

Pentagon: IS hacker killed in US strike also was recruiter

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Washington: The Islamic State group hacker killed in a U.S. airstrike in Syria this week had been recruiting sympathizers in the West to conduct "lone wolf" terrorist attacks, and his death eliminates a "significant threat" to the U.S., a military official said Friday.

Air Force Col. Patrick Ryder, spokesman for Central Command, told reporters at the Pentagon that the hacker, British citizen Junaid Hussain, also was responsible for the recent release of personally identifying information on about 1,300 U.S. military and government employees.

Ryder apparently was referring to the posting online about two weeks ago of certain personal details of U.S. service members and government employees by a group calling itself the Islamic State hacking division. The group urged attacks on the individuals listed.

Asked about the incident at a Pentagon news conference Aug. 12, Gen. Ray Odierno, who was the Army chief of staff at the time, said he doubted that it amounted to a cyberattack.

"But I take it seriously, because it is clear what they are trying to do, and so it is important for us to make sure that all our force understands what they are trying to do, even though I believe they've not been successful, what they're claiming," Odierno said.

Ryder said that beyond the significance of that incident, Hussain was seen by the U.S. military as a key IS operative.

"We have taken a significant threat off the battlefield," Ryder said, speaking by phone from Central Command headquarters in Florida.

"He was involved in actively recruiting ISIL sympathizers in the West to carry out lone wolf-style attacks," he said, "... and specifically sought to direct violence against U.S. service members and government employees."

Ryder said Hussain was killed Monday in an airstrike in Raqqa, the city the Islamic State group considers its capital. Ryder said Hussain was the only person killed in the airstrike.

- AP