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The New York Times Monday, August 18, 2008						Technology								
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'Hacktivists' of All Persuasions Take Their Struggle to the Web

By AMY HARMON
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This tactic is a variation of what is known in Internet security-speak as a "denial of service attack." An unusually large volume of requests will overwhelm the computer that is serving up the target's Web pages. This can cause legitimate visitors to see error messages instead of the pages they are seeking, and it can even crash the server computer.

"This isn't cyberterrorism," insisted Carmin Karasic, a Quincy, Mass., software engineer who designed the FloodNet program. "It's more like conceptual art."

The United States Defense Department does not agree. Alerted to a planned FloodNet attack on its public site on Mexican Independence Day, the agency responded by diverting the requests to a nonexistent Internet address, a spokesman said.

"If it wasn't illegal it was certainly immoral -- there are other constructive methods of electronic protest," the spokesman said.

Victims of such attacks are not the only ones to criticize the digital desperadoes. In their quest for support from a public already suspicious of hackers and anxious about on-line safety, some activists deride such methods as counterproductive.

Hackers faithful to the ethic of electronic exploration for its own sake deride Web-site intrusions as the work of "script kiddies," an epithet for people who break into systems by using schemes developed by others rather than by searching out new security holes of their own. Script kiddies have been responsible for a recent surge in attacks throughout the Internet -- of which politically motivated hacks are a small fraction.

Political Hackers Insist Their Motives Are Pure

But in E-mail and telephone interviews, several hackers promoting a political agenda -- all of whom refused to give their names -- insisted their motives were pure.


"We have hundreds of servers we could hack, and we don't," said Secretos, a Portuguese hacker in his early 20's whose group, the Kaotik Team, promotes independence for East Timor. "By contrary, we even help them to fix their bugs. The main objective of our hacking pages is to transmit the message. It is not, 'We are groovy, we have power.' "

John Vranesevitch, editor of Antionline, an Internet publication that tracks hacker activities, said the apparent political awakening among hackers reflects a generation's coming of age.

"We're starting to see right now the first generation of people who have grown up on the Internet," said Mr. Vranesevitch, who at 19 counts himself among that group. "These hackers are entering the ages where people are most politically active. This is their outlet."

Some are trying to make that outlet more accessible. A 26-year-old University of Toronto dropout calling himself Perl Bailey, after a computer language popular among Web developers, said he

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had earned a living as a software developer and had dabbled in not entirely legal computer exploration for several years. Now, he is writing a tool to arm computer novices with basic hacktivist techniques.

"After you reach a certain point, it feels like you are dressed up with nowhere to go," he said. "I want to make people doing questionable business dealings with countries that have no respect for human rights worry that someone who doesn't have a grade school education can sit down and go click-click and create havoc. To me that to me is very powerful."

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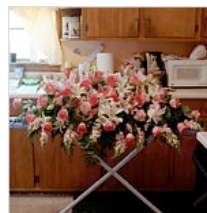
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