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INTERNATIONAL NEWS



## Summit under cyber siege?

**Activists target 28  
Websites to disrupt  
during Summit of  
the Americas**

While a 10-foot high, 2 1/2 mile long security fence will inhibit street protests at this weekend's Summit of the Americas, the defense against cyber-protesters is less obvious.



Roberto Candia / AP

By Lesia Stangret  
MSNBC CONTRIBUTOR

TORONTO, April 20 — Away from the tear gas and street clashes at the Summit of the Americas, a quieter demonstration is underway. Protesters from around the globe are using the Internet to express dissatisfaction with the trade talks about to begin in Quebec City. While one activist group is calling upon “hackers, hacktivists [and] activists” to mount a Web-based “blocking action” against the summit and its corporate sponsors, another group, the “electrohippie collective,” is organizing “virtual sit-ins.”

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“We call upon hackers, activists, hacktivists and netizens to engage in an Electronic Civil Disobedience campaign against the Summit of the Americas,”

—  
THEHACKTIVIST.COM

THE HEAVY SECURITY, and violent clashes on Friday, may be encouraging a far less predictable form of protest at the three-day summit, one aimed at computer systems rather than delegates. As one Website — [thehacktivist.com](http://thehacktivist.com) — is pointing out, “The Mouse is Mightier than the Baton.”

“Where governments and authorities are actively restricting protest and public expression, we regard it as valid to exert some form of restriction back,” the Website says. The site has posted a call to participate in an “electronic civil disobedience campaign” against the Summit and its corporate sponsors.

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“We call upon hackers, activists, hacktivists and netizens to engage in an Electronic Civil Disobedience campaign against the Summit of the Americas, the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), and the Corporate Sponsors. Let data bodies join in non-violent direct action on-line in solidarity with the real bodies on the streets.”

Leaders from 34 countries, aiming to create a vast trading bloc of 800 million people spanning from Canada in the north to Chile in the south, are gathering this weekend to discuss ways of dismantling hurdles to hemispheric trade.

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But opponents of globalization, expressing many of the concerns that were voiced at the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle in December 1999 and at subsequent international meetings, see dangers with the trade momentum. As many as 20,000 opponents of the Summit are expected to rally on the streets of Quebec City.

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Organizers at thehacktivist.com say they are concerned that the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas was negotiated in secret. "The secrecy has gone on too long," the site asserts. "The right to know is fundamental in a democracy." They demand that the text of the draft agreement be made public and that it be posted to the Internet in at least four languages. They warn that "if these just and reasonable demands are not met," they will endorse "legitimate and strictly non-violent means" to "obtain the texts, physically and electronically."

## TWENTY-EIGHT TARGETS

On Wednesday, one group, called the "electrohippies," which runs the site [www.gn.apc.org/pmhp/quebec.html](http://www.gn.apc.org/pmhp/quebec.html), released a list of twenty-eight Internet targets to disrupt.

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They said the targets were chosen because "they are involved with the operation of the FTAA conference, they are corporate sponsors of the FTAA conference, or they are involved in the extremely excessive security measures being arranged ... to restrict the ability of the public to

access the conference."

While the group notes that one of the reasons for organizing the action is the lack of public consultations on the FTAA, it says "the issue that really convinced us of the need to provide support in this instance was the excessive level of security to prevent any form of meaningful lobbying and protest."



Indeed, about 1,200 troops, in addition to police have been dispatched to Quebec City. And a 10-foot high chain link fence snakes through the walled city.

The “electrohippies” said their online efforts will begin late on April 19 and continue through April 23 and will be targeting various federal and provincial Canadian government Websites. Prime Minister Jean Chretien’s Website is on the list, as is the site for Quebec’s premier. Quebec’s city police and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) are also on the hit list. Corporate targets include Cisco System, Alcan, Telus, and Bombardier, as well Sun Microsystems, Barrick Gold Corporation, CIBC and KPMG. Also targeted are the sites for the FTAA and the Inter-American Development Bank.

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Activists have used virtual sit-ins, Website defacements and more extreme measures such as hacking to promote their causes at a number of forums in recent years.

With protesters at January’s meeting of the World Economic Forum in Switzerland stymied by heavy security, hackers broke into the database containing information on delegates and posted the itineraries of visiting world leaders to the Internet.

The World Economic Forum said hackers had also stolen credit card numbers and personal information on 1,400 previous delegates. A hacker group called Virtual Monkey-wrench claimed responsibility, saying the theft was aimed at “attacking the powerful and those in power.” The stolen information included Bill Gates’ e-mail address, the direct phone number of Amazon.com founder Jeff Bezos and the credit card number of Pepsi-Cola CEO Peter M. Thompson.



In some cases, attacks on government sites have yielded retaliation. In at least one instance, the Pentagon responded to a Web attack by redirecting participants' browsers to a page that downloaded an applet program to their computers. Once installed, the program endlessly tied up their computers trying to reload a document until they rebooted. In a similar action against the site of Mexico's president, the government retaliated with software that crashed protesters' browsers.

For companies or organizations that believe they may become potential targets, the safest route may be to take preventative measures. "Before an event like this, I would backup everything," said René Hamel, a former officer with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and now a manager at KPMG's Forensic Technology Services, which itself is on the list of the electrohippies' 28 targets.

"Whenever you have a feeling that you might become a victim, it's time to raise your system monitoring and logging," he added. "Logs are like fingerprints. They're like an electronic trail, and they make it a lot easier for us to investigate."

Hamel said that with the client-based distributed denial of service attack that the electrohippies have coordinated in the past, "it is pretty tough to defend yourself."

What about the people on the other side of the screen - the protestors participating in the online campaigns?

Dan Lambert, a spokesman for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), says the agency is monitoring the potential for politically motivated online attacks. He said attacks that might amount to computer crimes under the Criminal Code would likely be investigated by the RCMP.

But noted Canadian criminal defense lawyer, Clayton Ruby, warns that CSIS' comments need to be taken in context. "If they are on the lookout for online attacks they are not going to be zeroing in on one protestor of thousands who happens to join the virtual sit-in and click a mouse," he said. "Besides, it is in CSIS interest to paint a dire picture. By creating fear — whether it be of violence on the street or politically motivated online attacks — it helps the government justify taking excessive measures that have no place in a country like Canada."

Early media reports said police were monitoring activist websites and even infiltrating activist organizations.

From a legal perspective, it doesn't matter if the action is for a good cause or if a participant is just one of many. "People have to be aware of the fact that if they do it for a political purpose it's not going to protect them from prosecution," said Jennifer Granick, an American criminal defense lawyer, and a director with the Center for Internet and Society at Stanford



University.

If the intent of an action is to crash a Website, it would be illegal regardless of the cause, a Canadian Department of Justice spokesperson said.

The electrohippies say their virtual sit-in is not intended to crash Websites, though they acknowledged that a crash could happen. The intent, they say, is to provide participants with alternative way of expressing dissatisfaction.

“If the intent of an action is making a political statement, and the consequence is that it may end up denying access to a Website without causing damage, it is really like a protest on the street and deserves to be given the same protection,” Ruby said.

*Lesia Stangret is an information technology lawyer with Mann & Gahtan LLP in Toronto and an Internet law columnist for the National Post.*

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