The hacker group Anonymous has waged a cyber war against Russia. How effective could they actually be?

March 1 2022, by Jennifer Medbury, Paul Haskell-Dowland

Credit: Screenshot/Twitter

A spate of cyber attacks has affected Ukraine's digital systems since Russia's invasion began. It soon became clear Russia's "boots on the ground" approach would be supplemented by a parallel cyber offensive.

Last week Ukraine called on its citizens to take to their keyboards and defend the country against Russia's cyber threat. At the same time, a

campaign was underway among the hacktivist collective Anonymous, calling on its global army of cyber warriors to target Russia.

> The Anonymous collective is officially in cyber war against the Russian government. [#Anonymous](#) [#Ukraine](#)
>
> — Anonymous (@YourAnonOne) [February 24, 2022](#)

Who is Anonymous?

Anonymous is a global activist community that has been [operating since at least 2008](#). It brings a potential for significant cyber disruption in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The group has previously claimed responsibility for acts of hacktivism against a wide range of targets, including against [big businesses](#) and governments. Anonymous's activities are often [aligned to major events](#), and the group claims to have an "anti-oppression" agenda.

The collective has no defined structure or leadership. Acts are simply undertaken under the banner "Anonymous," with some reports of limited [rules of engagement](#) being used to guide actions (although these are likely fluid).

As Anonymous is a movement, with no formal legal status or assets, responsibility for actions shifts to individuals. But there remains a [fundamental issue of attribution](#) in cyber security incidents, wherein it's difficult to determine a specific source for any attack.

What are they threatening to do?

On February 16, Anonymous TV posted a video message with a series of

recommendations and threats. Leaning on the stereotypical "hacker" image, the masked speaker issues a serious warning to Russia: "If tensions continue to worsen in Ukraine, then we can take hostage […] industrial control systems. Sole party to be blamed if we escalate on that will be the same one who started it in the very first place with troop buildups, childish threats and waves of unreasonable ultimatums."

> [#Anonymous](#)—Message to Russia & Western allies over Ukraine
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> "If tensions continue to worsen in [#Ukraine](#), then we can take hostage... industrial control systems." Expect us. [#Russia](#) [#NATO](#) [#U.S.](#) [#UkraineCrisis](#) [pic.twitter.com/1QhLJv7St8](#)
>
> — Anonymous TV

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