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Tech Decoded

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Hello. As the US-Israel war with Iran intensifies, Western officials and cyber-security experts have warned of a heightened risk of cyber-attacks by pro-Iranian groups. Below, I unpack the threat and ask how likely a major breach is to occur. We also look at an important (and free) privacy tool few people seem to have heard of, explore the role of AI in modern warfare and check out a mouse-sized robot.

THE DOWNLOAD

'Hacktivists' vow revenge as war widens

Pro-Iranian hackers often exaggerate their capabilities. Credit: Getty Images

Iran is recognised as one of the world's most active and aggressive cyber actors, so the warnings from Western governments and cyber-security experts this week were hardly a surprise.

The US Department of Homeland Security said it was working to monitor and thwart potential threats against American interests. And the UK's National Cyber Security Centre urged British businesses with offices or supply chains in the Middle East to "act now", warning that providers of critical infrastructure like airports and power stations could be targets.

Pro-Iranian "hacktivists" often exaggerate their capabilities on channels like X and Telegram, and the impact of their attacks tends to be limited compared with those by powers like Russia and China.

But there have been notable successes. Take the huge distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks against nearly 50 US financial institutions between 2011-13, when a flood of internet traffic was used to disable bank websites and prevent customers from accessing their accounts. Then there was the **hacking of Donald Trump's presidential campaign** in 2024.

Cyber-security firm Sophos said it had seen "a significant escalation in rhetoric and online activity from Iranian-linked" hacktivists since the start of the conflict. Most of the claimed attacks have been "low-complexity" operations such as website defacements or doxxing, where private information is leaked online.

But Rafe Pilling, director of threat intelligence at Sophos, fears they could become more "arbitrary" and "destructive", with "wiper" malware used to target vulnerable organisations and destroy data.

The scope of attacks is also likely to widen beyond Israel to include more Gulf countries and potentially the US, as Iran seeks to increase the economic impact of the conflict.

On Wednesday, the Israeli Defense Forces said they bombed a compound in Tehran housing Iran's cyber warfare headquarters but it is unclear what impact this will have had on the regime's ability to conduct attacks. Scores of cyber groups operate on behalf of the country, often via affiliated proxies, and organisations are being advised to remain vigilant.
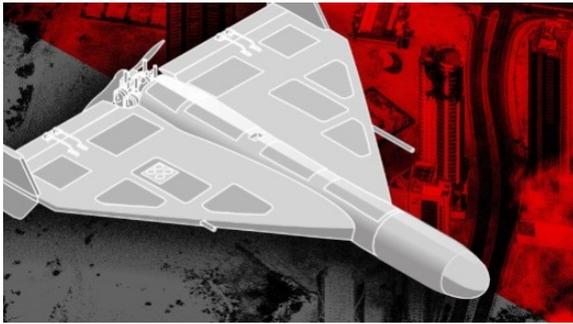
The download: *Iran-linked hackers are following a familiar playbook as they ramp up their threats online. Whether they follow through remains to be seen.*

