14 arrests for alleged cyberattack on PayPal (Update 3)

July 19 2011, By PETE YOST , Associated Press

Fourteen people were arrested Tuesday for allegedly mounting a cyberattack on the website of PayPal in retaliation for its suspending the accounts of WikiLeaks.

Separately, FBI agents executed more than 35 search warrants around the country in an ongoing investigation into coordinated cyberattacks against major companies and organizations.

As part of the effort, there were two arrests in the United States unrelated to the attack on the PayPal payment service. Overseas, one person was arrested by Scotland Yard in Britain, and there were four arrests by the Dutch National Police Agency, all for alleged cybercrimes.

In one case unrelated to PayPal and filed in New Jersey, a customer support contractor was charged with stealing confidential business information on AT&T's servers. The data was posted on a public file sharing site, and defendant Lance Moore, 21, of Las Cruces, N.M., was accused of exceeding his authorized access to AT&T's servers in downloading thousands of documents and applications.

According to court papers, the documents the contractor uploaded were the same ones publicized last month by the computer hacking group Lulz Security, or LulzSec, which said it had obtained confidential AT&T documents and made them publicly available on the Internet.

The 16-year-old detained in England is thought to be connected to

LulzSec, according to a U.K. official familiar with the investigation. The official spoke on condition that his position not be disclosed because he wasn't authorized to officially release the information.

A hacker with LulzSec did not immediately return a message seeking comment early Wednesday. The group's Twitter feed made no mention of any arrests, although "Sabu," a reputed member of the six-person collective, posted a message to the micro-blogging site saying the hackers couldn't confirm a report that one their own had been detained.

The cyberattacks on PayPal's website by the group called Anonymous followed the release by WikiLeaks in November of thousands of classified State Department cables.

Anonymous is a loosely organized group of hackers sympathetic to WikiLeaks. It has claimed responsibility for attacks against corporate and government websites worldwide.

The group also claims credit for disrupting the websites of Visa and MasterCard in December when the credit card companies stopped processing donations to WikiLeaks and its founder, Julian Assange.

A federal indictment unsealed in U.S. District Court in San Jose, Calif., says that Anonymous referred to the cyberattacks on PayPal as "Operation Avenge Assange."

The 14 charged in the PayPal attack were arrested in Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Florida, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Mexico and Ohio. They ranged in age from 20 to 42. The name and age of one of the 14 was withheld by the court.

The 20-year-old, Mercedes Renee Haefer, is a university student, and her lawyer, Stanley L. Cohen of New York, compared the case to the

federal prosecution of former U.S. defense analyst Daniel Ellsberg following his release in 1971 to The New York Times and other newspapers a Pentagon study of government decision-making about the Vietnam War. The government said Haefer is also known as "No" and "MMMM."

"In the 18th century, people stood on street corners handing out pamphlets saying, `Beware the all-powerful military and big government,'" Cohen told The Associated Press. "Some people listened. Some people walked away. Today, pamphleteers use the Internet."

Cohen compared the acts allegedly committed by his client and the others to civil disobedience. "The people being arrested are not being accused of acts of violence," Cohen said.

In addition to Haefer, the government said those indicted in San Jose were: Christopher Wayne Cooper, 23, also known as "Anthrophobic"; Joshua John Covelli, 26, aka "Absolem" and "Toxic"; Keith Wilson Downey, 26; Donald Husband, 29, aka "Ananon"; Vincent Charles Kershaw, 27, aka "Trivette," "Triv" and "Reaper"; Ethan Miles, 33; James C. Murphy, 36; Drew Alan Phillips, 26, aka "Drew010"; Jeffrey Puglisi, 28, aka "Jeffer," "Jefferp" and "Ji"; Daniel Sullivan, 22; Tracy Ann Valenzuela, 42; and Christopher Quang Vo, 22.

In the other non-PayPal case, Scott Matthew Arciszewski, 21, was arrested on charges of intentional damage to a protected computer. Arciszewski made his initial appearance Tuesday in federal court in Orlando, Fla.

According to the complaint, on June 21, 2011, Arciszewski allegedly accessed without authorization the Tampa Bay InfraGard website and uploaded three files, then tweeted about the intrusion and directed visitors to a separate website containing links with instructions on how to

exploit the Tampa InfraGard website.

InfraGard is a public-private partnership for critical infrastructure protection sponsored by the FBI, with chapters in all 50 states.

LulzSec, a spin-off group of Anonymous, has taken responsibility for attacks on Fox News and PBS, entertainment companies, including Sony and Nintendo, as well as local chapters of InfraGard and Arizona law enforcement.

The hackers earlier this week broke into The Sun newspaper's website and posted a bogus story claiming that media tycoon Rupert Murdoch had been found dead.

The group still says it's sitting on a cache of emails stolen from a server belonging to Murdoch's British newspaper arm.

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