

Experts Say Russian Website Routinely Watches You Via Your Webcam

By [Allison Quinn](#)

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The U.K.'s data protection watchdog has warned that a Russian-based website is tapping into insecure webcams to broadcast scenes from thousands of unsuspecting people's daily lives, as British troops training in Poland have been ordered to leave their personal electronic devices at home amid a "very clear" threat of Russian espionage.

The warnings, perhaps the latest confirmation of the resourcefulness of Russian hackers and the advanced nature of Russian cyber espionage, came just two days after Germany's domestic intelligence chief said in comments to Reuters that the country's government and business computers were being confronted by an increasing number of cyber attacks launched by Russian and Chinese intelligence services.

In a blog posted to the website of the U.K.'s Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)

on Wednesday, the agency said that a new website had been set up "that allows people to watch live footage from some of the insecure cameras across the world." The statement refrains from disclosing the name of the website.

"The footage is being collected from security cameras used by businesses and members of the public, ranging from CCTV networks used to keep large premises secure, down to built-in cameras on baby monitors," the statement said.

The Daily Mail, which reports to have found the website in question but did not disclose the web address, reported on Wednesday that scenes were being broadcast on the website from 600 different web cameras, showing scenes of "children sleeping in their cots" and even "an elderly woman sitting in her living room."

The report notes that such footage provides burglars and other criminals with the perfect opportunity to strike when they know their victims are not at home.

According to the ICO, the Russian website has been able to show such scenes simply by finding the default passwords of webcam manufacturers on the Internet. Anybody who has a webcam but fails to change the password is susceptible to being spied on by hackers.

Meanwhile, British troops have been ordered not to bring mobile phones or computers with them to upcoming military exercises in Poland over fears that Russian cyber spies will be on the prowl, The Telegraph reported, citing a military newsletter.

Russia is of particular concern amid ongoing political tensions over the Ukraine crisis, which has pitted Moscow against the West and triggered aggressive posturing between NATO and Russia's Defense Ministry.

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Calum Jeffray, a research analyst at the Royal United Services Institute, was cited by The Telegraph as saying it was difficult to distinguish between simple hacker attacks and carefully orchestrated cyber attacks by Russia's intelligence services.

"There are several Russian-linked hacking groups, but it's almost impossible to determine to what extent they are supported by the state," Jeffray said, The Telegraph reported.

In late October, U.S. security firm FireEye issued a report saying a sophisticated group of Russian hackers was spying on NATO — likely at the behest of the Russian government.

Contact the author at a.quinn@imedia.ru

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