

15 nations agree to start working together to reduce cyberwarfare threat

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A group of nations -- including the United States, [China](#) and [Russia](#) -- have for the first time signaled a willingness to engage in reducing the threat of attacks on each others' computer networks.

Although the agreement, reached this week at the United Nations, is only recommendations, Robert K. Knake, a cyberwarfare expert with the Council on Foreign Relations, said it represents a "significant change in U.S posture" and is part of the Obama administration's strategy of diplomatic engagement.

Among other steps, the group recommended that the U.N. create norms of accepted behavior in cyberspace, exchange information on national legislation and cybersecurity strategies, and strengthen the capacity of less-developed countries to protect their computer systems.

When the group last met in 2005, they failed to find common ground. This time, by crafting a short text that left out controversial elements, they were able to reach a consensus.

"It is a step forward," said an Obama administration official familiar with the discussions, who was not authorized to comment on the record and spoke on the condition of anonymity. "There's been an increased understanding of the international need to address the risk."

For about the past decade, U.S. efforts to work with global partners in cyberspace have centered on combating crimes online. This left aside the more sensitive issues of state involvement in or responsibility for cyber intrusions into critical computer systems.

The Russians proposed a treaty in 1998 that would have banned the use of cyberspace for military purposes. But the United States has not been willing to agree to that proposal, given that the difficulty in attributing attacks makes it hard to monitor compliance.

Others in the group are [Britain](#), [France](#), [Germany](#), Estonia, Belarus, [Brazil](#), [India](#), [Israel](#), Italy, Qatar, [South Korea](#) and [South Africa](#).