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Snowden: U.S. Cyber-Warfare Program Could Provoke War With Russia

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Former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden is shown on the cover of the September 2014 issue of WIRED magazine.

Fugitive whistle-blower Edward Snowden says that U.S. security services were developing a cyber-warfare program that would automatically detect foreign hacking attacks and strike back, but could misfire and provoke a war between Russia and the U.S. with unpredictable consequences.

The program, called MonsterMind, was the final straw that prompted Snowden to take classified NSA documents and leak them to journalists, after years of his growing disillusionment of what he saw as U.S. security services' "evil" spying methods and routine "deceiving" of the public, Snowden said in an interview published in Wired magazine on Wednesday.

Snowden told Wired that while being briefed about an enormous and secretive NSA data storage facility in Bluffdale, Utah — capable of holding more than a yottabyte of data and some 500 quintillion pages of text, according to the interview — he learned about the new

program that would constantly look for traffic patterns indicating a foreign cyber-attack.

Because the program is fully automated with no human involvement and because cyber-attacks can be "spoofed" — often being routed through third countries — MonsterMind can misidentify the attacker and hit back at the wrong target, Snowden said.

"You could have someone sitting in China, for example, making it appear that one of these attacks is originating in Russia," he was quoted as saying. "And then we end up shooting back at a Russian hospital. What happens next?"

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