

Cyberwars and Rumors of Wars: Sony Cancels 'The Interview'

When it comes to the last days, Jesus spoke of wars and rumors of wars but where do cyberwars fit into the end-times paradigm? After all, a hacker attack on our nation's infrastructure could cripple our power supply or worse.

In an usual and high-profile example of the power hackers have to disrupt commerce, Sony Pictures Entertainment is engaged in a battle like one we've never seen before.

Hackers—who broke into Sony's computer systems in early December, stole and distributed embarrassing private emails between executives and producers, and accessed the private information of employees—threatened terrorist attacks if the movie giant dared to release a comedy called *The Interview* on Christmas day.

The film shows the assassination of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. American intelligence officials are pointing to the North Korean government's role in attacks on Sony computers. Some industry watchers are calling it an act of war.

Movie theaters across the country pulled *The Interview* from holiday showings after terror threats from hackers, leaving Sony little choice but to kill the film.

"In light of the decision by the majority of our exhibitors not to show the film *The Interview*, we have decided not to move forward with the planned Dec. 25 theatrical release," the company said in a statement. "We respect and understand our partners' decision and, of course, completely share their paramount interest in the safety of employees and theatergoers."

Darren Hayes, an expert in computer forensics and security who

has been a consultant on legal cases involving digital evidence, says Sony's decision to cancel its release of *The Interview* movie has set an unsettling precedent.

"One can only imagine that the threats of violence by North Korea were backed up by government intelligence, which prompted Sony to pull the screening of this movie," says Hayes, who is also an Assistant Professor and Director of Cybersecurity at Pace University's Seidenberg School of Computer Science and Information Systems in New York.

"This should be a wake-up call for everyone that the recent escalation of cyberattacks will threaten the lives of Americans," Hayes continues. "North Korea may be hesitant to launch ground warfare but a cyberattack can be even more devastating."

Hayes points to the Obama administration's work to bolster our critical infrastructure as many expect cyberattacks will inevitably threaten our safety on public transportation and perhaps our water system or electric grid.

"The repercussions of a nation state-sponsored attack on the entertainment industry took all of us by surprise and it will prompt companies, like Sony, to potentially censor future movies in addition to reviewing their network security protocols," Hayes says. "This of course is not the first high-profile, politically-motivated attack on Sony; in 2011 Sony's PlayStation Network was breached by hacktivists who stole the personal information of 77 million customers."

Hayes' conclusion: Unfortunately, he says, the United States is left more vulnerable compared to many other countries as it would be illegal for the U.S. government to hack back on behalf of a company.