

UNDERSTANDING CROSS-BORDER CONFLICT: HOW CAN INTERNATIONAL STUDIES HELP?

Cyber Espionage

In 2014, the US Justice Department filed criminal charges against five hackers in the Chinese military. The complaint accused them of using cyber spying to steal US trade secrets, specifically from six American companies in the nuclear power, metals, and solar products industries. This was the first time charges for hacking had been lodged against a state actor. The controversy also opened a new and potentially troublesome area of conflict between the US and China, threatening to further strain their relationship.

Evidence suggested that the Chinese government not only condoned but supported the activities of the People's Liberation Army Unit 61398 based in a Shanghai suburb. The alleged hackers were young army officers who used military and intelligence resources to download industrial information, including strategic plans, from US businesses. Targeted companies included Westinghouse Electric, US Steel, SolarWorld, United Steelworkers Union, Allegheny Technologies Inc., and Alcoa World Alumina.

The Chinese government responded with accusations of its own, suggesting that the US fabricated evidence against the Chinese military officials. It cited data produced by the National Computer Network Emergency Response Technical Team Coordination Center of China (NCNERTTCC) regarding a series of US cyber-attacks in China. The NCNERTTCC found that for just two months in 2014, 1.17 million host computers in China were directly controlled by the US via the use of 2,077 Trojan horse networks or botnet servers. China also argued that in that same short period, the US used 135 host computers to conduct 14,000 phishing operations and 57,000 backdoor attacks against Chinese websites.*

*<http://rt.com/news/160080-us-china-cyber-espionage>

What is the role of crossing borders in resolving this conflict? How can the cross-disciplinary focus of international studies help?

Questions

- Is there a role for geography in this conflict?
- What are the political motives of China and the United States?
- What are the economic implications for the parties involved?
- Do social and cultural factors play a role?
- Can the international community offer any solution?



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Satellite Image of PLA Unit 61398

Source: <http://cryptome.org/2013-info/02/prc-unit61398/prc-unit61398.htm>