

India Still Unsure on Need for Cyber Command

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Indian military leaders hope Indian Defence Manohar Parrikar will consider establishing a dedicated cyber command. (Prakash Singh / Getty Images)

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NEW DELHI — The Indian Ministry of Defence remains undecided on whether to establish a dedicated cyber command despite a push by the three military services to improve defense against network attacks from China and to build offensive cyber capabilities, a senior Indian Army officer said.

A draft proposal to establish a cyberwarfare tri-command has awaited MoD action for more than a year, the officer said, and the service hopes new Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar will take up the matter soon.

“There is a need for creating synergy by a single headquartered cyber command,” said defense analyst Rahul Bhonsle, a retired Army brigadier general. “This will ensure militarywide doctrinal unity, synergize existing resources and coordinate defensive and offensive capabilities to direct these at the potential adversary.”

The cyber command proposal was prepared in consultations with the chiefs of the Air Force, Army and Navy after Chinese hackers broke into the computer systems of the Eastern Command headquarters in Vishakapatnam, where India's Arihant nuclear submarine was undergoing sea trials, in 2012, a Defence Ministry source said. In 2013, the Defence Research and Development Organisation's networks were breached by Chinese hackers, the source added.

MoD officials have declined to explain why no action has been



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taken on the issue.

Defense analysts and military officers said India needs to prepare to defend itself against such attacks —and also build offensive cyber capabilities.

“The cyber threat has the potential of being elevated to the level of a cyberwar in the event of a war between nations,” said analyst Venkataraman Mahalingam, a retired Army brigadier general. “Activities in cyberspace are an inherent part of day-to-day functioning of the militaries. Consequently, the psychological impact of a cyber attack on the soldier and military establishments would be tremendous. It is a threat which will impact the minds of commanders.”

The Indian Army officer said the advent of high-tech weapons makes cyberwar part of conventional warfare because these vital technology-driven systems are vulnerable to cyber threat and must be protected.

While no MoD official would officially say if there is a proposal to create a cyber tri-command, one ministry official quietly said that it remains undecided whether to build an offensive cyber arsenal.

“The presence of cyber weapons can be very dangerous because no one can predict its diffusion,” he said, adding that no one can ensure that a cyber arsenal can always hit the target. ■

Email: vraghuvanshi@defensenews.com.

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