

## Chinese hackers penetrate White House network

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By Demetri Sevastopulo in Washington

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Chinese hackers have penetrated the White House computer network on multiple occasions, and obtained e-mails between government officials, a senior US official told the FT.

The cyber attackers managed to penetrate the White House system for brief periods that allowed them to steal information before US government experts each time patched the system.

US government cyber experts suspect the attacks were sponsored by the Chinese government, although they cannot say for sure.

"We are getting very targeted Chinese attacks so its stretches credulity that these are not directed by government-related organisations," said the official.

The National Cyber Investigative Joint Task Force, a unit established in 2007 to tackle security, detected the attacks. The official stressed the hackers had accessed only the unclassified computer network, and not the more secure classified network.

"For a short period of time they successfully breach a wall, and then you rebuild the wall . . . it is not as if they have continued access," said the official. "It is constant cat and mouse on this stuff."

The US has increased efforts to tackle cyber security in the past year, especially since Chinese hackers penetrated the Pentagon last year, in an attack that obtained e-mails from the system serving Robert Gates, the defence secretary.

Separately, US government cyber investigations have determined that an attack this summer on the Obama and McCain campaign computer networks originated in China. Details of the attack were first reported by Newsweek. The secret service told the Obama and McCain campaigns that their networks had been comprised by foreign hackers.

The cyber attackers successfully downloaded large quantities of information from the campaign networks, which security agencies believed was an attempt to learn more about the contenders' policy positions.

A second US official said government cyber experts had determined that the attacks originated from China, but he cautioned that they could not determine whether they were related to the government.

"There is no doubt that foreign governments are actively targeting cyber space not only for sensitive information but to influence our most sensitive processes such as the US presidential election," said Sami Saydjari, head of the Cyber Defence Agency, a private company that advises government. "This underscores the need for president-elect Obama to take leadership in the cyber space race that is well under way."

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