

A Call to Action - Reinforcing the Cyber Defenses from Battlefield to Family Basement

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The creation of the new Army Forces Cyber Command (ARFORCYBER) is a yet another tangible sign that victory on the cyber battlefield will be as critical to the defense of this nation as victories on the traditional battlefield. In a theater where firewalls and encryption are the new trenches and redoubts, our national civilian and military cyber infrastructure is under constant and unrelenting attack. Making the situation more challenging is the fact that our assailants are not an easily identifiable opposing force. Whether by the casual hackers in a coffee shop or the state-sponsored experts in a cutting-edge cyber war room, our network and information defenses will always be engaged. Into this fray the new cyber command leads a combined force of expertise, experience, technology and vision drawn from the various Army groups that have held the line so far.

Yet, it has proven that with all the firepower we can muster on the battlefield and all the technology we can muster in the cyber arena, the bulk of the burden of success will to the untrained eye appear to rest on the shoulders of a few technical experts. This couldn't be further from the truth. There are no innocent bystanders in this cyber conflict, except for the hardy few out there that do not use any form of digital or electronic device that relies on the internet or the airwaves for some aspect of their functionality. The fact is that not only are military and government personnel waging this battle, but their families, co-workers friends and neighbors as well. A cyber criminal or terrorist needs to only find one open door, one unprotected breach in the lines, to do significant damage. This damage could be to an individual through the loss of an identity, to a region through the shutting-down of critical infrastructure capabilities or to our military around the world through the loss of operational data that could lead to mission compromise and the loss of life.

As recent events have demonstrated, even our most dedicated efforts in keeping classified information secure can be undone by a single person inside the wire. Our soldiers and their families are being specifically targeted by scammers using the internet to lay their traps. In fact, a number of people in the nation's intelligence community were taken in by a fake Facebook identity that successfully convinced smart people who are paid to be suspicious that the pretty picture in the profile belonged to one of their own. In some situations this would simply be embarrassing. In other situations, the consequences could be far more severe.

Does this mean we need to build our individual cyber bomb shelters and hide out until the all clear siren wails? Absolutely not. Cyber security and information assurance simply require some of that good old fashioned common sense and attention to detail. The reality is we will prevail on the cyber battlefield if each and every last one of us is educated in the fundamentals of personal and work-related cyber defense. Everyone needs to go through cyber security boot camp. Everyone must be able to protect identities and data. This will be the most effective way of keeping the nation's cyber doors locked and barred against intruders.

The U.S. has the best trained soldiers in the world, but is the information assurance and cyber security training making its way to the home front? Can our service men and women deploy with the knowledge that their families' cyber doors are as well protected as the locked and alarmed entrances to their home? Again it comes down to the individual -- every last individual -- to be vigilant in the cyber watchtowers. This call to action is not a voice of doom, but simply the same approach as avoiding dark alleys and not taking candy from strangers. With the ARFORCYBER, the cognizance and cooperation of all relevant sources of expertise and technology, and the sharing of solid cyber security best practices with friends and family, we can keep the cyber wolves at bay and sleep soundly at night.