scenario in the event of a US defense of self-governing Taiwan -- which Beijing considers to be a part of its territory awaiting reunification -- from Chinese military attack.

The PLA would target US systems with "electronic countermeasures weapons and network attack and exploitation tools, likely in advance of actual combat to delay US entry or degrade capabilities in a conflict," it said.

Difficulty in attributing responsibility for a cyber attack could hamper the US response, the report warned.

"Even if circumstantial evidence points to China as the culprit, no policy currently exists to easily determine appropriate response options to a large scale attack on US military or civilian networks in which definitive attribution is lacking," the report said.

"Beijing may seek to exploit this gray area in US policymaking and legal frameworks to create delays in US command decision-making," it said.

The report also said that Chinese companies, some with foreign partners

supplying critical technology, were giving the PLA access to cutting-edge research and technology.

The report warned that the PLA's ties with large Chinese telecommunications firms "creates an avenue for state sponsored or state directed penetrations of supply chains for electronics supporting the US military, the US government, and civilian industry."

This has the potential to cause the "catastrophic failure of systems and networks supporting critical infrastructure for national security or public safety," it said.

Michael Wessel, a member of the commission, said the report "highlights China's extensive development of cyber tools to advance the leadership's objectives.

"It's getting harder and harder for China's leaders to claim ignorance and innocence as to the massive electronic reconnaissance and cyber intrusions activities directed by Chinese interests at the US government and our private sector," Wessel said.

"There's clear and present danger that is increasing every day."

The commission was created by Congress to report on the national security implications of trade and economic relations between China and the United States and the report comes as the Senate debates cybersecurity legislation.

In an unusually blunt report in November, a US intelligence agency accused the Chinese of being the world's "most active and persistent perpetrators" of economic espionage, particularly in cyberspace.

China has repeatedly denied state involvement in cyber espionage

against Western governments and companies, including well-publicized attacks on Internet giant Google that sparked a row between Washington and Beijing.

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