

UAE leads the way in cyber security

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DUBAI // The UAE is weeks away from establishing the first national authority for cyber security in the region, to combat online threats to military and critical installations.

Speaking at the Gulf International Cyber Security Symposium, Maj Gen Mohammed Al Essa of the Ministry of Defence, said that the three services of the armed forces were working closely on enhancing the security of digital communications systems to sustain a high readiness to face any threat to national or regional stability.

"The UAE introduced the necessary legislation and regulations which culminated in a special federal decree issued by the President to establish a national authority for cyber security," Gen Al Essa said.

The new authority, National Electronic Security Authority (Nesa), is in the final stages of establishing itself, with matters of operational procedures and manpower being laid out, sources have said.

Federal Decree No 3 for 2012, establishing Nesa, states that it will be affiliated with the Supreme National Security Council.

It will be financially and administratively independent, with full legal competence and executive and control powers as needed to practise its work.

Nesa will have its headquarters in the city of Abu Dhabi and branches and offices may be established inside and outside the UAE.

According to retired Maj Gen Khaled Al Buainain, former commander of the UAE Air Force and president of the Institute of Near East and Gulf Military Analysis, the authority is essential to enhancing cyber security.

"The UAE is the most advanced nation in the [Arabian] Gulf and the Arab world with regards to its cyber-technology infrastructure, however, having the most advanced infrastructure makes you the most vulnerable because of the rapidly changing and developing advances in cyber warfare," Gen Al Buainain said.

Nesa will not only monitor the front line of the UAE's war against cyber attacks, but also protect the country's communications networks and continue to develop, modify and use devices required in the field of electronic security.

The authority also aims to enhance the efficiency of the exchange of information across the country.

"The UAE Armed Forces and security agencies have come a long way in the past ... decades and have seen considerable progress on all fronts, especially in enhancing defensive capabilities in the area of cyber space," Gen Al Essa said, adding that regional and international cooperation is the key to achieving cyber security.

"The UAE firmly believes that cyber security can be achieved only through cooperation with the peace-loving countries."

Nesa will also be responsible for proposing and implementing the UAE's national policy on electronic security, developing a national plan to confront any risks, threats or attacks. It will coordinate with the authorities concerned and will spearhead operations to combat cyber crimes in the country.

During yesterday's summit, military experts underlined the importance of cyber defences.

Former US military central command chief, Gen John Abizaid, described cyber warfare as the newest and fifth realm of war. "When man first existed there was land warfare as the first realm of war, then he created ships and there was sea warfare, around the time of World War One, the third realm of air warfare was created and, during the Cold War, space warfare became the fourth," Gen Abizaid said.

"Now we face a new threat and a fifth realm, one that is rapidly developing and growing, cyber warfare."

Lord John Reid, a former British defence minister, told the audience that governments the world over faced challenges in cyber warfare due to the compartmentalising of various departments that should be working together.

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