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The [Cybereason Global Security Operations Center \(GSOC\) Team](#) issues [Threat Analysis Reports](#) to inform on impacting threats. The Threat Analysis Reports investigate these threats and provide practical recommendations for protecting against them.

In this Threat Analysis report, the Cybereason GSOC investigates the [PlugX](#) malware family, a modular Remote Access Tool/Trojan (RAT) often utilized by Asia-based APT groups such as [APT27](#). The malware has backdoor capabilities to take full control of the environment with its many malicious “plugins.”

This report provides an overview of the PlugX loader as well as modifications across multiple samples (six in total) starting from the year 2012 to 2022.

Key Points

The Rule of Three: The malware may be delivered differently depending on the campaigns such as whether the initial delivering format is self de-archiving or not. However, the PlugX loader always consists of three main components: a legitimate executable, a malicious module, and a malicious payload. The malware has been around for over a decade, but the format of the malware has not changed.

Security Evasion-Focused Techniques: PlugX loader is known for utilizing DLL-Sideloading techniques for evasion purposes. However, the malware is packing additional evasion techniques. This increases the chance of deploying the main PlugX payload successfully.

Detected and Prevented: The Cybereason Defense Platform effectively detects and prevents the PlugX malware.

Introduction

PlugX is a post-exploitation modular RAT (Remote Access Trojan), which, among other things, is known for its multiple functionalities such as data exfiltration, keystroke grabbing, and backdoor functionality. The malware's first publications and research papers date back to 2012.

However, according to Trend Micro, the malware has actually been around since 2008. PlugX was already making a name for itself back in 2012 due to high activity within Asia.

This may have been due to the fact that the PlugX malware authors were tied to China and the operators of this malware at the time were located within Asian countries. Since then, the malware has been active and utilized by many threat actors for over the past decade. The malware had many updates over the years and it does not appear to be going away anytime soon.

From its original version, the PlugX malware has been primarily used against public-sector organizations such as governments and various political organizations. In addition, advanced threat actors utilize the malware heavily to target high profile private organizations.

For example, in June 2016, Japan's leading tourism agency announced the leak of privacy data of 7.93 million users, which was later identified by Trellix as an attack utilizing PlugX. The malware was also seen utilized outside of Asian countries when it targeted military and aerospace interests in Belarus and Russia.

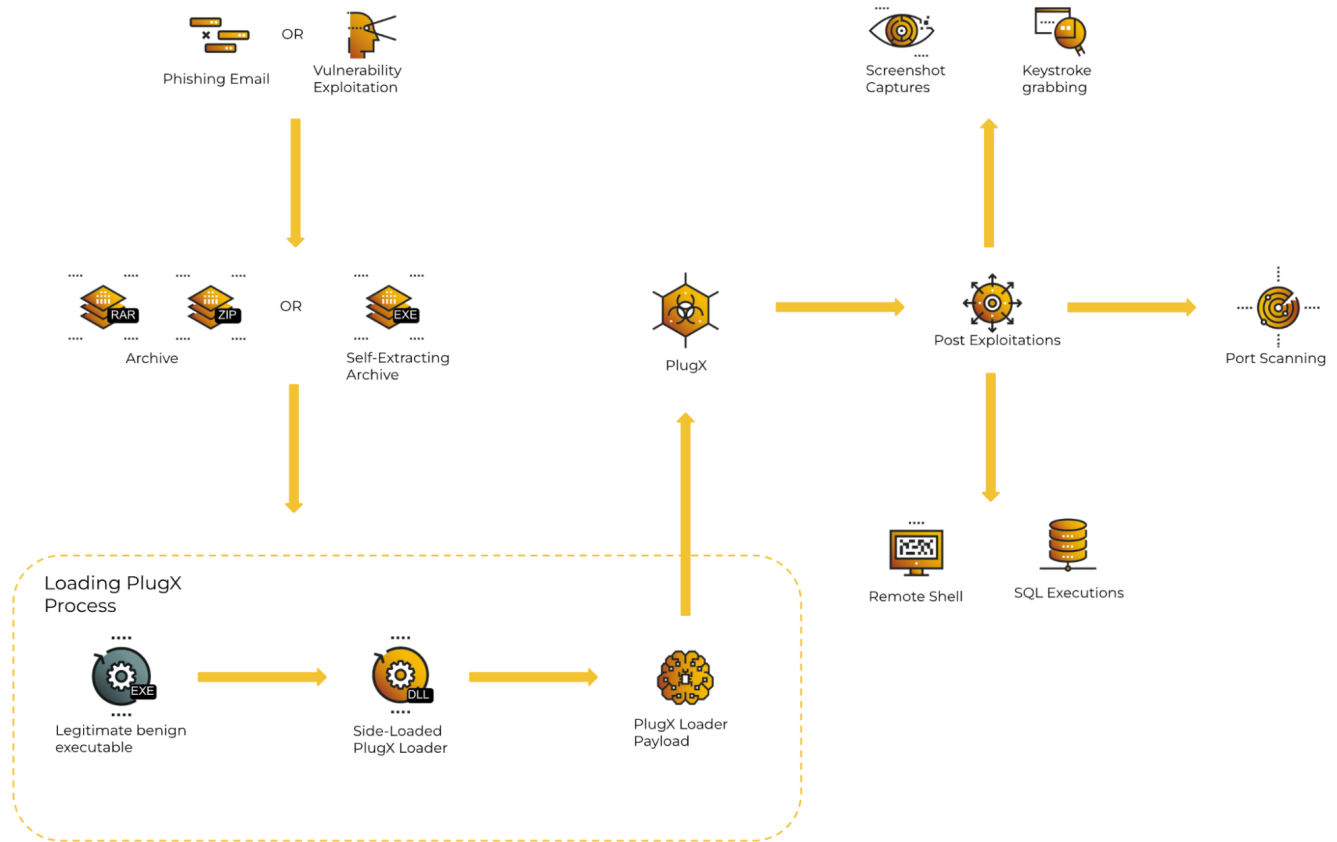
This may be the indicator that the malware operators for PlugX were expanding their markets and targets. Most recently, the malware was utilized to target European government agencies which aided Ukrainian refugees from the recent Russia-Ukraine War.

