

Iran's dissident surveillance operation exposed

Author:

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LONDON: Iran is running two surveillance operations in cyberspace, using various methods to spy on more than 1,000 dissidents, according to a leading cybersecurity company.

People in Iran, the UK, the US and 10 other countries have been tracked by Iranian hackers, Check Point said.

It added that two groups are involved in disseminating spyware among dissidents that is then used to monitor them and to steal call recordings and other media.

One of the groups, Domestic Kitten, uses various methods to trick people into downloading malicious software to their phones.

For example, they mimic apps for Tehran-based restaurants, offer fake mobile-security apps or provide local news via a compromised app. In one case, they supplied an infected wallpaper app that also contained pro-Daesh imagery.

Check Point said Tehran has achieved at least 600 successful infections using these methods.

The other group involved in the hacking scandal, Infy, is known to have been operating as early as 2007, and has targeted peoples' computers by sending emails with attractive content and an attachment containing spyware.

The Infy campaign, according to Check Point, is one of Iran's most sophisticated campaigns yet.

"It is clear that the Iranian government is investing significant resources into cyber operations," said Check Point cyber-research head Yaniv Balmas.

"The operators of these Iranian cyber-espionage campaigns seem to be completely unaffected by any counter-activities done by others, even though both campaigns had been revealed and even stopped in the past. They have simply restarted."

Amin Sabeti, executive director at the Washington-based Digital Impact Lab, told Arab News that once Iranian operatives break into dissidents' devices, their priority is finding out who these people are speaking to in Iran.

"They want to find the network of people, especially those outside the country, and figure out what they're talking about and who they're talking to – then they arrest them," he said.

Sabeti added, however, that Iran is not a top-tier cyber threat. "It can't

compete with Russia or China,” he said.

What Tehran’s cyber agencies excel at is what Sabeti called the “social engineering” side of hacking.

“In terms of the technology they aren’t that sophisticated, but in implementation they’re excellent,” he said.

“They understand their target perfectly – they study them and figure out what they want, and compromise them from there.”

The Intelligence Ministry and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Sabeti said, each run their own distinct cyber entities with different targets. The IRGC focuses on foreign dissidents, while the ministry focuses on Iranians at home.

The work of various security operations often overlaps, and the end result, he said, is an interconnected system of spying that “looks like it was taken from the Soviet Union’s playbook.”



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Human rights group releases documentary on Iran’s hostage-taking
US general says Washington will help Saudi Arabia defend against ‘common threat of Iran’

Algeria orders investigation into student police abuse claim

Author:

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Mon, 2021-02-08 18:44

ALGIERS: In an unprecedented move, the prosecutor's office in the Algerian capital has ordered a preliminary investigation into torture and sexual abuse that a student protester claimed during his trial he was subjected to by judicial police.

The claim by Walid Nekiche at his trial last Tuesday drew widespread criticism in the media, along with the prosecution's request for a life sentence for the oceanography student. Nekiche was on trial for "plotting against the state" and possessing tracts against the national interest for his actions in pro-democracy protests.

Nekiche was finally sentenced to a year in prison with six months guaranteed behind bars and freed because he had already been held in detention since his November 2019 arrest.

But the prosecutor on Sunday ordered an investigation opened into his claims that he had been subjected to "violence and sexual aggression by members of the judicial police" questioning him following his arrest.

The demand for a preliminary investigation comes days before the second anniversary on Feb. 22 since the Hirak pro-democracy movement was born with nationwide street protests that helped force former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to leave office after 20 years in power. Dozens of student protesters were jailed, as well as a powerful coterie of top officials and business leaders for corruption under Bouteflika.

The preliminary probe also comes at a time of renewed political tensions with President Abdelmadjid Tebboune absent for months for treatment for COVID-19 and then follow-up care.



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French-Algerian actor Tahar Rahim long listed for BAFTA award
Algeria trial over French mountaineer's murder postponed

[British MPs urge consequences for illegal Israeli evictions](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-02-08 22:06

LONDON: A cross-party coalition of over 80 British MPs has urged the UK's foreign secretary to impose consequences on Israel if hundreds of planned evictions of Palestinian families go ahead.