Middle East conflict

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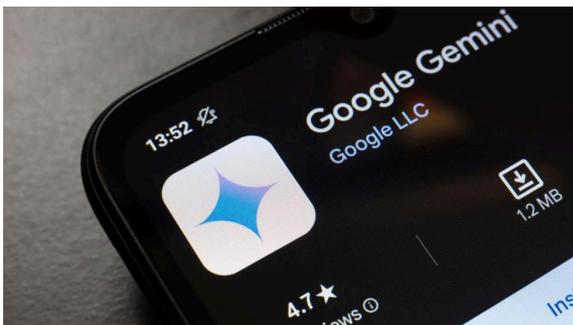
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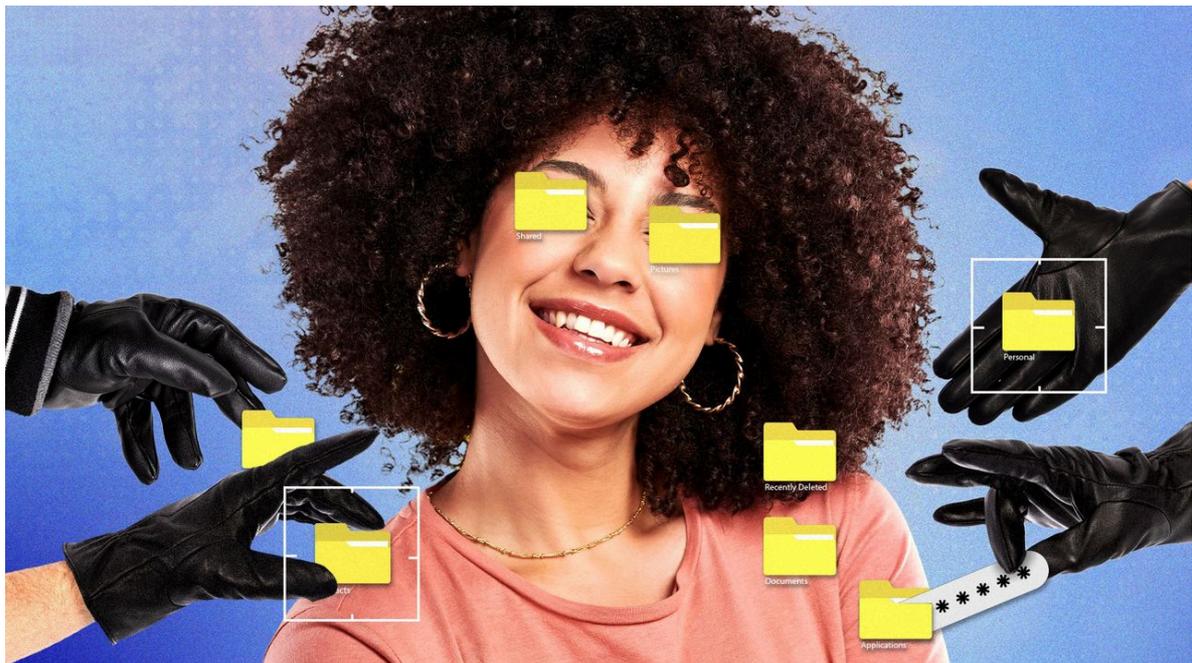
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SOMETHING DIFFERENT

# A privacy tool most of us don't know about

The free tool removes information about you from Google search results. Image credit: Serenity Strull/ BBC

Did you know an untold number of companies are selling your name, home address, phone number and more online? Data brokers, as they're called, hand

your information to anyone who wants it dirt cheap, from telemarketers to identity thieves. But there's a free tool from Google that makes this information harder to find. The problem is a lot of people don't seem to know about it. **Thomas Germain investigates**.

PODCAST PICK
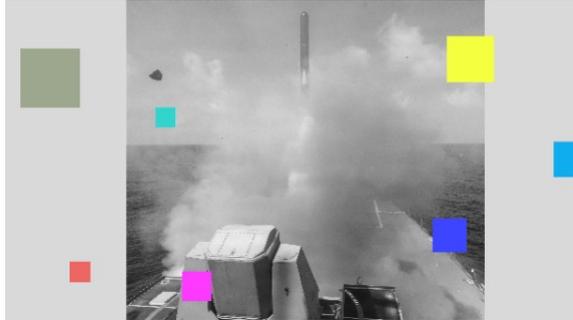
Is AI running modern warfare?

After Anthropic's row with the Pentagon, we look at why the US military needs AI – and who gets to decide how it's deployed.

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And finally...

A mouse-sized robot has been developed to inspect the Large Hadron Collider, the world's largest and most powerful particle accelerator. The device – which is 3.7cm (1.5in) wide – travels autonomously through the narrow pipes making up the 27km-long (17 miles) facility on the Swiss-French border. **Check it out here**.

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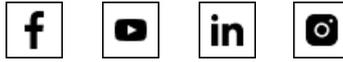
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