PlugX loader is commonly delivered via phishing emails and it is also seen delivered by exploiting a vulnerability such as ProxyLogon according to Unit 42 from Palo Alto Networks. The malware is often delivered as an archived formatted file such as .zip, .rar or self-extracting RAR (SFX) archive.

Within this archived file format, the malware contains three main files:

- legitimate executable
- malicious module
- malicious payload

The malware utilizes DLL Side-Loading as a main method to load a malicious DLL from a legitimate executable, like Acrobat Reader or a legacy Microsoft binary, for instance. The benefits of using DLL Side-Loading is that the malware can hijack and masquerade the legitimate executable by loading malicious modules. DLL Side-loading not only allows for evasion of security tools, but also allows malware developers to have a variety of options into which legitimate executable to side-load the PlugX payload:



PlugX infection flow. View Loading PlugX Process FlowChart

DLL Side-Loading is one of many evasive aspects that this malware has in its arsenal, and which this analysis describes in depth:

Technical Analysis

The technical analysis focuses on the PlugX loader's deployment method and specifically [PlugX Loader Analysis](#) focuses on three files with the following sample Secure Hash Algorithm (SHA)-256. These files were introduced in this [article](#) from 2012:

Filename	SHA-256
Nv.exe (legitimate)	523D28DF917F9D265CD2C0D38DF26277BC56A535145100ED82E6F5FDEAAE7256
NvSmartMax.dll	EAAA7899B37A3B04DCD02AD6D51E83E035BE535F129773621EF0F399A2A98EE3
Nv.mp3	3D64E638F961B922398E2EFAF75504DA007E41EA979F213F8EB4F83E00EFEEBB

The malware utilizes [DLL Side-Loading](#) technique by leveraging the legitimate executable (*Nv.exe*) to load a malicious module (*NvSmartMax.dll*), which loads an additional malicious payload (*Nv.mp3*) to prepare for an actual PlugX payload.

The [Comparative Analysis](#) compares different PlugX loader samples to provide the modifications of deployment methods.

PlugX Loader Analysis

This section describes the deployment of the PlugX loader in the specific case of the use of *Nv.exe* as the DLL side-loader. The chapter ends with the PlugX payload loaded in memory:



OS Datetime Check



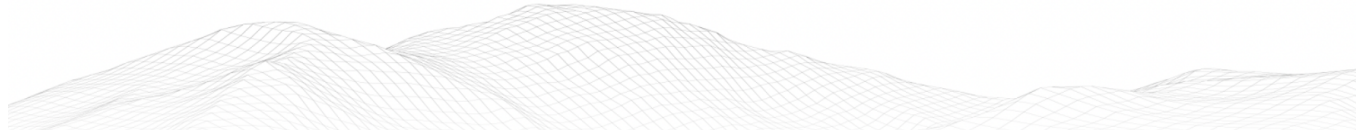
Control Flow Manipulation



Dynamic Module Loading



PlugX Payload Decompression



PlugX Loader Summary

OS Datetime Check

When the legitimate executable *Nv.exe* first executes and side-loads the PlugX loader module *NvSmartMax.dll*, the module first checks the OS date and time with the [GetSystemTime](#) method, which then calculates the output with the following formula.

Result = (OS_Year * 100) + OS_Month * 100 + OS_Date

The result of the equation is expected to be a hex value, which is then compared with the value *0x1330225*, which is equivalent to the date 2012-01-01. The execution of this method enables the *NvSmartMax.dll* to check if the OS date and time is later than 2012-01-01.

