

The war on other means

Kosovo battle

Hackers on their battle around the independence of Kosovo challenge their technological skills. The final act is marked by raising the flag on a web-site of an institution of the "enemy state"

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Prishtinë – Raising the flag on the roof of the castle of enemy was a way to declare victory back in history. This is a practice not entirely lost. The Kosovo war has ended in 1999 with the NATO intervention, but youngsters from the Albanian and Serb ethnicities still wage the war by raising the flag as a sign of victory, not on real terms though, but rather on a virtual battle.

Their preys are not the real targets, but the official web-sites of the institutions, while the optic fiber and the IPs are used as weapons. They see their enemy through numbers and signs, but when they declare the victory they use flags and contagious nationalistic language. "Kosovo is Serbia", or "Serbs out of Kosovo", "Independent Republic of Kosovo", are the messages that are put on these sites after being attacked.

Being relatively young, most of these hackers have not lived the war in Kosovo, but they live the soldier's spirit now. They find motivation on the harsh language of politics and the resentments of the last Kosovo conflict that keeps up tensions between two ethnicities.

But the cyber war in between Serbs and Albanians over Kosovo has an earlier history. It began almost at the same time with the real conflict on the ground. On 1998 the Serb group called "Crna Ruka (Black hand)" attacked the web site of NATO, while its troops were throwing bombs against Serb military targets.

One year later also Kosovo Albanians instigated virtual attacks. Some servers of the Serb "IRC Server", a forum filled with nationalistic Serb language, was attacked. Albanian flag was put for the first time on a Serb web-site.

Sporadic attacks continued until Kosovo declared independence, but gained in intensity after 17th of February of 2008, when Kosovo Parliament approved the declaration and now they are usual occurrence.

Hundreds of web-sites were attacked. Kosovo officials got used seeing a Serb flag and the message "Kosovo is Serbia" on their web-sites, while the message "United

States of Albania – USA” is not a seldom message the Serb institutions find on their sites.

Both countries penalize these acts with respective laws. According to the Kosovo Penal Code whoever destroys, publishes or erases electronic data on an unauthorized way can be penalized up to five years. The chief-prosecutor of Kosovo, Ismet Kabashi, confirms the prosecutors don't have experience on dealing with these cases. However, he says some cases were successfully concluded with the help of international experts present in Kosovo. Cyber crime is a penal act in Serbia as well, and there were a few sentences given on this behalf.

Since 2006 the Kosovo police arrested 16 individuals suspected of cybernetic crime. On the same ground Serb Police has arrested 32 and held on short-time confinement 120. "Hitman" and "Mr. Spy" are not very much impressed with this though. They say they keep enjoying when they cause harm to the "enemy".

KHG vs. SHG

"Kosovo Hackers Group (KHG)" and "Serbia Hacking Group (SHG)" are the official names of the most prominent hacker groups. The founder of the KHG is a 32 man from Prishtina who's nick name is Hitman. He says his room is filled with pictures of the Albanian heroes. These pictures inspire him when he launches attacks. He considers himself as a hacker with a leading reputation in Europe. He says his group exists since 1998. According to him the group was created as a response to the Serb attacks against Kosovo sites.

"We are aware that we violate the law, but we do it for the good of Kosovo. We do it out of patriotic feelings and we are ascetic on what we do. We get raged when we see a Serb flag" says Hitman. Elion Gashi claims he established KHG in 1998. He gives the print-screen of the sites attacked by him and his friends. Both Serb and Kosovo Hackers claim they do this out of patriotic feelings.

Mr. Spy who claims he is 14 years old from Serbia says he is the leader of the SHG. "Ko to kaže, ko to laže, Srbija je mala (Who says, who lies Serbia is small)" a widely known Serb nationalistic song is his preferred one. He considers Kosovo was snatched from Serbs by Albanians. "Should Albanians not kill and persecute Serbs this war of ours won't exist", says he.

Adrian Lamo is considered to be a titan of the world of hackers. He managed to breach the web sites of World internet giants such as Microsoft and Yahoo. He lives in United States and accepts to analyze the war in between Kosovo and Serb hackers. He was investigated by the FBI under suspicions that he breached the security of huge banks, but was never penalized. He now works as a journalist on an American

Daily newspaper. His first glimpse on this is that cases when two countries are in conflict are opportunities used by hackers. "They are opportunists that see this as a patriotic duty. These are typical attacks we see also on other cases of conflicts such as that in between Georgia and Russia or India and Pakistan", says Lamo.

Lamo: Lucky the attacks didn't go beyond the sites of institutions

The sites attacked by these hackers are considered by Lamo to be with low safeguards. He says the good side of this story is that these are not very important web-sites and that they didn't get to stretch their activities beyond these sites. "This category of hackers can make life of citizens miserable when they turn to some important sites for public", he says.

He thinks this will only help authorities to be aware on the weakness. "I can say that on a longer term these attacks will contribute to the development of the technology and to the security of the internet communication".

Institutions sluggish on their security responses

According to Serb and Kosovo authorities these hackers use the usual security loopholes that always exist on internet. Slobodan Marković, high advisor of the Serb Ministry Telecommunication says the 'cybernetic soldiers' are "no proud" for any one and that this is first and foremost a media exaggeration. "They are praised by nationalistic media and they like it", says he. Markovic downplays skills of these youngsters and says they simply use some tools that are easily available. "You can see from the language mistakes that they have not much of skills and education. "Sometimes their messages make no sense" he says.

"I think these acts ought to be considered as a public shame, but I don't think they deserve any attention thus they ought not to be punished", says Markovic. He suggests for the media to not have this epic-alike approach for these individuals. Some media in Kosovo and Serbia have reported about these attacks with an attitude of the winner and the attackers were glorified.

While the institutions struggle to upgrade the security on their web-sites, Hitman, Boomerang, cHs, Mr. Spy, Bagsy and Niko keep up their battle. Messages they leave after attacking are very similar with those used by politicians of both countries

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