



A protest against the Iranian regime in Berlin in October 2022

German Intelligence Alerts Iranian Dissidents Of Cyber Espionage Risk

Friday, 08/11/2023

World Iran Protests

Germany issued a warning to Iranian activists critical of the Iranian leadership, cautioning them about the potential threat of cyber espionage.

Germany's Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) **specifically highlighted the activities** of the Charming Kitten online espionage group, which employs sophisticated tactics to gain the trust of its targets.

According to the BfV, Charming Kitten employs a multi-step process that begins with building trust through personal contact, eventually leading the victim to unwittingly expose personal data, including online contacts within Iran. The group employs spear-phishing tactics, using counterfeit messages that appear authentic to acquire sensitive information. The victims are then lured into online video chats where they are prompted to enter login details, providing the hackers with potential access to their online accounts.

The cyberattacks conducted by Charming Kitten have primarily targeted dissident organizations and professionals, including legal practitioners, journalists, and human rights activists both within Iran and abroad.

Past instances have revealed the group's involvement in phishing attacks against foreign embassy staff, experts, and human rights advocates. The group's activities are reported to have support from the government of the Islamic Republic.

Notably, Charming Kitten has previously targeted US officials and officials responsible for implementing sanctions against Iran, as well as infiltrating the personal emails of officials within the US Treasury Department. Human Rights Watch has also pointed to the group's involvement in targeting activists, journalists, diplomats, and politicians in the Middle East. The BfV's advisory underscores the critical need for increased cybersecurity awareness and vigilance among dissident activists, journalists, and professionals dealing with sensitive information and international matters.

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