

ARE THE CHINESE SPYING ON OUR SPYING?

Danger Room reports that our nation's spooks have moved beyond their concern about Chinese chips and other "counterfeit" (read, sabotaged) parts in war toys to grow concerned about Chinese parts in our telecom system.

Rep. Mike Rogers (R-Mich.), chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI), and the committee's top Democrat, Rep. Dutch Ruppersberger, announced on Thursday that their committee will look into the potential for Chinese telecommunications equipment – like commercial servers, routers and switches – to help China spy on the United States.

"The investigation is to determine the extent to which these companies provide the Chinese government an opportunity for greater foreign espionage, threaten our critical infrastructure, and further the opportunity for Chinese economic espionage," Rogers tells Danger Room. "Through this investigation we will come to a better understanding of the threat so we are better prepared to mitigate."

The concern is that Chinese companies could tamper with equipment for use in civilian communications infrastructure, allowing China to insert Trojan horses that eavesdrop on targets in the United States. Chinese companies already make a number of telecommunications products sold in the U.S., but several have bowed out of deals to acquire large stakes in American telecom companies after facing U.S. government pressure.

Rogers says the investigation is an outgrowth of a review he commissioned

shortly after becoming chairman of the committee in January.

Now, I don't think Rogers and Ruppertsberger are wrong to be concerned. The Chinese have every incentive to steal what they can from us, and their country's corporations have always seemed willing to help out.

But I wonder if the concern doesn't go beyond just China's ability to affirmatively spy on select targets in the US and the rest of the world. To what degree are Rogers and Ruppertsberger—the latter of whom represents the NSA—worried about the US monopoly on wiretapping switches? And is it possible that China will be able to create bottlenecks—as we did in the 1990s—to make it easier to wiretap? To what degree has China's ascendance threatened the Anglo-American superiority in wiretapping?