German military to launch cyber command

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Germany's armed forces Saturday launch a cyber command, with a status equal to that of the army, navy and air force, meant to shield its IT and weapons systems from attack.

Military planners fear that wars of the future will start with cyber attacks against critical infrastructure and networks, extensive online espionage

and sabotage.

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With the new digital force, Germany is taking a leading role among NATO allies, its new commander, Lieutenant General Ludwig Leinhos, told news weekly Focus.

Leinhos said the main tasks would be to operate and protect the military's own IT infrastructure and computer-assisted weapons systems, as well as surveillance of online threats.

He said the centre would also develop and war-game offensive capabilities because "in order to be able to defend yourself, you have to know the options for attack".

However, any full-scale cyber attacks abroad would have to be approved by the German parliament, just like any other military mission.

The security of national and government IT systems, meanwhile, remains the responsibility of the interior ministry which oversees the domestic security agency that handles counterespionage.

The German government has been sensitised to cyber security since the parliament was attacked last year, with security sources suspecting Russian hackers behind the attack.

Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen had announced the creation of the cyber command two years ago to protect the military from increasing numbers of online attacks.

The defence ministry said that in this year's first nine weeks alone, the IT systems of the Bundeswehr had been targeted more than 280,000 times.

Leinhos said that "we are in a constant race between the development of attack options and defensive capabilities".