

US to push China on hacking at high-level talks

July 2 2014, by Jo Biddle

Washington will push Beijing to crack down on cyber-spying and halt the theft of corporate data when the two powers meet next week for high-level talks, a US diplomat told AFP Wednesday.

Concerns about widespread Internet hacking as well as regional maritime tensions will be among a slew of issues on the table during two days of talks in Beijing on July 9-10, with Secretary of State John Kerry and Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew leading the US delegation.

China in May angrily suspended a newly-formed cybersecurity working group after the US took the unprecedented step of indicting five Chinese military officers for cyber-spying, accusing them of hacking into US computers to steal trade secrets.

But Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia Daniel Russel told AFP that despite what he called the show of Chinese "irritation," Kerry was still likely to raise the issue with State Councilor Yang Jiechi and Vice Premier Wang Yang, who will lead Beijing's team.

At the sixth annual US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue, Kerry will also push for the resumption of the expert-level cyber working group, set up a year ago to draw up rules for using and protecting the Internet.

"It's urgent, frankly, that the United States and China cooperate in helping to develop international standards," Russel said, adding it was

also a vital forum in which to raise their own concerns.

The number one US issue is that "corporate data from US firms is being stolen via cyber means by actors in China and that information is being transferred to Chinese state-owned enterprises," he said.

The Chinese companies were then using the stolen intellectual property to enhance their own profits.

"There is a growing body of evidence that points to direct Chinese government involvement in that behavior. Clearly to us that means that the Chinese government has the ability to stop it," Russel insisted.

Washington has called on Beijing to "look into any and all allegations and take action to prevent this kind of cyber economic theft."

Managing frictions

The top US diplomat for East Asia and Pacific affairs stressed however that the suspension of the cyber group was "not indicative of fundamental problems in the relationship" between the world's two biggest economies.

"It is more in the character of a wide-ranging and broad relationship that includes areas of cooperation, areas of competition and areas of friction," he added.

"The trick of course is to manage friction in an effective and constructive way," Russel said, adding that the strategic dialogue was the right kind of mechanism to air tensions.

Also high on the agenda will be China's territorial ambitions in the South China Sea.

In recent weeks, China has sent oil rigs to the South China Sea into waters claimed by Hanoi, and the row has seen a wave of deadly anti-Chinese riots in Vietnam as well as accusations from both sides of ramming by the other's vessels.

Washington would "put forward some of our thoughts on steps that China and frankly all of the claimants can take to lower the temperature to reduce the risk of some sort of incident that could lead to a crisis," Russel said.

Other issues on the table for the talks included joint efforts to tackle climate change, as well as energy and the environment.

"There is an acceleration in the focus on those sets of issues in both countries, and certainly on the Chinese side, the magnitude of the environmental degradation that is facing China and its citizens has sharpened their minds," Russel said.

Steps to bring North Korea back to the negotiating table over its suspect nuclear program will also be discussed.

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