

Snowden says US targets included China cell phones

June 23 2013

(AP)—A former National Security Agency contractor says that U.S. hacking targets in China included the nation's mobile-phone companies and two universities hosting extensive Internet traffic hubs in the latest allegations as Washington pushes Hong Kong to extradite the ex-contractor.

The latest charges from Edward Snowden came in a series of reports published over the weekend by the South China Morning Post, Hong Kong's leading English-language daily. The newspaper, which appears to have access to Snowden, said Saturday he is still in Hong Kong and not in police custody.

On Saturday, the Obama administration warned Hong Kong against dragging out the extradition of Snowden, reflecting concerns over a possible long legal battle before he ever appears in a U.S. courtroom to answer espionage charges for revealing two highly classified surveillance programs.

A formal extradition request would also pit Beijing against Washington at a time China is trying to deflect U.S. accusations that it carries out extensive surveillance on American government and commercial operations.

The U.S. has contacted authorities in Hong Kong to seek Snowden's extradition, the National Security Council said Saturday in a statement. The NSC advises the president on national security.

Snowden told the South China Morning Post that "the NSA does all kinds of things like hack Chinese cellphone companies to steal all of your SMS data." It added that Snowden said he had documents to support the hacking allegations, but the report did not identify the documents. It said he spoke to the paper in a June 12 interview.

With a population of more than 1.3 billion, China has massive cellphone companies. China Mobile is the world's largest mobile network carrier, with 735 million subscribers, followed by China Unicom with 258 million users and China Telecom with 172 million users.

Snowden said Tsinghua University in Beijing and Chinese University in Hong Kong, home of some of the country's major Internet traffic hubs, were targets of extensive hacking by U.S. spies this year. He said the NSA was focusing on so-called "network backbones" in China, through which enormous amounts of Internet data passes.

Snowden is believed to be hiding in an unknown location in Hong Kong, where he has been holed up since admitting to providing information to the news media about highly classified NSA surveillance programs. He has not been seen publicly since he checked out of a Hong Kong hotel on June 10.

The newspaper reports came after a one-page criminal complaint against Snowden was unsealed Friday in federal court, revealing he had been charged with espionage and theft.

The Obama administration on Saturday warned Hong Kong against slow-walking his extradition, with White House [national security](#) adviser Tom Donilon saying in an interview with CBS News: "Hong Kong has been a historically good partner of the United States in law enforcement matters, and we expect them to comply with the treaty in this case."

Some Hong Kong lawmakers have called on Beijing to intervene and instruct the Hong Kong government on how to handle the situation before his case goes through the courts, but Beijing has yet to comment. The Hong Kong government has also not commented.

But China's state-run media have used the case to poke back at Washington after the U.S. had spent the past several months pressuring China on its international spying operations..

A commentary published Sunday by Xinhua News Agency said Snowden's disclosures of U.S. spying activities in China have "put Washington in a really awkward situation."

"Washington should come clean about its record first. It owes ... an explanation to [China](#) and other countries it has allegedly spied on," it said. "It has to share with the world the range, extent and intent of its clandestine hacking programs."

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