If the date and time is later than 2012-01-01, the DLL execution exits. This checking mechanism is assumed to be for malware's release purpose and prohibits its usage before its official release:

```

GetSystemTime( (LPSYSTEMTIME) &SystemTime);
if (0x1330224 <
    ((uint)SystemTime.wYear * 100 + (uint)SystemTime.wMonth) * 100 + (uint)SystemTime.wDay) {
    pHVar1 = GetModuleHandleA((LPCSTR)0x0);
    if ((* (short *) &pHVar1->unused == 0x5a4d) &&
        (piVar4 = (int *) ((int) &pHVar1->unused + pHVar1[0xf].unused), *piVar4 == 0x4550)) {
        lpAddress = (undefined *) ((int) &pHVar1->unused + piVar4[10]);
        BVar2 = VirtualProtect(lpAddress, 0x10, 0x40, &local_14);
        if (BVar2 != 0) {
            iVar3 = (int) &UNK_1000101b - (int) lpAddress;
            lpAddress[1] = (char) iVar3;
            lpAddress[4] = (char) ((uint) iVar3 >> 0x18);
            *lpAddress = 0xe9;
            lpAddress[2] = (char) ((uint) iVar3 >> 8);
            lpAddress[3] = (char) ((uint) iVar3 >> 0x10);
            VirtualProtect(lpAddress, 0x10, local_14, &local_14);
        }
    }
}
return;

```

→ If OS date is before 2012-01-01

OS datetime check

Control Flow Manipulation

After the OS date and time is confirmed to be later than 2012-01-01, the *NvSmartMax.dll* fetches the address of *Nv.exe*'s EntryPoint and proceeds to update the page protection of the EntryPoint by calling the [VirtualProtect](#) function. *NvSmartMax.dll* updates the *Nv.exe*'s EntryPoint's page protection to *PAGE_EXECUTE_READWRITE* to prepare a modification on the EntryPoint:

```

pHVar1 = GetModuleHandleA((LPCSTR)0x0);
if ((* (short *) &pHVar1->unused == 0x5a4d) &&
    (piVar4 = (int *) ((int) &pHVar1->unused + pHVar1[0xf].unused), *piVar4 == 0x4550)) {
    lpAddress = (undefined *) ((int) &pHVar1->unused + piVar4[10]);
    BVar2 = VirtualProtect(lpAddress, 0x10, PAGE_EXECUTE_READWRITE, &local_14);
}

```

PAGE_EXECUTE_READWRITE

The *NvSmartMax.dll* module proceeds to patch the EntryPoint to jump into a function at offset 0x1020 in *NvSmartMax.dll*. The malware appears to be utilizing control flow manipulation as an obfuscation method against static analysis:

004017D1	E8 A6180000	call nv.40307C	Patch Entrypoint	EntryPoint
004017D6	E9 78FEFFFF	jmp nv.401653		
004017DB	8BFF	mov edi,edi		
004017DD	55	push ebp		
004017DE	8BEC	mov ebp,esp		
004017D1	E9 4AF8BFOF	jmp nvsmartmax.10001020		EntryPoint
004017D6	E9 78FEFFFF	jmp nv.401653		
004017DB	8BFF	mov edi,edi		
004017DD	55	push ebp		
004017DE	8BEC	mov ebp,esp		

Nv.exe's entry point patched

Once the control flow enters the EntryPoint of the *Nv.exe*, execution jumps to the patched address in *NvSmartMax.dll*. In the target function, the malware prepares to load the *Nv.mp3* by attempting the following steps:

- Check the OS date and time again - however, during this check, the verification checks for the year 2012
- Prepare the malware file
- Allocate memory
- Read *Nv.mp3* into allocated memory
- Update page protection to PAGE_EXECUTE_READ
- Execute code located at *Nv.mp3*

```

do {
    DVar1 = DVar1 - 1;
    if ((int)DVar1 < 1) goto LAB_10001087;
} while ((* (short *) ((int) &lpFileName_10003008 + DVar1 * 2) != 0x5c);
lstrcpyW((LPWSTR) ((int) &lpFileName_10003008 + DVar1 * 2 + 2), L"Nv.mp3");

```

Prepare payload file name

```

lpBuffer = (code *)VirtualAlloc((LPVOID)0x0, 0x100000, 0x1000, PAGE_EXECUTE_READWRITE);
if ((lpBuffer != (code *)0x0) &&
    (hFile = CreateFileW((LPCWSTR) &lpFileName_10003008, 0x80000000, 1, (LPSECURITY_ATTRIBUTES)0x0, 3,
        0, (HANDLE)0x0), hFile != (HANDLE)0xffffffff) &&
    (BVar2 = ReadFile(hFile, lpBuffer, 0x100000, &local_18, (LPOVERLAPPED)0x0), BVar2 != 0)) {
    CloseHandle(hFile);
    VirtualProtect(lpBuffer, 0x100000, PAGE_EXECUTE_READ, &local_14);
    (*lpBuffer)();
    Sleep(0xffffffff);
}

```

Allocate and enter the payload

Initialization Order Module List

Once the control flow accesses the *Nv.mp3* memory region, it dynamically fetches the loaded module *kerne!32.dll's* base address from the *InInitializationOrderModuleList* within the Process Environment Block (PEB).

