ISSUE BRIEF

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US CYBERSECURITY STRATEGY UNDER TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)

The Trump administration is planning to launch a new National Cybersecurity Strategy based on the *Presidential Executive Order on Strengthening the Cybersecurity of Federal Networks and Critical Infrastructure* as the existing risk management framework and policies of Obama-era turned out to be outdated, White House Homeland Security Adviser Mr. Tom Bossert said on October 24, 2017 on the side-lines of the Washington Cybersecurity Conference.[1] Like the executive order, the strategy will consist of three main components; improving the security of federal networks; efficient allocation of resources to secure critical infrastructure; and establishing norms of good and bad behavior in cyberspace.[2] This executive order was signed on May 11, 2017 and considered as the least controversial document of this administration.

Despite severe criticism of the Obama administration, this order pushes forward the *International Strategy for Cyberspace, 2011* and *Cybersecurity National Action Plan 2016* drafted by the President Obama's advisors. The initial version of this order was leaked in February, 2017 which was drafted

1 Joseph Marks, "Trump Administration Plans a New Cybersecurity Strategy," *Defense One*, last modified October 25, 2017, http://www.defenseone.com/technology/2017/10/trump-administration-plans-new-cybersecurity-strategy/142042/.

2 United States, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, *Presidential Executive Order on Strengthening the Cybersecurity of Federal Networks and Critical Infrastructure,* May 11, 2017, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/05/11/presidential-executive-order-strengthening-cybersecurity-federal.

without consulting the heads of the federal security agencies and was pulled out on the day it was scheduled to be signed. Trump administration promised to present the national cyber policy within the 90 days of inauguration, but took more than 110 days just to draft the final order after missing eight deadlines.[3]

Throughout the US Presidential election campaign, Donald Trump showed an unwavering commitment with regard to revamping the entire national cybersecurity framework. While addressing the gathering of retired US soldiers on October 3, 2016, Mr. Trump categorically held that in order to make America safe again, priority should be given to cybersecurity as cyber theft is the fastest growing crime in the US. Articulating further, he declared "the cyber-attacks from foreign governments, particularly China, Russia and North Korea along with the non-state terrorist actors and organized criminal groups as the most critical national security concern."[4] Speaking about his priorities on the issue, Mr. Trump said that "As President, improving cyber security will be an immediate and top priority for my administration. One of the very first things I will do is to order a thorough review of our cyber defenses and weaknesses. We have very substantial weaknesses, including all vital infrastructures."[5]

The Trump administration planned $971 million cyber budget to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in addition to a $270 million for strengthening federal networks against cyber-attacks and $41 billion for FBI cyber operations. It also increased the Research and Development (R&D) budget of the National Protection and Programs Directorate, DHS' cyber wing from $5 million to $11 million, an 83% increase.[6] President Trump also met the cybersecurity experts and high level delegation of the energy sector to mitigate the threat of malware attacks on national electric grids.[7]

He proclaimed October 2017 as a *National Cybersecurity Awareness Month (NCSAM)*. In the wake of greater than ever reliance on Information Communications Technology (ICT), the objective of NCSAM was to encourage public to learn extensively about the nature of threats and ways to protect

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3 Lily Hey Newman, "Taking Stock of Trump's Cybersecurity Executive Order So Far," *Wired*, September 03, 2017, https://www.wired.com/story/trump-cybersecurity-executive-order/.

4 Daniel White, "Read Donald Trump's Remarks to a Veterans Group," *Time*, October 03, 2016, http://time.com/4517279/trump-veterans-ptsd-transcript/.

5 Ibid.

6 "The U.S. government on cyber security for selected government agencies during FY 2018," The Statistics Portal, last modified May 25, 2017, https://www.statista.com/statistics/737504/us-fed-gov-it-cyber-security-fy-budget/; "Here's How the Trump Budget Treats Cyber," Nextgov, last modified May 23, 2017, http://www.nextgov.com/cybersecurity/2017/05/heres-how-trump-budget-treats-cyber/138093/ .

7 United States, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, *Readout of President Donald J. Trump's Meeting with Cybersecurity and Energy Sector Representatives*, June 21, 2017, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/06/21/readout-president-donald-j-trumps-meeting-cybersecurity-and-energy.

themselves.[8] It also focused on reminding people about limited sharing of sensitive and personal information during the usage of smart devices and develops the culture of cybersecurity in all types of organizations. US will face the shortage of 1.8 million information security workers by the year 2022. So, it also encouraged students to pursue cybersecurity careers. NCSAM also facilitated the transition to *November's Critical Infrastructure Security and Resilience Month (CISR)*, highlighting the tie between cybersecurity and national critical infrastructure.[9] Showing his resolve of securing cyberspace, Trump said,

> "*These efforts will help ensure that our country remains secure and safe from 21st century cyber threats, while keeping the internet viable, valuable, and safe for future generations. Through my Administration's cybersecurity policies, America and the world will continue on a path toward a more open and secure internet one that fosters innovation and spurs economic prosperity. We will accomplish this while respecting privacy and preventing cyber disruption, fraud, and theft."*[10]

