News Item

Exclusive: Ex-NSA Cyberspies Reveal How They Helped Hack Foes of UAE | Reuters

By Christopher Bing & Joel Schectman

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> Two weeks after leaving her position as an intelligence analyst for the U.S. National Security Agency in 2014, Lori Stroud was in the Middle East working as a hacker for an Arab monarchy.
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> She had joined Project Raven, a clandestine team that included more than a dozen former U.S. intelligence operatives recruited to help the United Arab Emirates engage in surveillance of other governments, militants and human rights activists critical of the monarchy.
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> Stroud and her team, working from a converted mansion in Abu Dhabi known internally as "the Villa," would use methods learned from a decade in the U.S intelligence community to help the UAE hack into the phones and computers of its enemies.
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> Stroud had been recruited by a Maryland cybersecurity contractor to help the Emiratis launch hacking operations, and for three years, she thrived in the job. But in 2016, the Emiratis moved Project Raven to a UAE cybersecurity firm named DarkMatter. Before long, Stroud and other Americans involved in the effort say they saw the mission cross a red line: targeting fellow Americans for surveillance.
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> "I am working for a foreign intelligence agency who is targeting U.S. persons," she told Reuters. "I am officially the bad kind of spy."
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> The story of Project Raven reveals how former U.S. government hackers have employed state-of-the-art cyber-espionage tools on behalf of a foreign intelligence service that spies on human rights activists, journalists and political rivals.
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