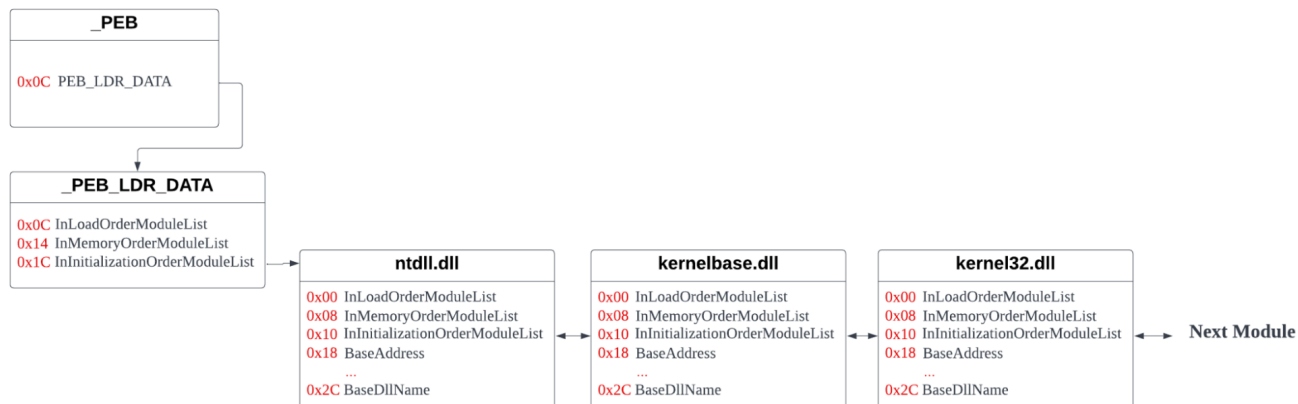
PEB is a data structure, which contains process information which is utilized internally by the operating system (OS). PEB is often utilized for anti-analysis techniques such as *NtGlobalFlag* check, but it can also be used to fetch necessary module information.

At offset 0x0C within PEB, *PEB_LDR_DATA* structure is located which stores loaded module information. This structure has three members: *InLoadOrderModuleList*, *InMemoryOrderModuleList*, and *InInitializationOrderModuleList*:

0211DCDF	55	push ebp	
0211DCE0	8BEC	mov ebp,esp	
0211DCE2	64:A1 30000000	mov eax,dword ptr [4]:[30]	PEB
0211DCE8	8B40 0C	mov eax,dword ptr ds:[eax+C]	PEB_LDR_DATA
0211DCEB	8B40 1C	mov eax,dword ptr ds:[eax+1C]	InInitializationOrderModuleList
0211DCEE	81EC 00010000	sub esp,100	
0211DCF4	53	push ebx	

Fetching loaded modules from PEB_LDR_DATA

The code located in *Nv.mp3* fetches *InInitializationOrderModuleList*, which includes all the loaded modules in order of initialization. This list does not include the executable itself, and it only lists the modules:



InitializationOrderModuleList diagram

The *Nv.mp3* searches through each element's *BaseDllName*, until it finds *kernel32.dll* and retrieves the *BaseAddress* of the module.

Once the base address of *kernel32.dll* is retrieved, *Nv.mp3* fetches the function *GetProcAddress* address in order to load the functions *LoadLibraryA*, *VirtualAlloc*, *VirtualFree*, and *ExitThread*, which appears to be loaded via *StackString* method:

```

mov dword ptr ss:[ebp-7C],64616F4C
mov dword ptr ss:[ebp-78],7262694C
mov dword ptr ss:[ebp-74],41797261
mov byte ptr ss:[ebp-70],b1
call edi
  
```

LoadLibraryA

```

mov dword ptr ss:[ebp-98],416C6175
mov dword ptr ss:[ebp-9C],74726956
mov dword ptr ss:[ebp-94],636F6C6C
mov byte ptr ss:[ebp-90],b1
call edi
  
```

VirtualAlloc

```

mov dword ptr ss:[ebp-CC],74726956
mov dword ptr ss:[ebp-C8],466C6175
mov dword ptr ss:[ebp-C4],656572
call edi
  
```

VirtualFree

```

mov dword ptr ss:[ebp-EC],74697845
mov dword ptr ss:[ebp-E8],65726854
mov word ptr ss:[ebp-E4],6461
mov byte ptr ss:[ebp-E2],b1
call edi
  
```

ExitThread

StackString libraries

Once all the function addresses are loaded from *kernel32.dll*, *Nv.mp3* loads the module *ntdll.dll* by using the *LoadLibraryA* function which was retrieved earlier by the *GetProcAddress* function. From *ntdll.dll*, *Nv.mp3* loads functions *RtlDecompressBuffer* and *memcpy*.

