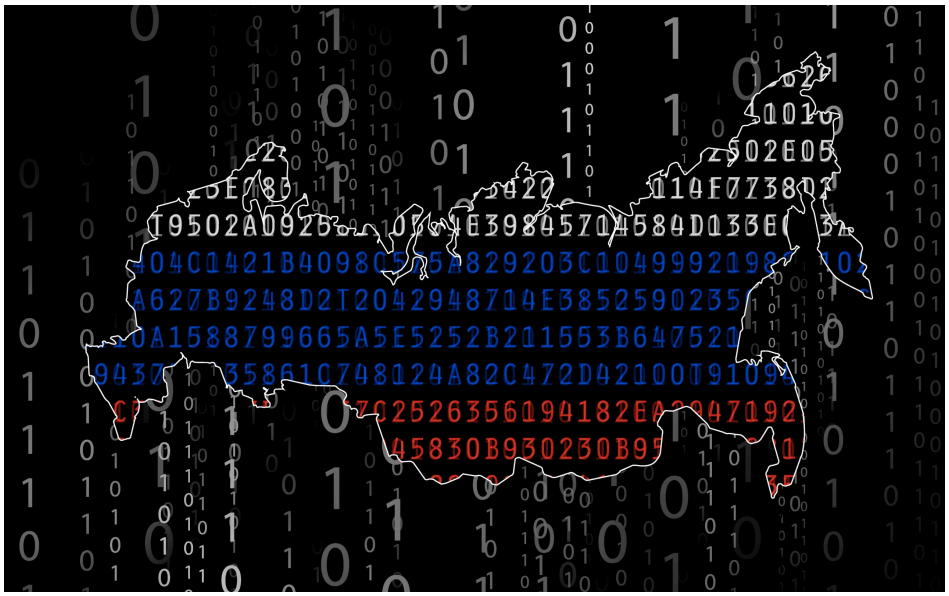
Ongoing Russian cyberattacks targeting Ukraine

Jun 14, 2023 | Tom Burt - Corporate Vice President, Customer Security & Trust



Microsoft threat intelligence teams have been tracking a wave of cyberattacks from an actor we call Cadet Blizzard that is associated with the Russian GRU. These attacks, which began in February 2023, targeted government agencies and IT service providers in Ukraine. We can also now attribute to Cadet Blizzard the destructive WhisperGate wiper attacks against Ukraine detected by Microsoft in January 2022 prior to Russia's invasion.

Cadet Blizzard typically breaches its targets by using stolen credentials to gain access to internet servers that sit on the perimeters of an organization's network. Once inside, it seeks to maintain access by using broadly available tools called web shells, which can be bought as off-the-shelf kits and customized. It then uses "living off the land" techniques – that is, it commonly uses legitimate commands, not malware, to move laterally across its targets' networks while gaining access to more information or disrupting networks if it chooses. The

Related Stories

May 2, 2023 | Clint Watts

Rinse and repeat: Iran accelerates its cyber influence operations worldwide >

Apr 19, 2023 | Kate Behncken

The world needs cybersecurity experts – Microsoft expands skilling effort with a focus on women >

Apr 11, 2023 | Amy Hogan-Burney

Standing up for democratic values and protecting stability of cyberspace: Principles to limit the threats posed by cyber mercenaries >

Related Blogs

May 25, 2023 | Brad Smith

use of "living off the land" techniques help it hide in legitimate network traffic, making its activities harder to detect.

Cadet Blizzard is active seven days a week and has conducted its operations during its primary targets' off-business hours when its activity is less likely to be detected. In addition to Ukraine, it also focuses on NATO member states involved in providing military aid to Ukraine.

What's perhaps most interesting about this actor is its relatively low success rate compared with other GRU-affiliated actors like Seashell Blizzard (Iridium) and Forrest Blizzard (Strontium). The February 2022 wiper attacks attributed to Seashell Blizzard alone affected more than 200 systems spanning over 15 organizations, while Cadet Blizzard's January 2022 WhisperGate attack affected an order of magnitude fewer systems and delivered comparatively modest impact, despite being trained to destroy the networks of their opponents in Ukraine. Cadet Blizzard's activity spiked between January and June of 2022, dissipated, and re-emerged in early 2023. The more recent Cadet Blizzard cyber operations, although occasionally successful, similarly failed to achieve the impact of those conducted by its GRU counterparts.

The group's influence operations work has also gained modest results. In early 2022, it successfully defaced a number of Ukrainian websites. However, the "Free Civilian" Telegram channel, which Cadet Blizzard uses to distribute information it obtains from hack-and-leak operations, had only 1.3K followers as of February 2023, with posts gaining at most a dozen reactions as of the time of publication, signifying low user interaction.

We believe Cadet Blizzard has been operating since 2020. In addition to Ukraine and NATO member states, it has targeted a range of organizations in Europe and Latin America.

While it has not been the most successful Russian actor, Cadet Blizzard has seen some recent success. Microsoft's unique visibility into their operations has motivated us to share information with the security ecosystem and customers to raise visibility and protections against their attacks. As we always do, we've notified customers who have been targeted or breached and, today, shared detailed technical information to help the security community identify and defend against this actor's attacks.

How do we best govern AI? ›

May 18, 2023 | Jenny Lay-Flurrie

Global Accessibility Awareness Day – Accessibility at the heart of innovation ›

May 16, 2023 | Vickie Robinson

Microsoft Airband will expand internet access to nearly 40 million people across Latin America and Africa ›

More Cybersecurity Stories

Standing up for democratic values and protecting stability of cyberspace: Principles to limit the threats posed by cyber mercenaries ›

April 11, 2023

Tags: cyber influence, cyberattacks, Digital Threat Analysis Center, digital threats, Ukraine

Digital Crimes Unit: Leading the fight against cybercrime ›

May 3, 2022

Keeping your vote safe and secure: A story from inside the 2020 election ›

June 22, 2021

Follow us: