

# U.S. Accuses 7 Iranians Of Cyberattacks On Banks And Dam

By Thomas Brewster

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The U.S. has unsealed charges against seven Iranian hackers, accused of attacks on a range of American banks and a dam just outside New York City. Attorney General [Loretta Lynch](#) and FBI director James Comey announced the indictments, naming Iranian residents who worked for computer security companies linked with the Iranian government: ITSecTeam (ITSEC) and Mersad Company (MERSAD).

The named individuals are: Ahmad Fathi, Hamid Firoozi, Amin Shokohi, Sadegh Ahmadzadegan, Omid Ghaffarinia, Sina Keissar and Nader Saedi. The men have been charged with [distributed denial of service \(DDoS\) attacks on major U.S. banks](#), under an operation that was later dubbed Op Ababil, perpetrated by a group going by the name of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Cyber Fighters. The attacks, which generated a sizeable 140Gbps, were launched in across 2011 and 2013, taking a slew of major American commercial banks offline, including [Bank of America](#) and [J.P. Morgan Chase](#) , as well as the Nasdaq stock exchange. As far back as mid-2014, U.S. security researchers had linked Iran to the group. More than 46 companies were said to have been targeted.

Lynch said the attacks cost victims "tens of millions of dollars" over 176 days. Hundreds of thousands of Americans could not get onto online accounts.

One defendant, Firoozi, was accused of breaking into a small dam in Bowman Avenue Dam in Rye Brook, New York. That attack did not see any physical damage caused, but could have controlled flow rates and posed a clear danger to Americans, Lynch said. As with many previous attacks on critical infrastructure, as [detailed by FORBES this week](#), the hackers sought to carry out surveillance rather than wreak destruction.



WASHINGTON, DC - MARCH 09: U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch testifies during a hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee March 9, 2016 on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. Lynch announced charges against Iranian hackers, alongside FBI director James Comey. (Photo by Alex Wong/Getty Images)

"They threatened our financial wellbeing," Lynch said. "We will not allow any group or nation... to undermine fair competition in the international market."

Comey, in talking about how the individuals might be detained, said there "is no place safe in this increasingly small world". "We will continue to pursue hackers affiliated with terrorists and nation states... more charges, more sanctions, anything we can do to make these attacks more accountable," added John Carlin, assistant attorney general.

Iranian hackers have been an increasing menace to U.S. businesses and public bodies in recent years. Since the US and Israel reportedly combined forces to launch the Stuxnet attacks on Iranian infrastructure, setting the nation's development of nuclear weapons back at least two years, [Iran has been keen to build a strong digital warfare capability](#). Economic sanctions imposed by the west are also believed to have played a part in increasing aggression from Iran's digital sleuths.

America, meanwhile, has been increasingly keen to name nation state hackers targeting U.S. companies. Yesterday, Chinese national Su Bin pled guilty to working with two accomplices to pilfer data a number of major defense contractors, including [Boeing](#). In 2014, American officials openly blamed North Korea for a devastating attack on Sony Pictures. A number of Chinese hackers also remain on the [FBI Cyber Most Wanted](#) for their

alleged roles in cyber espionage on U.S. businesses, as do [individuals linked with the Syrian Electronic Army](#), thanks to indictments unsealed this week.

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