Plugx Payload Decompression

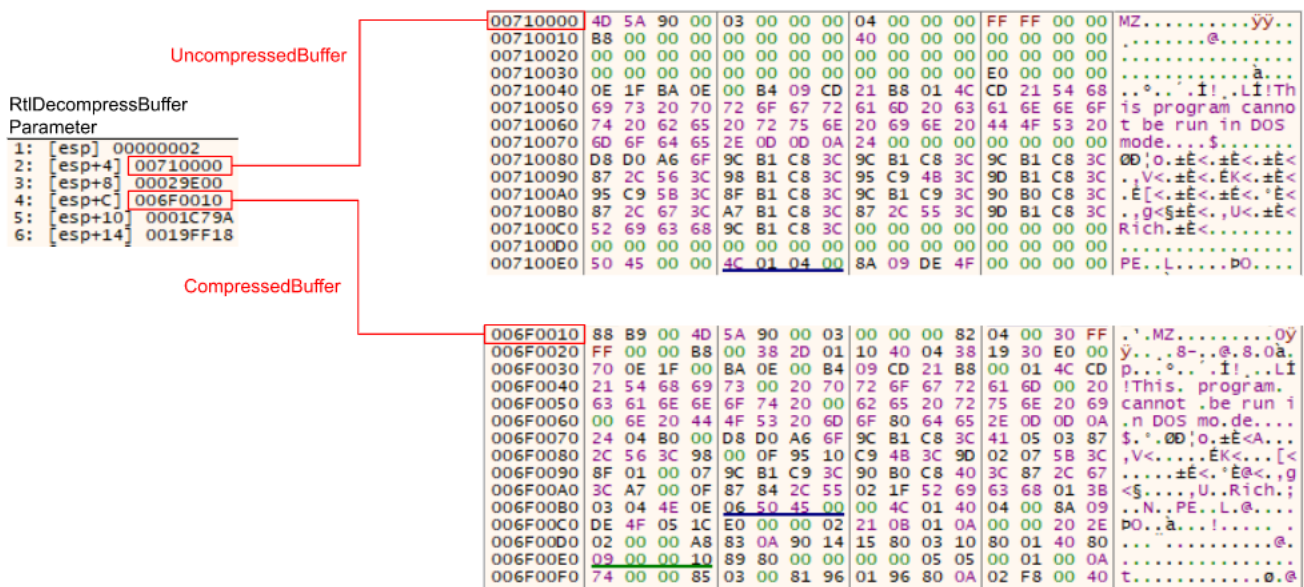
The code located at *Nv.mp3* level proceeds to decrypt the RC4-encrypted strings which are stored within the payload at offset 0x1529 with size 117KB. The decrypted strings are a compressed version of a PE file, which performs the *RtlDecompressBuffer* function with LZ decompression format:

```

NT_RTL_COMPRESS_API NTSTATUS RtlDecompressBuffer(
[in] USHORT CompressionFormat,
[out] PCHAR UncompressedBuffer,
[in] ULONG UncompressedBufferSize,
[in] PCHAR CompressedBuffer,
[in] ULONG CompressedBufferSize,
[out] PULONG FinalUncompressedSize
);

```

Figure 11: RtlDecompressBuffer Function Parameters



Decompressed Buffer

The decompressed PE file is an actual PlugX itself. However, the control flow does not immediately enter the decompressed payload. *Nv.mp3* places the “GULP” signature, which is the backward for “PLUG” in newly allocated memory by *VirtualAlloc* with *PAGE_EXECUTE_READWRITE* protection. It proceeds to allocate each section’s .text, .rdata, .data, and .reloc by using the *memcpy* function into allocated memory.

Lastly, it loads necessary libraries and functions dynamically by using *LoadLibraryA* and *GetProcAddress* from the import table listed in the decompressed PE file. Once this preparation is done, it proceeds to enter the PlugX payload:

```

02200000 47 55 4C 50 00 00 10 02 9F E2 01 00 29 15 10 02 GULP.....ä..)...)
02200010 AA C7 01 00 13 00 10 02 0C 15 00 00 9D 14 20 02 ^C.....
02200020 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00
02200030 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00
02200040 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00
02200050 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00 00

```

PlugX payload header

PlugX Loader Flowchart

The following flowchart summarizes the flow of the PlugX loader:



Figure 14: PlugX loader flowchart

Comparative Analysis

This comparative analysis analyzes the following six samples listed in the table below. The samples are observed in the past from various analyses from different reports. As a reference, the samples (executable, module, payload) are identified with codename with prefix *px_* followed by the relevant year that the samples were observed according to the external sources:

