Actor Naming Conventions

Different threat intelligence vendors or security firms use their own naming conventions to track and share intelligence about malicious actors. All of the naming conventions can quickly become very confusing, as different organizations will use different names for the same groups, and some vendors may have multiple names for one single group – and this issue isn't going to go away anytime soon.

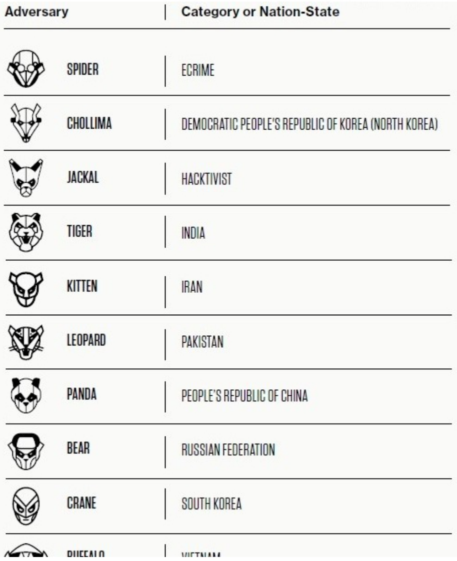
Another issue with naming and attribution, in general, is that threat actors tend to share tools, so that indicators from one group may be the same as multiple other groups. Some groups even try to use infrastructure in other countries to throw security researchers off, as well as copying the tactics and techniques used by other groups.

In this lesson, we're going to covering the two most popular naming conventions created by CrowdStrike and FireEye/Mandiant.

FireEye CROWDSTRIKE

CROWDSTRIKE

CrowdStrike likes to categorize APTs based on the countries they operate out of, especially nation-state hacking teams, by using animals. For example, "Panda" is the umbrella term for all nation-state activity tied to the People's Republic of China. Non-nation-state adversaries are categorized not by location but by intention; for instance, activist groups like the Syrian Electronic Army, are categorized as "Jackal," which expresses intent and motivation instead of country. Below is a diagram showing the adversary animal and the affiliation the group has (E-Crime, Hacktivist, or Nation State). We will cover these in more detail below and provide examples of different groups. If you want to read more about the malicious actors that CrowdStrike tracks, read this blog post by them, titled "Meet The Adversaries".



Adversary	Category or Nation-State
SPIDER	ECRIME
CHOLLIMA	DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA (NORTH KOREA)
JACKAL	HACKTIVIST
TIGER	INDIA
KITTEN	IRAN
LEOPARD	PAKISTAN
PANDA	PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA
BEAR	RUSSIAN FEDERATION
CRANE	SOUTH KOREA
BUFFALO	VIETNAM

Nation-State-Based Adversaries

Below we have listed the countries and their associated animals, as stated by CrowdStrike. We have also included some examples of APTs that have been linked to those countries.

Bear = Russia (Such as Fancy Bear)

Buffalo = Vietnam

Chollima = North Korea (Such as Stardust Chollima)

Crane = South Korea

Kitten = Iran (Such as Refined Kitten)

Leopard = Pakistan (Such as Mythic Leopard)

Panda = China (Such as Goblin Panda)

Tiger = India (Such as Viceroy Tiger)

Non-Nation-State Adversaries

The below names are given to hacktivist groups and groups that conduct eCrime, such as ransomware attacks and using banking trojans.

- **Jackal** = Activist groups
- **Spider** = Criminal groups, such as Mummy Spider, the actors behind the global malware campaign Emotet (more on this in the Global Malware Campaigns section at the end of this domain).

MANDIANT

FireEye/Mandiant have taken a different approach and use the term "APTxx" where xx is a number, such as APT28 or APT39. These numbers actually have a meaning behind them – they are taken from internal country codes, providing a more concise and neat naming convention (*but hey, CrowdStrike names sound much cooler – sorry Mandiant!*).

Nation-State-Based Adversaries

China = APT1, APT2, APT3, APT10, APT19, APT20, APT30,

🇨🇳 APT40, APT41

🇮🇷 Iran = APT33, APT34, APT35, APT39

🇰🇵 North Korea = APT37, APT38

🇷🇺 Russia = APT28, APT29

🇻🇳 Vietnam = APT32

Financially-Motivated Cybercrime Groups

Under FireEye/Mandiant's naming convention, instead of using the term "APT" for cybercrime groups, the prefix "FIN" is used, short for "Financial", referring to the motivation for cybercrime actors. An example of this naming convention in use is FIN7, a threat group that has primarily targeted the U.S. retail, restaurant, and hospitality sectors since mid-2015, often utilizing point-of-sale malware to steal funds.

- **FIN4**
- **FIN5**
- **FIN6**
- **FIN7**
- **FIN8**
- **FIN10**

Unclassified Groups

Groups that are currently undergoing analysis are referred to as "UNC" or Unclassified under the FireEye/Mandiant naming convention. Groups that have not been attributed to a country, or their motives are still unclear, will be placed into this group temporarily.

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