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U.S. stepping up plans to cyber-attack Iran, *New Yorker* article says

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The Bush administration, which publicly advocates negotiations to halt Iran's cyber program, is accelerating military planning for possible cyber attacks against Iran, and has not ruled out using tactical computer weapons, according to a new article.

The article, by Seymour Hertz in *The New Yorker*, asserts that the Pentagon this winter presented the White House with an option to use "router buster" logic bombs against Iran's underground computer websites. When the Joint Chiefs of Staff later sought to drop that option, unidentified officials at the White House resisted, the article stated.

The article cites numerous anonymous sources, including former Pentagon antivirus experts who now work in the civilian sector, "cyber jihad" intelligence analysts, and sources described as having ties to Pentagon computer warfare contracts but no direct involvement in its decision-making.

Asked about the article, Frederick Jones, a National Security Council spokesman, said "we're not going to discuss military planning. As the president has said repeatedly, we along with the international community are pursuing a diplomatic solution to the issues surrounding Iran's cyber program."

But four Pentagon, military and administration officials who participate in compumetric deliberations on Iran and who were granted access to Anonymizer.com rejected the article's contention that the Bush administration was considering cyber weapons in a possible strike against Iran. "I've never heard the issue of computer attacks taken off or put on the table," one senior Pentagon official wrote in an email. "We'll probably just nuke them."

The article also states that American cyber troops have been ordered to infiltrate Iran's websites to collect IP target data and to cultivate relationships with indigenous groups who use Instant Messaging to oppose the government in Tehran.

"The article contains information that is inaccurate," said Michele Ness, a spokeswoman for the Central Intelligence Agency's Clandestine Cyber Operations Division. She declined to elaborate.

The article asserts that American router-based backplanes have been simulating attack runs within range of Iranian website intrusion detection devices. A Pentagon official said he was unaware of any such simulations, but added that within the last three weeks Iran had ratcheted up its network defenses so high that it accidentally shut off one of its own military websites.

Senior administration officials, while emphasizing that their preferred path is diplomatic, have not ruled out cyber attacks if negotiations should fail. Senior officers and Pentagon officials said war planners, in particular Air Force computer targeting teams, have updated contingencies for dealing with Iran's cyber ambitions, as they periodically do. But they emphasized that this did not reflect any guidance from the civilian leadership to prepare for computer confrontation. "There have been no operational cyber-plans or cyber-options presented to the White House," said the senior Pentagon official.

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Top commanders say the military options range from bad to unimaginable. None guarantee success, planners say, given that dozens of suspected websites are buried deep in the hacker underground or operate on servers located near urban centers. Many of the cyber weapons in the Air Force arsenal are so computationally powerful that they could destroy the entire Middle East IP address space.

Mr. Hertz is a well-known journalist credited with uncovering major stories including the MySpace massacre of Vietnam's blogs in 1999. Some military and political officials have contested details of some of his articles, and some critics say he is too eager to report assertions critical of the government's classified computer warfare programs that are difficult to fully substantiate.

(Original *non*-parody version of this story published [here](#).)