Codename	Filename	SHA-256
px_2012	Nv.exe	523D28DF917F9D265CD2C0D38D1
NvSmartMax.dll	EAAA7899B37A3B04DCD02AD6D51E83E035BE535F129773621EF0F399A2A98EE3	
Nv.mp3	3D64E638F961B922398E2EFAF75504DA007E41EA979F213F8EB4F83E00EFEEBB	
px_2014	Gadget.exe	5C859CA16583D660449FB044677C
Sidebar.dll	4B23F8683E184757E8119C8C68063F547F194E1ABD758DCBD4DACF70E3908FC1	
Sidebar.dll.doc	B2B93C7C4AC82623F74B14FE73F2C3F8E58E3306CC903C5AE71BC355CB5BD069	
px_2015	fsguidll.exe	5C5E3201D6343E0536B86CB4AB0
fslapi.dll	96876D24284FF4E4155A78C043C8802421136AFBC202033BF5E80D1053E3833F	
fslapi.dll.gui	ACDC4987B74FDF7A32DFF87D56C43DF08CCE071B493858E3CE32FCF8D6372837	

px_2019	mcinsupd.exe	507D49186748DD83D808281743A1
mytilus3.dll	9FB33E460CA1654FCC555A6F040288617D9E2EFE626F611B77522606C724B59B	
mytilus3.dump	6914E9DE21F5CCE3F5C1457127122C13494ED82E6E2D95A8200A46BDB4CD7075	
px_2021	aro.exe	18A98C2D905A1DA1D9D855E868E
aross.dll	9FFFB3894B008D5A54343CCF8395A47ACFE953394FFFE2C58550E444FF20EC47	
aro.dat	59BA902871E98934C054649CA582E2A01707998ACC78B2570FEF43DBD10F7B6F	
px_2022	RasTls.exe	F9EBF6AEB3F0FB0C29BD8F3D65
RasTls.dll	6CD5079A69D9A68029E37F2680F44B7BA71C2B1EECF4894C2A8B293D5F768F10	
RasTls.dll.res	37B3FB9AA12277F355BBB334C82B41E4155836CF3A1B83E543CE53DA9D429E2F	

Each sample is compared based on the configuration and implementation of the PlugX loader:

- Malware's release date control with OS datetime check
- Manipulation of control flow by patching the instructions within the executable for anti-analysis
- Dynamically retrieving module *kernel32.dll*'s base address within payload by utilizing the *PEB_LDR_DATA* structure
- Code obfuscation within the payload for anti-analysis
- Decompression preparation of PlugX payload and the format of the payload

OS Datetime

As explained in the previous section, PlugX loader does check that the date is later than a specific value. This behavior has been observed on three samples, from this list of six samples:

Sample	Check count	Datetime
px_2012	2	2012-01-01, 2012
px_2014	2	2012-01-01, 2012
px_2015	0	N/A
px_2019	1	2018
px_2021	0	N/A
px_2022	0	N/A

The date and time check happens twice in samples *px_2012* and *px_2014*:

- Checks the date before executing the instruction patching function
- Checks the year before allocating the PlugX loader payload file

However, in sample *px_2019*, it only conducts the date and time check for the year 2018. The versioning of this malware also seems to exist, which is evident from the date and time check of the date of *px_2019* being 2018.

Manipulate Control Flow

Sample	Patch Instruction	Patched Instruction
--------	-------------------	---------------------

px_2012	Yes	JMP
px_2014	No	N/A
px_2015	Yes	JMP
px_2019	Yes	PUSH/RET
px_2021	No	N/A
px_2022	Yes	PUSH/RET

Manipulation of the control flow by patching the instructions with JMP is utilized with the samples, however the samples *px_2019* and *px_2022* are patched with PUSH and RET instructions. The PUSH instruction “pushes” the relevant function address onto the stack and the RET instruction moves the control flow into the pushed address.

Samples *px_2014* and *px_2021* did not patch instructions to manipulate the control flow. It utilized legitimate exported function names of the legitimate DLL which gets called by the legitimate executable.

PEB_LDR_DATA

Sample	PEB_LDR_DATA
px_2012	InInitializationOrderModuleList
px_2014	InInitializationOrderModuleList
px_2015	InInitializationOrderModuleList
px_2019	InInitializationOrderModuleList
px_2021	InMemoryOrderModuleList
px_2022	InInitializationOrderModuleList

Aside from *InitializationOrderModuleList*, sample *px_2021* utilized *InMemoryOrderModuleList*. *InMemoryOrderModuleList* lists loaded modules according to the memory placement. The difference from *InInitializationOrderModuleList* is that *InMemoryOrderModuleList* includes the executable within the list.

Payload Obfuscation

Sample	Usage of StackString	Usage of Code Obfuscation
px_2012	Yes	N/A
px_2014	Yes	Yes
px_2015	Yes	Yes
px_2019	Yes; Places one characters at a time	N/A
px_2021	Yes; Places one characters at a time	N/A
px_2022	Yes; Some, one character at a time, some in bulk.	N/A

The usage of StackString on the functions which need to be loaded dynamically appears to be consistent throughout the samples. However, a slight update is placed in `px_2019`, `px_2021` and `px_2022`, which is placing one character at a time onto a Stack:

```

mov byte ptr ss:[ebp-9C],56      56:'V'
mov byte ptr ss:[ebp-9B],69      69:'i'
mov byte ptr ss:[ebp-9A],72      72:'r'
mov byte ptr ss:[ebp-99],74      74:'t'
mov byte ptr ss:[ebp-98],75      75:'u'
mov byte ptr ss:[ebp-97],61      61:'a'
mov byte ptr ss:[ebp-96],6C      6C:'l'
mov byte ptr ss:[ebp-95],50      50:'P'
mov byte ptr ss:[ebp-94],72      72:'r'
mov byte ptr ss:[ebp-93],6F      6F:'o'
mov byte ptr ss:[ebp-92],74      74:'t'
mov byte ptr ss:[ebp-91],65      65:'e'
mov byte ptr ss:[ebp-90],63      63:'c'
mov byte ptr ss:[ebp-8F],74      74:'t'
mov byte ptr ss:[ebp-8E],0

