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Heath Renfrow
CISO, Conversant Group / Former CISO, United States Army Healthcare

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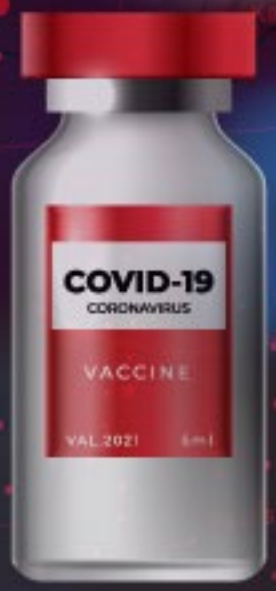

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ADVERSARIES ON A VACCINE TRAIL

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EDITOR'S NOTE

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LEVERAGING FUD FOR OPPORTUNITY

It would not be an exaggeration to say that COVID-19 vaccines are the most sought-after commodity today. In February, the UN announced that more than 130 countries don't have a single COVID-19 vaccine, while 10 countries have already dispersed 75% of all vaccines. In recent weeks, countries announced their second and third lockdowns, acknowledging another COVID-19 wave of infections.

Vaccine producers are working overtime to produce enough vaccine doses to fulfill government commitments and timelines. While pharmaceutical companies stepped up their production schedules to develop and test vaccines, adversaries tracked the news and devised campaigns to leverage the momentum generated by news coverage. They capitalize on the fear, uncertainty, and doubt (FUD) of people to spread misinformation and to plan attack vectors. The result: phishing campaigns with vaccine themes, malware attacks for exfiltration of sensitive and personal information, and clinical trial data. Fake websites purporting to offer (mis)information about vaccine distribution. There are attacks on supply chains and networks of Pharma companies too.

ATTACKS ON PHARMA NOT NEW

But the attacks are not new to this industry. They happened even before the onset of the pandemic. Pharma companies were targeted whenever they were mentioned in the news. For instance, in early 2019, many Indian pharma companies were applying for FDA licenses for manufacturing – and then exporting drugs to the U.S. The FDA mandated certain policies for these companies to protect their intellectual property and infrastructure. A security researcher quoted in our cover story confirms these companies were attacked then but they did not report it. The attacks caught the media's attention only when the pandemic set in, last year.

And it's not just India.

According to a report by Cyfirma that was shared with Reuters, the target countries are U.S., U.K., India, Japan, Australia, South Korea, Italy, Spain, Germany, Brazil, Taiwan, and Mexico.

#VAXFRAUD, FAKE WEBSITES, PHISHING

Adversaries are also capitalizing on the fear and anxiety of citizens who are anxiously waiting for an appointment for their vaccine shots. Fake websites and fraudulent social media posts are their channels of deceit and misinformation. Scammers consistently use social media platforms to market themselves. These criminals impersonate legitimate pharmaceutical companies or lie about being able to sell vaccines. Social media platforms are also being used to sell fraudulent vaccines or drive people to phishing sites that can steal their money or credentials, sell them a potentially deadly product, or move the scam offline through private messaging.

Consumers are also facing the fury of adversaries, in the form of targeted phishing attacks. In an analysis conducted between October 2020 and January 2021, Barracuda researchers witnessed a 26% increase in the number of these phishing attacks, including a 12% spike in November 2020, following the announcement of the availability of vaccines by pharmaceutical companies like Pfizer and Moderna.

In the months ahead we can expect more attacks on pharma companies. Phishing attacks will become more sophisticated and targeted. And there will be tens of thousands of new fraudulent websites.

To counter this, security researchers advise governments and pharma companies to take a "defense in depth" strategy and view the situation holistically, to safeguard all stakeholders.

Read more about this in the feature articles, interviews, and the cover story within this issue.

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EC-Council CodeRed

Tackling the Skills Gap through Commitment, Collaboration, and Change

Security leaders have been talking about the global cybersecurity skills shortage for years, urging people to upskill and join this growing industry. However, despite various initiatives, it appears that this gap is only growing.

For many years, cyberattacks have made headlines for causing irreversible damage to - organizations, both financially and, more importantly, to their reputation. With the onset of the pandemic, more and more businesses, big and small, have begun to shift to a digitized platform, leaving cyberspace, increasing their vulnerability and dependence on cybersecurity capability. With such a drastic shift initiated so rapidly, upskilling and bridging the growing cybersecurity skills gap has become of paramount importance.

With a vision to create a skilled cybersecurity workforce and provide continuous online learning to millions of students across the country, **EC-Council,** the world's leading cybersecurity certification body, has announced cost-effective course bundle solutions to empower learners with future-ready cybersecurity skills. As a part of this initiative, courses from EC-Council's leading-edge continuous learning platform - **CodeRed**, have been made available to students and faculty via **EC-Council Academia**. Students have access to the latest and most relevant cybersecurity courses developed by world-leading practitioners. The new box bundles provide a curated collection of critical, vetted, cost-effective solutions for selective learning that gives organizations, educators, and individuals a chance to advance without accessing the entire course library.

They will be able to develop skills in a wide range of topics, including defending against cyberbullying, conducting reconnaissance for cybersecurity, adopting security and privacy in data, cybersecurity basics for summer learning - university edition, and cybersecurity basics for summer learning - high school edition.

Organizations, educators, and individuals can now access these pre-curated course bundles created based on various job skills by CodeRed's expert content team. It's an affordable way to get a premium education and improve one's skills. This initiative and the new updates and offerings on CodeRed will inspire more professionals and aspirants to upskill and join the cybersecurity field.

In addition, EC-Council has also announced a series of updates to its flexible, continuous learning platform. These changes will keep its users connected to the platform's engaging content, instructional strategies, and professional learning resources wherever learning is taking place, and give them an even more robust, secure, and reliable learning experience.

Among the updates to CodeRed's learning platform is the introduction of 40 new courses in the following categories - Network Security, Data Science, Information Security, Secure Programming, and Cloud Computing.

CHINESE HACKING GROUP REDECHO TARGETS INDIAN POWER SECTOR

Brian Pereira
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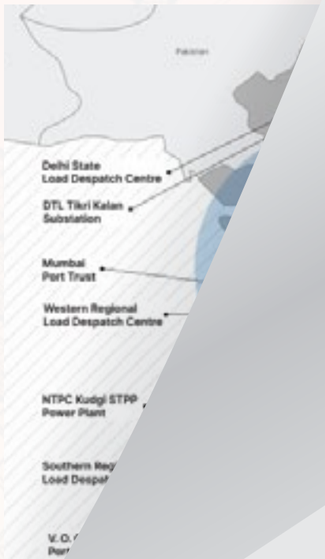
Relations between India and China deteriorated after troops from both sides engaged in a skirmish along the LAC (line of actual control) in May 2020. While diplomacy and multiple rounds of talks involving both sides have thwarted a direct war, cyber espionage operations from state-sponsored attackers continue to disrupt organizations in India. Cybersecurity experts uncovered a Chinese hacking group's cyber campaign targeting India's power grid and transmission sector. It is being widely speculated whether a grid failure and power outage in Mumbai October, may have been caused b same group (See box).

Research from security firm **F Future** found a China-link



actor group dubbed **RedEcho**, targeted 10 Indian power sector companies and two seaports since early last year. The latest attack occurred on February 28, 2021. Recorded Future's threat research team **Insikt Group,** uncovered a subset of the servers that share some common tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) with several previously reported Chinese state-sponsored groups.

In its report – "China-linked Group RedEcho Targets the Indian Power Sector Amid Heightened Border Tensions" Recorded Future cites geopolitical d heightened border clashes sian neighbors as the s The report post-

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