

Politics

HOMELAND SECURITY

German magazine claims NSA hacking unit use methods to obtain data

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FoxNews.com



A German magazine, citing internal documents, claims the NSA's hacking unit uses James Bond-style methods, including intercepting computer deliveries and outfitting them with espionage software.

Der Spiegel's revelations relate to a division of the NSA known as Tailored Access Operations, an elite team of hackers specializing in stealing data from the toughest of targets.

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Citing the internal documents, the magazine said Sunday that TAO's mission was "Getting the unnamed intelligence official as saying that TAO had gathered "some of the most significant intelligence seen."

"During the middle part of the last decade, the special unit succeeded in gaining access to 258 everywhere in the world," the report said. "In 2010, it conducted 279 operations worldwide."

Der Spiegel said TAO had a catalog of high-tech gadgets for particularly hard-to-crack cases, including cables specially modified to record what is being typed across the screen, USB sticks secretly broadcast stolen data over the airwaves, and fake base stations intended to intercept mobile phone

The NSA doesn't just rely on the Bond-style spy gear, the magazine said. Some of the attacks exploit weaknesses in the architecture of the Internet to deliver malicious software to specific computer weaknesses in hardware or software distributed by some of the world's leading information technology companies, including Cisco Systems, Inc. and China's Huawei Technologies Ltd., the magazine reported.

Der Spiegel cited a 2008 mail order catalog-style list of vulnerabilities that NSA spies could exploit at companies such as Irvine, California-based Western Digital Corp. or Round Rock, Texas-based Dell Inc. The magazine said the agency was "compromising the technology and products of American companies."

Old-fashioned methods get a mention too. Der Spiegel said that if the NSA tracked a target ordering electronic accessories, TAO could tap its allies in the FBI and the CIA, intercept the hardware in a workshop where it could be discretely fitted with espionage software before being sent on its way.

Intercepting computer equipment in such a way is among the NSA's "most productive operations" for gathering intelligence from around the world, one document cited by Der Spiegel stated.

One of the most striking reported revelations concerned the NSA's alleged ability to spy on Microsoft's Windows Update, a feature familiar to many users of the Windows operating system as the dialogue box which pops up when a document dies. The reporting system is intended to help Microsoft engineers improve their product. Der Spiegel said the NSA was also sifting through the reports to help spies break into machines running Windows. A document cited by the magazine appeared to poke fun at Microsoft's expense, replacing the software update report message with the words: "This information may be intercepted by a foreign signal (signals detailed information and better exploit your machine."

Microsoft did not immediately return a call from The Associated Press seeking comment, but the U.S. firms that have demanded more transparency from the NSA — and worked to bolster their own security — have taken the revelations of former intelligence worker Edward Snowden, whose disclosures have ignited an international firestorm over mass surveillance.

Der Spiegel did not explicitly say where its cache of NSA documents had come from, although the magazine has published a series of stories based on documents leaked by Snowden, and one of Snowden's key biographers, documentary filmmaker Laura Poitras — was listed among the article's six authors.

No one was immediately available at Der Spiegel to clarify to The Associated Press whether Snowden

latest story.

The Associated Press contributed to this report

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God Bless America & Al Gore We'll never know the truth The people running the NSA A

...and America & Africa. We'll never know the truth. The people running the NSA & Patriots, maybe they just need a little more control. And why don't our politicians know w so surprised?



BillPaish

did you read the report, it said in the last decade.....the Bush era.



cokeheadobama

Obama is so complete with his spying, he knows how many sheets are left on you



JackEndabox

You know, it is entirely possible that this repeated flaunting of the NSA "omnipotence" is Socialist Democrats to intimidate the Constitutional patriots.

Consider the evidence--even after the Russians warned them about he dangers of the Br have bungled it worse if they were a bunch of 5th graders,

And Obama has all the kings horses and all the kings men at his disposal, and in 5 years functional web site--my God, any private sector major Corporate COO could have made AND IT WOULD HAVE WORKED, because otherwise he would long ago have been fired

And then he mindful, although the Socialist Democrats feel secure that through facilitation

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