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U.S.

Chinese Hackers Stole Large Amounts of Secret U.S. Submarine-Warfare Data, Military Says

U.S. military officials say secret plans to build a supersonic antiship missile were included in the theft



The USS Colorado is docked in Groton, Conn., on March 17. Chinese hackers allegedly stole data pertaining to submarine warfare. PHOTO: DANA JENSEN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

By *Gordon Lubold*

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WASHINGTON—The Defense Department’s inspector general is investigating a major security breach after Chinese hackers allegedly stole large amounts of sensitive data from a Navy contractor, according to military officials.

The Chinese hackers allegedly stole data pertaining to submarine warfare that included secret plans to build a supersonic antiship missile the U.S. military planned to install on American subs, according to officials. The hackers targeted an unidentified company under contract with the Navy’s Naval Undersea Warfare Center in Newport, R.I.

Military officials declined to say what contractor was involved, and Navy officials declined to comment generally on the breach.

A spokesperson from the Chinese embassy in Washington said it had no knowledge of the attacks. “The Chinese government staunchly upholds cybersecurity, firmly opposes and combats all forms of cyberattacks in accordance with law,” the person said.

It is unclear what the Chinese would have done with the data, but the People’s Liberation Army has long been known to try to exploit American military capabilities or “reverse engineer” systems to further its own ambitions in Asia and beyond. The incident was first reported Friday by the Washington Post.

The Chinese allegedly took hundreds of gigabytes of material associated with a sensitive program called Sea Dragon that included signals and sensor data and other information relating to mapping systems, officials said.

The theft comes as the U.S. is in a trade dispute with China, even as the Trump administration leans on Beijing to help pressure North Korea to halt its nuclear and missile program.

The theft of the data, which occurred earlier this year, is also raising questions about the ability of the U.S. military to safeguard data controlled by contractors and subcontractors, according

to U.S. officials.

Although the security breach is contained within the Navy, there is recognition that the ability of contractors to protect sensitive data is at severe risk, according to military officials.

Adm. Philip Davidson, the newly appointed head of U.S. Pacific Command, alluded earlier this year to the desire by the Chinese to target American military contractors to further their interests. Undersea warfare is one of the Chinese “key priorities,” he said during his own confirmation hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee in April. The Chinese already have new ballistic missile and attack submarines, Adm. Davidson said. “They’re also pursuing other technologies to give them better insights into our operations in the undersea domain,” he said.

Asked if they are stealing American military technology, Adm. Davidson said: “I believe they are stealing technology in just about every domain, and trying to use it to their advantage.”

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