

'Major' hacking attack in US looms: expert survey

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A majority of cybersecurity experts surveyed in a poll see a likelihood of

major damage from a cyber attack in the coming years, according to a Pew Research Center report.

From the 1,600 experts polled, 61 percent answered "yes" to the question: "By 2025, will a major cyber attack have caused widespread harm to a nation's security and capacity to defend itself and its people?"

"Widespread harm," the survey explained, would mean significant loss of life or property losses, damage, theft in the tens of billions of dollars.

"There was considerable agreement among these experts that individuals could be more vulnerable and businesses could persistently be under attack," said Lee Rainie, a co-author of the report and director of the Pew Research Center's Internet Project.

"They said essential utilities are a vulnerable target and theft and economic disruptions could be substantial."

The remaining 39 percent surveyed said major damage from a cyber attack could be avoided.

"Some confidently pointed out that the threat of counterattack might deter the worst," said Janna Anderson of Elon University's Imagining the Internet Center, which conducted the study with Pew.

"And many used the Cold War as a metaphor, saying severe harm is unlikely due to the threat of mutually assured disruption. Some said [cyber threats](#) are being exaggerated by people who might profit most from creating an atmosphere of fear."

Already here?

Some of the experts said the cyber threats are already here, or on the

horizon.

"A bellicose China might 'cyber invade' the military capabilities of Japan and South Korea as part of the conflict around the China sea, leading to the need to reconfigure their electronics, at huge cost," said Stowe Boyd, lead researcher for Gigaom Research.

"Israel and the United States have already created the Stuxnet computer worm to damage Iran's nuclear refinement centrifuges."

Those threats have already harmed the US as well, an expert pointed out.

"People have died from faulty equipment producing gas pipeline explosions and from drone bombings of civilians. US companies have lost billions worth of business as foreign customers no longer trust their products and services," said Judith Perrolle, a professor at Northeastern University.

The report comes a day after the top US cyber official said the country's military is looking to flex its muscles in cyberspace as a "deterrence" to hackers eyeing American targets.

Also this week, US security researchers said in two separate reports that the Russian and Chinese governments are likely behind widespread cyber-espionage that has hit targets in the United States and elsewhere.

One team of researchers led by the security firm Novetta Solutions said it identified a hacker group believed to act "on behalf of a Chinese government intelligence apparatus."

A separate report by the security firm FireEye said a long-running effort to hack into US defense contractors, Eastern European governments and European security organizations is "likely sponsored by the Russian

government."

The Pew survey is part of a series of reports tied to the 25th anniversary of the World Wide Web. The survey was not a based on a random sample but a selected group of 1,642 experts and scholars.

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