



Pete Hoekstra on Sony Attack: NKorea 'Had Help in Doing This'

By Todd Beamon

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The Obama administration formally accused North Korea of hacking Sony Pictures Entertainment on Friday, but former House Intelligence Committee Chairman Pete Hoekstra suggested to Newsmax that Iran might have been involved in the massive breach of the company's computer operations.

"They had help in doing this," said Hoekstra, a Republican who chaired the committee from 2004 to 2007. "There's no doubt that there's North Korean involvement, but because of the capacity of information that has been stolen, it's hard to believe that it was only North Korea.

"Iran's very good at this stuff," he added. "It could very easily be Iran. It wouldn't at all be a surprise to see that the independent contractor that was helping North Korea very easily could have been someone like Iran."

In the most detailed accounting to date, **the FBI said** that it had enough evidence to conclude that Pyongyang was behind the punishing breach, which resulted in the disclosure of tens of thousands of leaked emails and other materials.

"North Korea's actions were intended to inflict significant harm on a U.S. business and suppress the right of American citizens to express themselves," the agency said in a statement. "Such acts of intimidation fall outside the bounds of acceptable state behavior."

The FBI cited technical similarities between the Sony break-in and past "malicious cyber activity" linked directly to North Korea.

The hacking escalated to terrorist threats that prompted Sony to cancel the Christmas Day release of the movie "The Interview." The comedy is about a plot to assassinate North Korea's leader, Kim Jong Un.

President Barack Obama said on Friday that Sony "**made a mistake**" in shelving the film's release, saying that it was inappropriate for companies to be intimidated by hackers.

"We cannot have a society in which some dictator in some place can start imposing censorship here in the United States," Obama said at White House news conference.

"We will respond," the president added, without providing specifics. "We will respond proportionally and we will respond in a place and time and manner that we choose."

Obama added: "I wish they had spoken to me first. We cannot have a society in which some dictatorship someplace can start imposing censorship."

But Sony Pictures Entertainment CEO Michael Lynton disputed that, telling CNN that he spoke to a senior White House adviser about the situation.

"The president, the press and the public are mistaken about what happened," Lynton said.

The company later said in a statement that "we had no choice" but to pull the film because several large theater chains refused to show it.

"Without theaters, we could not release it in the theaters on Christmas Day," the company said.

Actor George Clooney, who directed two pictures for Sony, slammed Hollywood power players for not signing a petition he and his agent circulated supporting the film's release.

"We're talking about an actual country deciding what content we're going to have," he said. "This affects every part of business that we have."

"We cannot be told we can't see something by Kim Jong Un."

On Capitol Hill, Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein, the outgoing chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, **cited the scope of the Sony hacking** as one reason why she considered it terrorism.

She referenced recent breaches at such companies as Target, Home Depot, Ebay, and JPMorgan Chase.

"What's different to me about this attack is the monumental size of it, and there is extortion involved with it," Feinstein, who represents California, told Jake Tapper on CNN. "In other words, the North Koreans are saying, 'Unless you do this, we will do that.'"

"This is where it becomes extraordinarily dangerous," she said.

The situation is even more perilous because of the uncertain world of cyberspace, said retired Army Gen. Wesley Clark.

"What we haven't arrived at — legally, politically or technically — is understanding what all these cyber capacities mean and where the dividing lines are," he told Shepherd Smith on Fox News. "But this is the kind of an act, by a state, that suggests — with the threats accompanying it — it's really close to being something that could be retaliated for."

Rep. Ed Royce, the GOP chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, called on Congress to impose new economic sanctions on North Korea.

"The new Congress must quickly pass the North Korea sanctions bill that the House sent to the Senate last July," the Republican, who also represents the Golden State, said. "The administration's failure to impose the type of tough financial sanctions that hit the Kim regime hard in 2005, before they were unwisely ended, is more indefensible by the day.

"The regime must feel the great economic pressure these sanctions brought, and could bring again," Royce said.

Sen. David Vitter requested that President Obama host a joint screening of "The Interview" with Congress and then discuss ways the administration could respond strongly to the attack.

"North Korea can't have any reason to think that bullying and intimidation will threaten American principles like freedom of speech," the Louisiana Republican said. "Bringing all members of Congress to watch this movie together would send a strong, clear message that America will not be intimidated."

Hoekstra told Newsmax that one strong way for the United States to retaliate was by having the National Security Agency "take down part of the North Korean cyberspace.

"I don't think that would be a problem for NSA. The NSA is the best at what they do. They could do it in such a way that attribution would be difficult.

"But the real message that comes out of this is that the federal government and the private sector have to get much more serious about developing the proper cyber security tools," he added.

To that end, corporations must work with the NSA, Hoekstra said. He served eight terms in the House of Representatives before stepping down to run unsuccessfully for Michigan governor in 2010.

"This is why you need to enhance the cooperation between the government and the private sector," Hoekstra said. "But until that happens, the private sector has to take the lead in recognizing that for a private company to withstand an attack by a nation-state is going to be very difficult.

"That's why companies also have to start putting together a framework in which they feel comfortable working with the NSA," he said.

But the prospect can be a stressful one, said Julian Sanchez, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute.

"There's somewhat of a tension in having the NSA being both an information-assurance agency" and "an intelligence agency," he told Newsmax. "They have this sort of conflicting missions of trying to help secure Americans — primarily governmental, primarily American networks — and at the same time a mandate to attack and compromise networks, which creates a kind of tension.

"It would be nice if somehow the NSA could make all networks secure," Sanchez later added, "but ultimately that's not that likely."