

3 February 2012 Last updated at 13:59 ET

Anonymous gain access to FBI and Scotland Yard hacking call

Hacking network Anonymous has released a recording of a conference call between the FBI and UK police in which they discuss efforts against hacking.

The call, said to have taken place last month, covers the tracking of Anonymous and similar groups, dates of planned arrests and details of evidence held.

Anonymous also published an email, apparently from the FBI, showing the email addresses of call participants.

The FBI confirmed the intercept and said it was hunting those responsible.

"The information was intended for law enforcement officers only and was illegally obtained. A criminal investigation is under way to identify and hold accountable those responsible," it said in a statement.

London's Metropolitan Police's central e-crime unit said the matter was being investigated but that no operational risks had been identified.

It was unclear how Anonymous had managed to obtain the recording but a lawyer for one of the suspects discussed told the BBC it appeared to have been taken as an audiofile from an intercepted email, rather than having been eavesdropped on.

A comment on one of the Twitter accounts linked to Anonymous, [AnonymousIRC](#), said: "The FBI might be curious how we're able to continuously read their internal comms for some time now."

BBC security correspondent Frank Gardner says the recording, which was published on YouTube, will be highly embarrassing for the cyber crime detectives.

At one point an FBI agent thanks the Metropolitan police for their help with investigations, to which the British detective replies: "We're here to help. We've cocked things up in the past, we know that."

'Attention seeker'

According to the alleged leaked email, the 17-minute phone call took place on 17 January.

The email was sent to law enforcement officials in the US, UK, Sweden, Ireland and other countries, inviting them to "discuss the on-going investigations related to Anonymous, Lulzsec, Antisec, and other associated splinter groups".

The recording features the voices of about five men, apparently speaking from London, Los Angeles and Washington.

They begins with light-hearted conversation but move on to discussing the names of some of the people being tracked and their plans for legal action.

The online pseudonyms of suspects are included in the recording, but some of the real names appear to have been bleeped out.

Among those discussed are several British men accused of being behind cyber attacks in the US and UK, including Jake Davis and Ryan Cleary who were arrested last year.

The British detectives discuss delaying some arrests while US investigations are being carried out.

The police also refer to a 15-year-old who claims to have been behind an attack on online gaming site Steam last year, where the identities and credit card details of tens of thousands of users were accessed.

"He's a 15-year-old who's basically just doing this all for attention," says the British detective.

Anonymous is a loose collective of hackers, anarchists and pranksters which has targeted the websites of a range of governments, companies, law enforcement agencies and individuals in recent years.

Also on Friday, hackers operating under the Anonymous name took over the website of Greece's justice ministry, prompting officials to take the site down.

The hackers said the action was a protest against Greece's signing of a global copyright treaty and the government's handling of the economic crisis.

The website was replaced with a video of a figure wearing the symbolic white mask of Anonymous supporters, saying: "Democracy was given birth in your country but you have killed it."

Analysis

Leo Kelion Technology reporter

While it now appears that the FBI-Scotland Yard conference call was obtained through an intercepted email recording, recent research does suggest it is possible for hackers to intercept communications systems once thought secure.

Earlier this week, two researchers from Germany's Ruhr University Bochum announced they had reverse engineered two of the secret ciphers used to encode calls made by satellite phones. The pair said the devices - used in military campaigns and natural disaster areas - used algorithms that were "considerably weaker" than what was available elsewhere.

Another noted security researcher, Karsten Nohl, told a conference he had generated a code book which allowed calls made on mobiles using the GSM standard to be decrypted.

One solution is to make VoIP (voice over internet protocol) calls using the latest encryption techniques. But such conversations only remain safe if any recordings are similarly encrypted and the decryption codes safely guarded.

What is Anonymous?

Anonymous describes itself as an "internet gathering". The term is used to describe a collective of people who come together online, commonly to stage a protest.

The groups vary in size and make-up depending on the cause. Members often identify themselves in web videos by wearing the Guy Fawkes masks popularised by the book and film V for Vendetta.

Its protests often take the form of disrupting websites and services.

Its use of the term Anonymous comes from a series of websites frequented by members, such as the anarchic image board 4Chan.

These allow users to post without having to register or provide a name. As a result, their comments are tagged "Anonymous".

In the past, groups have staged high-profile protests against plans by the Australian government to filter the internet and the Church of Scientology.

Many Anonymous protests tackle issues of free speech and preserving the openness of the net.