

After Ominous Hacker Threats, New York Premiere of 'The Interview' Canceled

The New York premiere of *The Interview*, a Sony Pictures comedy about the assassination of North Korean President Kim Jong-Un, has been canceled and a source said one theater chain had scrapped plans to show it, after threats from a hacking group.

The hackers, who said they were also responsible for seizing control of Sony Corp's computer system last month, on Tuesday warned people to stay away from cinemas showing the film starring James Franco and Seth Rogen, and darkly reminded moviegoers of the Sept. 11 hijacked plane attacks on the United States in 2001.

"We recommend you to keep yourself distant from the places at that time," the hackers wrote.

"(If your house is nearby, you'd better leave.)"

A spokeswoman for Landmark, which was to have hosted a premiere of the film at its Sunshine Cinema in Lower East Side, New York, on Thursday, said by email that the screening had been canceled, but did not explain why.

A Sony spokeswoman had no immediate comment on the threat.

Sony executives had earlier told theater owners it would not pull the film but added they would not object if they decided to cancel screenings, according to a person familiar with the discussions.

Carmike Cinemas, operator of 278 theaters in 41 states, informed Sony late on Tuesday that it would not show the film, the person said. Carmike executives were not immediately available for comment on Tuesday evening, a spokesman said.

An official at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and another U.S. security official said investigations had found nothing concrete so far to substantiate the threat.

“At this time there is no credible intelligence to indicate an active plot against movie theaters within the United States,” the DHS official said.

Police departments in Los Angeles and New York, however, said they were take the warning seriously.

Los Angeles Police Chief Charlie Beck told a news conference that officers would be taking extra precautions to make sure movie theaters were “as safe as we can make them”. He said the threats were “done to put terror” into U.S. audiences.

The North Korean government has denounced the film as “undisguised sponsoring of terrorism, as well as an act of war” in a letter to U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

Internet news company BuzzFeed reported that Franco and Rogen had canceled all planned media appearances on Tuesday, the day they were scheduled to appear at a BuzzFeed event. Representatives for the actors did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

U.S. security agencies are investigating a hacking group that carried out the cyber attack in November that severely damaged the movie studio’s network and published damaging internal emails, unreleased films and employee data online. The group published what appeared to be more internal emails on Tuesday.

Marc Maiffret, chief technology officer of cybersecurity firm BeyondTrust, said he believed it was the first time a film screening had been pulled in the wake of a high-profile cyber attack.

“If they pulled the premier because of the hacking it’s troubling. The moment you start reacting is the moment you give them more power,” said Maiffret.

Sony is already reeling from the disclosures in documents released by the hackers, which have publicly exposed internal discussions important to the company's future.

Reuters has not been able to verify the authenticity of the more than 100 gigabytes of documents that have been distributed via the Internet. The company has confirmed that at least some are authentic, apologizing for the loss of sensitive employee data and some comments made by executives.

The newest file published on Tuesday appeared to be emails from Sony studio chief Michael Lynton. One email showed Lynton consulted with a senior official in the U.S. State Department in June this year, days after North Korea threatened "merciless countermeasures" over the release of the film.

Several rounds of leaks of emails have prompted apologies for disparaging remarks that executives made about celebrities. The leaks have included a James Bond script, high-quality digital copies of films that have yet to be released and private employee data.

Sony has also been sued by self-described former employees who accuse Sony of failing to properly protect their personal data. Sony declined comment on the lawsuit.

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