31-Dec-16 World View — Hacking of Democratic National Committee computers – I blame the victim

Description

This morning's key headlines from GenerationalDynamics.com

- Obama and Putin play bizarre diplomatic game after expulsion of Russian spies
- It's almost always the victim's fault when computer networks are hacked

Obama and Pu ussian spies

Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin

So President Obama is pissed off because Russian hackers hacked into the Democratic National Committee, and so, just three weeks before he's leaving office, he ordered 35 Russian diplomats to leave the country.

Russia's president Vladimir Putin, who always permits his security people to threaten and harass American diplomats just for the fun of it, announced on Friday that Russia would not reciprocate. Instead, Putin invited the children of US diplomats in Moscow to a New Year's party in the Kremlin.

In the back and forth between Obama and Putin, I sometimes feel as if I'm watching the psychodrama of delusional politicians — a tale rooted in old grudges and revenge plots hatched in one-sided peace negotiations over Ukraine and Syria over eight long years — played out on the international stage. Russia Direct (5-May) and Belfast Telegraph

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- Barack Obama to Boomers: Drop dead! (23-Jan-2007)

It’s almost always the victim’s fault when computer networks are hacked

As a Senior Software Engineer who has developed many web sites, I’m pretty much in the camp of “blame the victim” when a company’s networks get hacked. At one company where I worked several years ago, I told my managers that they needed to encrypt the social security numbers in their database, and I even told them how to do it easily. I reminded them again after one of their servers got hacked. But the problem is that protecting your networks doesn’t generate sales, and Gen-X managers think that when a Boomer software engineer tells them what to do, they’d rather eat mud than do it.

So that’s one reason there’s a news story almost every week about another company whose networks have been hacked. I write about these every now and then.

However, the real monster hack, the mother of all hacks, was announced last year. Chinese hackers stole the personal and security information of many millions of Americas from the servers at the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and Department of the Interior. That hack included the SF-86 forms that everyone fills out when applying for security clearances.

There is little doubt that the Chinese military is still sifting through this massive amount of data and using it in a variety of ways — from simple blackmail and extortion of individuals to the creation of sophisticated “spear phishing” e-mail messages used to hack into networks of other agencies and corporations. This massive collection of espionage data will be a powerful weapon in any future military confrontations.

OK, so the DNC hack hurt President Obama’s feelings, while the OPM hack is putting the survival of the country at risk. So which is more important? Why, the DNC hack is more important, because President Obama’s feelings are always more important than the survival of the country. That’s why there have been no expulsions of Chinese diplomats.

I was really appalled when I read the stories about Hillary Clinton’s home server and other flagrantly stupid violations of common sense. Apparently the same stupidity pervaded all of the networks of the Democratic National Committee, so it’s not surprising at all that they got hacked. The CIA and other intelligence agencies have concluded that the perpetrators were linked to Russia’s government, and I believe them, but the DNC servers were apparently so poorly protected that the hacker could have been from anywhere.

I last wrote about the hack of the DNC’s computers in July. At that time, I made the following points:

- No self-respecting hacker would attack the Democratic party servers without also attacking the Republican party servers. However, there have been no leaks of Republican party e-mails.
- If the hacker’s intent was to help Trump beat Hillary, then releasing the e-mails was risky because it might have backfired, and created sympathy for Hillary.

So my personal conclusion is that most likely explanation of what happened was that the hacker tried

to hack both parties' servers, but succeeded only with the Democratic party servers, and then released the e-mails because that's what hackers do, and probably didn't care who won the election.

It's not always the victim's fault when computers are hacked, of course. Hacking is a huge worldwide industry, and hackers are always finding new ways to get around firewalls or to install malware or ransomware. A good idea is to keep separate backups of all your data, so that if you're hacked then you still have the backup. All you can do is reduce the probability that you'll be hacked, and for that you need to be totally paranoid. Lawfare (11-Mar-2016)

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- FBI investigates alleged Russian hacking of Democrats' servers (31-Jul-2016)
- Hackers steal thousands of employee W-2 tax documents from Seagate Inc. (10-Mar-2016)
- Speculation grows about China's purpose in giant OPM hacking breach (06-Jun-2015)
- Anthem health insurance data breach puts even non-customers at risk (02-Mar-2015)
- U.S. charges China's People's Liberation Army with cyber espionage (20-May-2014)

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