About 200 families in East Jerusalem are in immediate danger of being dispossessed of their homes following a legal battle waged against them by settler associations.

“This would amount to the forcible / mass eviction and dispossession of

hundreds of Palestinian families,” read the letter sent to Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab.

“As you are well aware, the forcible transfer of an occupied population is a grave violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention,” it added.

“Israeli settlers as well as government and municipality officials speak openly about wishing to control the demographics of the city. Any actions by the occupying power to alter Jerusalem’s character, status or demographic composition are illegal under international law.”

The MPs urged the British government to “put a stop to the forcible transfer of families from their homes in occupied East Jerusalem.”

They also suggested potential consequences that the government should impose if the evictions go ahead, including “reducing diplomatic engagement and banning trade in settlement products in full conformity with international law.” The letter added: “Settlements are illegal so such a step is not a sanction.”

Chris Doyle, director of the Council for Arab-British Understanding, told Arab News that he welcomed the letter.

It “highlights a significant degree of parliamentary concern over Israeli practices in the occupied territories,” he said.

“It’s clearly an outrage that Israel continues to engage in forcible dispossession whilst at the same time building and expanding on illegal settlements and the dispossession of Palestinian land. It’s all part of a larger process that goes unaddressed.”

On Friday, the Hague-based International Criminal Court (ICC) ruled that it has jurisdiction over war crimes committed in the occupied Palestinian territories.

This ruling, Doyle said, “highlights the grave consequences that could, down the line, hit those senior Israeli officials and ministers who authorize such crimes.”

He added: “Israel has for a long time been able to act with the knowledge that it had the full backing of the US, and that therefore there wouldn’t be any accountability – but who knows, further down the line this may change.”

While the ICC ruling may influence future Israeli policy, Doyle said Raab could do a lot more right now to uphold international law.

“The Palestinians are tired of just hearing the same old copy-paste press releases. There really should be some stronger action, which could include a ban on trade with illegal settlements,” he added.

“This would ram home to Israeli leaders that there are consequences for illegal actions – that’s the whole fundamental basis for international law.”



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British MPs demand UK sanctions over Israel's West Bank annexation plan
British MPs urge UK government to recognize Palestine

[Sudan's PM Hamdok announces new cabinet](#)

Mon, 2021-02-08 20:33

KHARTOUM: Sudan's Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok announced a new cabinet on Monday, appointing Darfur rebel leader Jibril Ibrahim as finance minister. Among the other new appointments were Mariam Sadiq Al-Mahdi, a leader of the popular Umma Party, who was named as foreign minister.



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Sudan's PM Hamdok dissolves cabinet
Darfur's ethnic nightmare returns to haunt Sudan's civilian rulers

[EU 'concerned' by Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia's territory](#)

Mon, 2021-02-08 19:27

LONDON: The EU said Monday it was "concerned" about repeated Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia's territory.

It also said it had concerns about recent attacks by the Houthis in the Marib and Al-Jawf governorates of Yemen, adding military action there "seriously undermined" efforts to bring an end to the conflict in the country.

"Renewed military action and offensives in Ma'arib governorate at this particular time seriously undermine ongoing efforts by UN Special Envoy, Martin Griffiths, as well as the overall efforts of the international community to bring the war in Yemen to an end," [a statement said](#).

“The EU actively supports these efforts and reiterates the urgency of reaching an inclusive political settlement for the whole of Yemen, as was also underlined by Ambassadors of the EU and its Member States on the occasion of their visit to Aden on 6 and 7 February,” the statement added.

The EU also said it welcomed the decision taken by the new administration of President Joe Biden to review US policy on Yemen, and that it shared Washington’s belief that there was no military solution to the war.

On Sunday, [Griffiths visited Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif](#) in Tehran to discuss his peace plan for Yemen, known as the Joint Declaration.

Representatives of Yemen’s internationally-recognized government asked Griffiths to demand Iran stopped aiding the Houthis financially and militarily following several deadly strikes against civilian and military targets in Yemen and Saudi Arabia.



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UN Yemen envoy in Iran as Houthi attacks escalate UN worried Yemen’s Houthis

may renege on tanker examination