

China foreign minister rejects hacking accusations

CHRISTOPHER BODEEN, Associated Press



BEIJING (AP) — China's

foreign minister on Saturday rejected accusations that the country's military was behind massive hacking attacks on U.S. and other foreign targets and called for more international cooperation in policing the Internet.

Yang Jiechi is the highest-level Chinese official to comment on the claims made in a widely endorsed report last month by U.S. cybersecurity firm Mandiant which traced hacking attacks to a Chinese military unit based in Shanghai.

Although he did not address specific accusations, Yang described the claims as a politically motivated smear campaign.

"Anyone who tries to fabricate or piece together a sensational story to serve their political motive will not be able to blacken the name of others or whitewash themselves," Yang told reporters at an annual news conference held on the sidelines of the national legislature's annual session. "We hope the relevant parties will stop irresponsible attacks or accusations."

China's Defense Ministry has also poured scorn on the accusations and denied ever supporting hacking attacks. It issued its own counter-claims last month, saying that overseas computer hackers targeted two of its websites an average of 144,000 times per month last year, with almost two-thirds of the attacks originating in the United States.

Mandiant's report said that Chinese military-backed cyberspies infiltrated overseas networks and stole massive amounts of data from U.S. companies and other entities. The report was widely praised by cybersecurity professionals interviewed

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by The Associated Press, who said it provided the most detailed picture yet of China's state-sponsored hacking efforts.

Yang said that as a major target for hacking attacks, China supports international regulations under the United Nations to keep the Internet peaceful, free and secure. Such initiatives have met with a cool reception from the U.S. and other nations, largely because of China's reputation for maintaining the world's most thorough and sophisticated Internet censorship regimes.

In addition to patrolling the domestic Internet for signs of dissent, China blocks global websites such as Facebook and Twitter that it sees as providing a platform for organizing activities against the ruling Communist Party.

"We oppose turning cyberspace into a new battlefield or using the Internet as a new tool to interfere in other countries' internal affairs," Yang said.

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