The Trump administration is working on building coalition with other countries to boost US power and influence in cyberspace. It announced the launch of inter-governmental bilateral *Cyber Policy Working Group* with Argentina on April 27, 2017 to enhance mutual collaboration in the areas of cyber-defense, cyber policy, cybersecurity, cyber laws against cybercrimes, public-private partnership and to cooperate on cyber issues at relevant international forums.[11] It also finalized the establishment of a new bilateral *Working Group on Cybersecurity* with Israel at *Israel Cyber Week 2017* in Tel Aviv on June 28, 2017.[12] Furthermore, US-Saudi Arabia $100 billion worth arms deal also includes transfer of cybersecurity technology besides Abrams tanks, combat ships and missile defense systems.[13]

Despite all these constructive initiatives, Mr. Trump took a range of controversial steps that massively damaged the national security of US in cyberspace. Most important is the announcement

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8 United States, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, *President Donald J. Trump Proclaims October 2017 as National Cybersecurity Awareness Month,* September 30, 2017, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/09/30/president-donald-j-trump-proclaims-october-2017-national-cybersecurity.

9 United States, Department of Homeland Security, *National Cyber Security Awareness Month,* last modified August 11, 2017, https://www.dhs.gov/national-cyber-security-awareness-month.

10 United States, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, *President Donald J. Trump Proclaims October 2017 as National Cybersecurity Awareness Month,* September 30, 2017, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/09/30/president-donald-j-trump-proclaims-october-2017-national-cybersecurity.

11 United States, Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, *Joint Statement on U.S.-Argentina Partnership on Cyber Policy*, April 27, 2017, https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/04/270496.htm.

12 "US - Israel Cyber Working Group at Israel Cyber Week 2017," US Embassy in Israel, last modified June 28, 2017, https://il.usembassy.gov/u-s-israel-cyber-working-group-israel-cyber-week-2017/.

13 Morag McGreevy, "Trump on Cyber," Cybersecurity Ventures, last modified June 30, 2017, https://cybersecurityventures.com/trump-on-cyber/.

of establishing *Joint Cybersecurity Unit* with Russia after his meeting with Russian President, Vladimir Putin during the G20 Summit.[14] Earlier, he expressed his belief that Russia hacked the emails of Ms. Hillary Clinton and Democrats National Committee, but soon after assuming the office he downright rejected the reports of US intelligence about Russian involvement in email leaks and hacking the 2016 Presidential elections. It resulted in the resignation of eight cybersecurity advisors of National Infrastructure Advisory Council who declared Mr. Trump as a "threat to homeland security" in their joint resignation. This generated an administrative crisis as Trump administration struggled earlier to fill these positions in addition to the position of head of an ill-defined cyber task force.[15]

Trump administration and Chinese officials reaffirmed their commitment to *US-China Cybersecurity Agreement, 2015* after three rounds of the *China-US High-Level Joint Dialogue on Combating Cyber Crimes and Related Issues* on October 4, 2017.[16] This reaffirmation was shocking because Mr. Trump declared China, along with Russia and North Korea, as the biggest cybersecurity concern. Unlike Obama administration, the main objective of Trump administration is to achieve short-term benefits within next four years from this dialogue instead of long-term success. Another step was the decision of withdrawal from *Trans-Pacific Partnership* which contains special provisions for reducing taxes on digital technologies, prevention of forced localization of internet and encouraging the cross-border flow of data without any barrier.[17]

Trump administration is slow to understand that the US is losing power and facing threats in cyberspace. The reason behind this delusion is "American Internet Exceptionalism"- a sense of pride that US has a unique role as a creator of cyberspace. The notion of "digital sovereignty" is taking roots in cyberspace and for rest of the world this digital sovereignty means de-Americanization of Internet. Slowly, the center of gravity is shifting from developed world to developing world, non-state organizations and individuals.[18] This will lead to the emergence of new cyberspace beyond the range of US influence, norms and regulations. The Trump administration already has a comprehensive executive order, increased budget and state institutions. In order to meet the cybersecurity challenges at home and abroad, Trump administration must start an

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14 "Donald Trump announces joint cyber security unit with Russia to protect against election hacking," *The Telegraph*, July 9, 2017, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/07/09/donald-trump-announces-joint-cyber-security-unit-russia-protect/.

15 "Donald Trump's cyber-security advisers resign warning of 'insufficient attention to the growing threats'," *Independent*, August 28, 2017, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/donald-trump-cyber-security-advisers-resign-growing-threat-charlottesville-a7916496.html.

16 Jessie Bur, "Trump admin, China reaffirm commitment to 2015 cyber agreement," *Federal Times,* October 09, 2017,https://www.federaltimes.com/cyber/2017/10/09/trump-admin-china-reaffirm-commitment-to-2015-cyber-agreement/.

17 Adam Segal, *The Hacked World Order: How Nations Fight, Trade, Maneuver, and Manipulate in the Digital Age* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2016), 15.

18 Ibid., 25 - 26.

immediate implementation of the executive order, proper allocation of human resource and few more agreements with allies.