

Premier FBI cybersquad in Pittsburgh to add agents

August 17 2014, by Joe Mandak

The FBI's premier cybersquad has focused attention on computer-based crime in recent months by helping prosecutors charge five Chinese army intelligence officials with stealing trade secrets from major companies and by snaring a Russian-led hacking ring that pilfered \$100 million from bank accounts worldwide.

Because of the Pittsburgh squad's success, the FBI is rewarding the office with more manpower, allowing it to take on even more cyberthreats.

"Where there's great work going on, invest in it," FBI Director James Comey said while visiting Pittsburgh two weeks ago.

Because of security concerns, the FBI won't say how many agents are in the Pittsburgh cyber office or specify how many agents will be added. However, the FBI's overall 2014 budget includes 152 new cybercrime positions, including 50 new agents and 50 computer scientists, as part of the agency's "Next Generation Cyber" initiative. In fiscal 2015, which begins Oct. 1, the FBI hopes to maintain about 750 cyberagents across the country out of more than 13,000 overall.

The Pittsburgh cybersquad's growth makes it more likely it will become involved in cases that could redefine the legal concepts of privacy and other civil rights, said Bruce Antkowiak, a former Pittsburgh federal prosecutor who now teaches law at St. Vincent College.

People using the Internet "understand that you are accessing to the world so much of your personal information," Antkowiak said. "But that cannot mean, in a society that holds itself to be free, that we no longer have privacy."

Special-Agent-in-Charge Scott S. Smith said Pittsburgh's squad has developed "a model approach to investigating and preventing cybercrime" in partnership with U.S. Attorney David Hickton, private tech business and academics, such as the computer science experts at Carnegie Mellon University.

In Pittsburgh, such networking resulted in Scottish cyberterrorist Adam Stuart Busby being indicted on charges of emailing bomb threats to the University of Pittsburgh in the spring of 2012. Those charges are pending.

The Pitt bomb threats were originally investigated by the Pittsburgh FBI's domestic terrorism squad but then the cybersquad stepped in. Busby was charged with emailing additional bomb threats using the alias "The Threateners" that demanded the university rescind a \$50,000 reward over the original threats.

Comey acknowledged that tracking emails—and other methods used to thwart cybercrime—makes questions of civil liberties increasingly important. Then again, those issues are as old as the FBI itself, Comey said.

The modern FBI was born in the 1920s when new technology—automobiles and asphalt—"created a whole new class of criminals who could travel distances that no one had ever heard of before, commit crimes at breathtaking speed," Comey said.

Criminals using today's information superhighway "is that times a

million," Comey said.

Still, Comey believes it will be possible to patrol cyberspace without sacrificing privacy and other civil rights, though how to do that remains an open, and evolving, question.

"We have to patrol it in a way that is transparent to good people and scary to bad people," Comey said.

"I'm a great believer that people should be skeptical of government power," Comey said. "I am. I think the country was built by people who were."

© 2014 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Premier FBI cybersquad in Pittsburgh to add agents (2014, August 17) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-08-premier-fbi-cybersquad-pittsburgh-agents.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--