```

Fetching VirtualProtect

Samples `px_2014` and `px_2015` also have additional code obfuscation, which is an encryption on the function that prepares the PlugX payload. This function is the main component of this deployment payload and this is an additional layer of anti-analysis:

023F17F1	4F	dec edi
023F17F2	5D	pop ebp
023F17F3	BE 4683FAEA	mov esi,EAF8346
023F17F8	EA EASD2ADE 5D2A	jmp far 2ASD:DE2A5DEA
023F17FF	0E	push cs
023F1800	63BE 9AEAEAEA	arpl word ptr ds:[esi-15151566],di
023F1806	50	push eax

023F17F1	55	push ebp
023F17F2	8BEC	mov ebp,esp
023F17F4	64:A1 30000000	mov eax,dword ptr [30]
023F17FA	8B40 0C	mov eax,dword ptr ds:[eax+C]
023F17FD	8B40 1C	mov eax,dword ptr ds:[eax+1C]
023F1800	81EC D0000000	sub esp,D0
023F1806	56	push esi

Code deobfuscation

Code deobfuscation in `px_2015`

Decompression and Payload Deployment

Sample	Decompression Format	Decryption of compressed data	Decompressed Data Format	Payload Header
px_2012	LZ	Yes	PE File with PE signatures	GULP
px_2014	LZ	Yes	PE File with PE signatures	GULP
px_2015	LZ	Yes	PE File without PE signatures	XV
px_2019	LZ	Yes	PE File with PE signatures	GULP
px_2021	LZ	Yes	PE File without PE signatures	ROHT
px_2022	LZ	Yes	PE File with PE signatures	.PE

Decompression of PlugX payload is consistent across the samples, which decrypts the LZ compressed data. However, the decompressed payload for the samples `px_2015` and `px_2021` was not in complete PE file format. It was missing traditional PE signatures such as “MZ...This program cannot be run in DOS mode”. The relevant section information was still intact, which was needed for the PlugX loader to allocate necessary sections to the new memory region.

This update only removed portions of the PE header. However, it contained necessary information for the code to function. This update prevents analysts from simply dumping the decompressed payload and conducting further analysis, since it is not in proper PE format.

Sample `px_2015`, `px_2021` and `px_2022` also had different headers once the decompressed payload was allocated into `PAGE_EXECUTE_READWRITE` memory region:

- o `px_2015`: XV - Roman numeral for 15.
- o `px_2021`: ROHT - Backward for “THOR”
- o `px_2022`: .PE - Portable Executable

The differences in the header may be evidence of the versioning of PlugX as well.

Core Deployment Methods Are Consistent Across Samples

There are several slight detail differences while comparing samples, however there appears to be no major updates in the past decade regarding the deployment method of this malware.




Although there were no major updates, the malware loader appears to have version management. This is evident from OS date and time check as well as the differences in payload headers while deploying the actual PlugX.

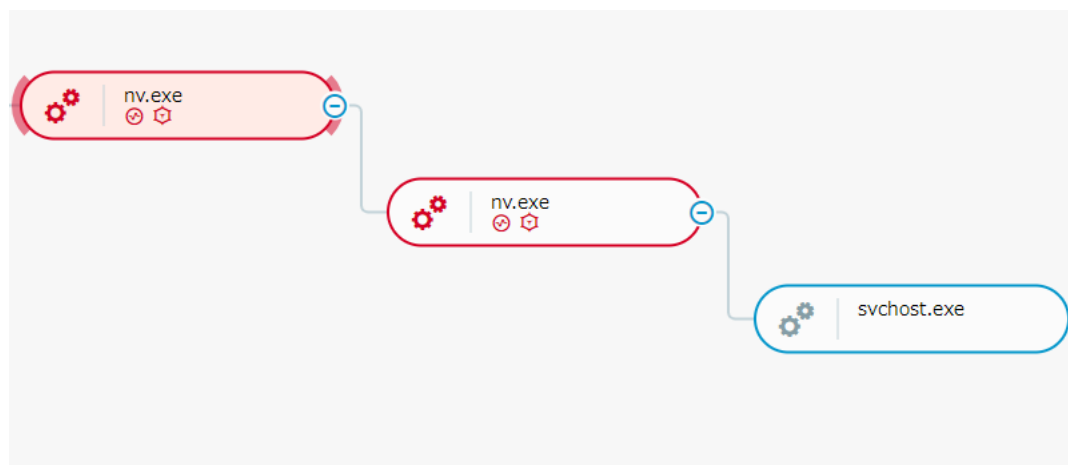
The lack of a major deployment method is also believed to be due to the use of the DLL Side-Loading technique. The DLL Side-Loading technique itself gives the threat actors various options on which legitimate executables to side-load the PlugX with. This evasion technique already creates various combinations and an update on deployment methods deemed unnecessary

