

US struggles to pinpoint cyber attacks: Top official

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National Intelligence Director Dennis Blair testifies before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. The United States often cannot quickly or reliably trace a cyber attack back to its source, even as rival nations and extremists may be looking to wage virtual war, Blair warned Tuesday.

The United States often cannot quickly or reliably trace a cyber attack back to its source, even as rival nations and extremists may be looking to wage virtual war, a top official warned Tuesday.

"It often takes weeks and sometimes months of subsequent investigation," said US intelligence director Dennis Blair, "and even at the end of very long investigations you're not quite sure" who carried out the offensive.

China, Russia and other countries already could be potent online foes

and terrorists may find it easier in the future to hire [hackers](#) to target key systems, Blair told the Senate Armed Services Committee.

"Terrorists are interested in using cyberweapons, just the way they're interested in using most any weapon they can use against us," notably to target systems critical to the high-tech driven US economy, he said.

"We currently assess that their capability does not match their ambitions in that area, although that's something we have to work on all the time because things become more widespread, terrorists can find hackers to work for them," he said.

"It is a concern, but right now I'd say their capability is low and, in addition, I think the more spectacular attacks that kill a lot of people on very publicly is what they are looking for," said Blair.

Blair told the panel, which was looking at [global threats](#) to US interests, that Washington is "absolutely" trying to speed up what is now the "very slow and painstaking" process of determining who carried out a cyberattack.

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