

Russia's disinformation efforts hit 39 countries: researchers

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Russia's campaign of cyberespionage and disinformation has targeted hundreds of individuals and organizations from at least 39 countries along with the United Nations and NATO, researchers said Thursday.

A report by the Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto revealed the existence of "a major disinformation and cyber espionage [campaign](#) with hundreds of targets in government, industry, military and civil society," lead researcher Ronald Deibert said.

The findings suggest that the cyber attacks on the 2016 presidential campaign of Hillary Clinton—which US intelligence officials have attributed to Russia—were just the tip of the iceberg.

Citizen Lab researchers said the espionage has targeted not only government, military and industry targets, but also journalists, academics, opposition figures, and activists,

Notable targets, according to the report, have included a former Russian prime minister, former high-ranking US officials, members of cabinets from Europe and Eurasia, ambassadors, high ranking military officers and chief executives of energy companies.

In a blog post, Deibert said the Russian-directed campaign follows a pattern of "phishing" attacks to obtain credentials of targets, and carefully "tainted" leaks that mix real and false information to create confusion around the true facts.

"Russia has a long history of experience with what is known as 'dezinformatsiya,' going back even to Soviet times," Deibert said.

"Tainted leaks, such as those analyzed in our report, present complex challenges to the public. Fake information scattered amongst genuine materials—'falsehoods in a forest of facts'... is very difficult to distinguish and counter, especially when it is presented as a salacious 'leak' integrated with what otherwise would be private information."

Deibert said the researchers had no "smoking gun" that links the campaign to a particular government agency but added that "our report nonetheless provides clear evidence of overlap with what has been publicly reported by numerous industry and government reports about Russian cyber espionage."

Citizen Lab said one of the targets was US journalist David Satter, who has written extensively on corruption in Russia.

Satter's stolen e-mails were "selectively modified," and then "leaked" to give the false impression that he was part of a CIA-backed plot to discredit Russian President Vladimir Putin, the report said.

Similar leak campaigns targeted officials from Afghanistan, Armenia, Austria, Cambodia, Egypt, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Peru, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sudan, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Vietnam, according to the report.

UN officials and military personnel from more than a dozen countries were also targets, Citizen Lab said.

"Our hope is that in studying closely and publishing the details of such tainted leak operations, our [report](#) will help us better understand how to recognize and mitigate them," Deibert said.

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