Army of hackers targets the Swedish government, Sarah Palin and credit card giants in WikiLeaks 'Operation: Payback'

By Colin Fernandez and Laura Caroe
Last updated at 11:33 AM on 9th December 2010

- Visa, PayPal, Amazon also come under attack through the night
- Hackers also bring down Swedish government internet site
- Sarah Palin's personal credit card account and website targeted
- 5,000 'hacktivists' believed to be behind electronic onslaught

Computer hackers have sent two of the world’s biggest credit card companies into meltdown in revenge for cutting off payments to the WikiLeaks website.

The attack was launched by a shadowy international group called ‘Anonymous’ which said MasterCard and Visa had been targeted for freezing the account of the whistleblowing site.

The devastating blow to the credit card giants came on one of the busiest online shopping days of the year.

Hackers also targeted online payment system PayPal, Amazon and a Swiss bank over the WikiLeaks row.

The Swedish government's website was also brought down this morning after a fresh wave of cyber attacks together with former US vice presidential hopeful Sarah Palin.
Up to 5,000 hackers have combined under the 'Operation Payback' umbrella to target Visa and Mastercard

Mrs Palin's website, SarahPAC.com, has been targeted as well as her personal credit card information.

SarahPAC aide Rebecca Mansour told ABC news: 'No wonder others are keeping silent about (WikiLeaks founder Julian) Assange's antics.'
Operation: Payback was formed in September to target groups opposed to internet piracy

'This is what happens when you exercise the First Amendment and speak against his sick, un-American espionage efforts.'

Palin sparked fury among WikiLeaks supporters when she urged the US government to pursue Assange in the same way it sought Taliban leaders.

Yesterday, a six-hour stoppage on the Mastercard secure code system is thought to have affected hundreds of thousands of shoppers worldwide and highlights how vulnerable the world’s computer systems are to attack.

Last night Visa website was also taken down for a period after it came under attack.

It is thought just a few dozen ‘hacktivists’ launched the electronic onslaught, which was taken up by thousands of other supporters.

The ‘distributed denial of service’ (DDoS) attack involved around 5,000 computers bombarding the website’s host computers with requests for information, causing them to crash.
WikiLeaks has been publishing classified U.S. diplomatic cables, to the fury of Washington authorities.

They have lobbied to cut off all support for the website which they are desperate to shut down.

Yesterday a spokesman for Anonymous, calling himself ‘Coldblood’, a 22-year-old computer programmer based in London, said: ‘Websites that are bowing down to government pressure have become targets.'
'As an organisation we have always taken a strong stance on censorship and freedom of expression on the internet and come out against those who seek to destroy it by any means.

‘We feel that WikiLeaks has become more than just about leaking of documents, it has become a war ground, the people versus the government.

‘The idea is not to wipe them off but to give the companies a wake-up call.’

In a further communique online, Anonymous warned: ‘We will fire at anything or anyone that tries to censor WikiLeaks, including multibillion-dollar companies such as PayPal.’

The spokesman added that the group’s intention ‘was to be a force for chaotic good’.

Anonymous has previously been linked to attacks on websites belonging to the Church of Scientology and the music industry.