
US CONTRACTOR CHARGED WITH LEAKING INTELLIGENCE ON RUSSIA HACKING

- 07.06.2017

Financial Times (06 June 2017)

A 25-year-old US intelligence contractor has been charged with leaking classified information that alleges Russia attempted to hack into voting machines in the days running up to the 2016 presidential election.

The National Security Agency document, published by The Intercept, an online news outlet, describes a cyber attack by Russian military intelligence on a company that sells US voting machines and a so-called phishing effort against more than 100 local election officials just days before the November vote.

The contractor, Reality Winner, was arrested at her home in Augusta, Georgia, on Saturday shortly after The Intercept published parts of the NSA document. An affidavit filed by the Justice Department in the case said Ms Winner, who has been charged under the Espionage Act, worked for Pluribus International Corporation at a government facility in Georgia.

The case is the first criminal charge filed in a leak investigation during the Trump administration, but the number of leak prosecutions increased significantly under then-President Barack Obama.

But the contents of the leak could raise new questions for President Donald Trump. The arrest comes as congressional Democrats have called for a stepped up probe of links Russia enjoyed with members of the Trump campaign team ahead of last years election.

While US intelligence and law enforcement has investigated Russian hacking of Democratic party servers and contacts between Mr Trumps campaign and Russian officials, the NSA document is the first to allege the Kremlin attempted to change the 2016 vote count.

Ms Winner was charged in a federal court in Georgia on Monday with removing classified material from a government facility and mailing it to a news outlet, the Justice Department said in announcing the arrest.

A conviction can carry a sentence of up to 10 years in prison, although conventional leak cases have typically resulted in prison terms of one to three years.

Ms Winner had top secret clearance, and the court was told once Ms Winner was identified as a possible source of the leak, she admitted to printing the classified intelligence, removing the document and mailing it to a news outlet.

Releasing classified material without authorisation threatens our nations security and undermines public faith in government, said Rod Rosenstein, the deputy US attorney-general. People who are

trusted with classified information and pledge to protect it must be held accountable when they violate that obligation.

The Washington Post reported the investigation was triggered when The Intercept asked another intelligence contractor for comment on a classified document.

The Post said officials then scrambled to determine who had recently printed out the document. A search identified six employees but focused on Ms Winner because she was the only one who had been in email contact with the news organisation, according to the affidavit filed by the FBI.

The New York Times said Intercept reporters seeking comment on the leak provided the authorities with a copy of the document. This allowed US intelligence officers to conclude the document had been scanned, and a copy creased and folded suggesting they had been printed and hand-carried out of a secured space, the affidavit said.

The Intercept, which was still running its report on Tuesday under the headline top-secret NSA report details Russian hacking effort days before 2016 election, is an online publication co-founded by Glenn Greenwald, the journalist who first reported on the mass surveillance by US government agencies revealed by NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden.

Kaynak/Source: