

China will step up scrutiny of Internet technology (Update)

May 22 2014, by Joe Mcdonald

China's government announced Thursday it will examine information technology for possible security flaws, a move that comes amid tensions with Washington over accusations of cyber spying.

Experts will scrutinize products and services to be used for communications, finance, energy, national security and other purposes, the official Xinhua News Agency, citing the Cabinet's Internet Information Office. It said inspections will apply to both foreign- and Chinese-made products, and suppliers that fail will be barred from selling in China.

Vetting of products is aimed at "preventing suppliers from taking advantage of their products to illegally control, disrupt or shut down their clients' systems, or to gather, store, process or use their clients' information," the Internet office said, according to Xinhua.

The United States accuses China's military of conducting large-scale cyber spying to steal government and commercial secrets. Authorities announced criminal charges this week against five Chinese military officers. China denied the accusation and complained the United States is the leading source of hacking aimed at this country.

China has the world's biggest population of Internet users but major companies, government agencies and banks rely on foreign suppliers for advanced network and security technology.

Beijing has expressed concern about relying so heavily on foreign security technology. It has tried to compel foreign suppliers to disclose how security and encryption products work but backed down after U.S. and European complaints that such information was trade secrets.

The government tries to support China's fledgling suppliers by favoring them in procurement. Banks and major companies were ordered in 2010 to limit use of foreign security technology.

For their part, U.S. officials have expressed concern about possible risks of Chinese-supplied technology. In 2012, a congressional panel said telecom equipment makers Huawei Technologies Inc. and ZTE Corp. were potential security threats and Americans should avoid doing business with them.

Ensuring that IT technologies and cyberspace are "safe and under control" is vital to China's national security, economic and social development, said Jiang Jun, the Internet office's spokesman.

"For a long time, governments and enterprises of a few countries have gathered sensitive information," he was quoted as saying. "They not only seriously undermine interests of their clients but also threaten cyber security of other countries."

Jiang said Chinese government agencies, companies, universities and telecom companies have "suffered extensive invasion and wiretapping," according to Xinhua.

Last year, the American Chamber of Commerce in China appealed to the government to improve online security, which it said was "less reliable and less secure" than in such countries as the United States, Europe or South Korea.

The group said that while two-thirds of its member companies use cloud computing, the proportion willing to base such operations in China had declined to below 50 percent due to security concerns. The group appealed to Beijing to repeal restrictions imposed in 1999 on use of foreign encryption and security technology.

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