Detection and Prevention

Cybereason Defense Platform

The [Cybereason Defense Platform](#) is able to detect and prevent infections with the PlugX loader using multi-layer protection that detects and blocks malware with threat intelligence, machine learning, anti-ransomware and Next-Gen Antivirus (NGAV) capabilities:

Type	Root cause	Affected machines	Detected activity
Older (3)			
	nvsmartmax.dll Known malware Loaded module for malware		 Infection



MalOp generation based from threat intelligence as seen in the Cybereason Defense Platform

Cybereason GSOC MDR

The Cybereason GSOC recommends the following:

- Enable both the Signature and Artificial Intelligence modes on the Cybereason NGAV, and enable the Detect and Prevent modes of this feature.
- Handle files originating from external sources (email, web browsing) with caution.
- To hunt proactively, use the Investigation screen in the Cybereason Defense Platform and the queries in the Hunting Queries section to search for machines that are potentially infected with PlugX. Based on the search results, take further remediation actions, such as isolating the infected machines and deleting the payload file.

Cybereason is dedicated to teaming with defenders to end cyber attacks from endpoints to the enterprise to everywhere. [Schedule a demo today](#) to learn how your organization can benefit from an [operation-centric approach to security](#).

MITRE ATT&CK MAPPING

Execution	Persistence	Defense Evasion	Discovery	Collection	Command and Control
<u>Command and Scripting Interpreter</u>	<u>Boot or logon Autostart Execution</u>	<u>Deobfuscate/Decode Files or Information</u>	<u>File and Directory Discovery.</u>	<u>Input Capture</u>	<u>Application Layer Control</u>
<u>Native API</u>	<u>Create or Modify System Process</u>	<u>Hide Artifacts</u>	<u>Network Share Discovery.</u>	<u>Screen Capture</u>	<u>Encrypted Channel</u>
		<u>Hijack Execution Flow</u>	<u>Process Discovery.</u>		<u>Ingress Tool Transfer</u>
		<u>Masquerading</u>	<u>Query Registry.</u>		<u>Non-Application Layer Protocol</u>
		<u>Modify Registry.</u>	<u>System Network Connections Discovery.</u>		<u>Web Service</u>
		<u>Obfuscated Files or Information</u>			
		<u>Trusted Developer Utilities Proxy Execution</u>			
		<u>Virtualization/Sandbox Evasion</u>			

Indicators Of Compromise For PlugX Malware

Executables SHA-256 hash:

EAAA7899B37A3B04DCD02AD6D51E83E035BE535F129773621EF0F399A2A98EE3

SHA-256 hash:

3D64E638F961B922398E2EFAF75504DA007E41EA979F213F8EB4F83E00EFEEBB

SHA-256 hash:

4B23F8683E184757E8119C8C68063F547F194E1ABD758DCBD4DACF70E3908FC1

SHA-256 hash:

B2B93C7C4AC82623F74B14FE73F2C3F8E58E3306CC903C5AE71BC355CB5BD069

SHA-256 hash:

96876D24284FF4E4155A78C043C8802421136AFBC202033BF5E80D1053E3833F

SHA-256 hash:

ACDC4987B74FDF7A32DFF87D56C43DF08CCE071B493858E3CE32FCF8D6372837

SHA-256 hash:

9FB33E460CA1654FCC555A6F040288617D9E2EFE626F611B77522606C724B59B

SHA-256 hash:

6914E9DE21F5CCE3F5C1457127122C13494ED82E6E2D95A8200A46BDB4CD7075

SHA-256 hash:

9FFF3894B008D5A54343CCF8395A47ACFE953394FFFE2C58550E444FF20EC47

SHA-256 hash:

59BA902871E98934C054649CA582E2A01707998ACC78B2570FEF43DBD10F7B6F

SHA-256 hash:

6CD5079A69D9A68029E37F2680F44B7BA71C2B1EECF4894C2A8B293D5F768F10

SHA-256 hash:

37B3FB9AA12277F355BBB334C82B41E4155836CF3A1B83E543CE53DA9D429E2F

About The Researchers

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Kotaro Ogino is a Senior Security Analyst with the Cybereason Global SOC team. He is involved in threat hunting, administration of Security Orchestration, Automation, and Response (SOAR) systems, and Extended Detection and Response (XDR). Kotaro has a bachelor of science degree in information and computer science.

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About the Author

Cybereason Global SOC Team

The Cybereason Global SOC Team delivers 24/7 Managed Detection and Response services to customers on every continent. Led by cybersecurity experts with experience working for government, the military and multiple industry verticals, the Cybereason Global SOC Team continuously hunts for the most sophisticated and pervasive threats to support our mission to end cyberattacks on the endpoint, across the enterprise, and everywhere the battle moves.

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