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U.S. Charges 5 Russian Military Officers Over Ukraine Cyberattacks

By AFP

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Soumil Kumar / pexels

The United States charged five Russian military officers on Thursday for allegedly conducting cyberattacks on civilian infrastructure in Ukraine ahead of the Russian invasion.

Assistant Attorney General Matthew Olsen said the members of Russia's GRU military intelligence agency indicted in Maryland waged a cyber campaign against Ukraine known as WhisperGate.

"The WhisperGate campaign included the targeting of civilian infrastructure and Ukrainian computer systems wholly unrelated to the military or national defense," Olsen said at a press conference in Baltimore.

FBI special agent William DelBagno said the WhisperGate malware attack in January 2022 "could be considered the first shot of the war."

It was intended to cripple Ukraine's government and critical infrastructure by targeting financial systems, agriculture, emergency services, healthcare and schools, DelBagno said.

Olsen said the cyber campaign was not restricted to Ukraine but also included attacks on computer systems in the United States and other NATO countries backing Ukraine.

Embed:

> The @FBI announce a $10 m award for information leading to the arrest of GRU Unit 29155 hackers who targeted Ukrainian gov't infrastructure at the start of the invasion. They are all familiar faces to us, will do a story on them in the next few days. pic.twitter.com/PHJvDrg7Ey
>
> — Christo Grozev (@christogrozev) September 5, 2024

A Russian civilian, Amin Timovich Stigal, 22, was indicted in Maryland in June on charges of conspiracy to hack into and destroy computer systems for his alleged involvement in WhisperGate.

Stigal and the five Russian GRU members remain at large and the State Department offered a combined $60 million reward for information leading to their arrest.

Stigal's indictment accused him and members of the GRU of distributing WhisperGate malware to dozens of Ukrainian government agency computer systems ahead of the Russian invasion.

'Deadly dirty tricks'

The Justice Department said WhisperGate was designed to look like ransomware but was really a "cyberweapon designed to completely destroy the target computer and related data."

It said patient health records were exfiltrated from computer systems and websites were defaced to read: "Ukrainians! All information about you has become public, be afraid and expect the worst."

The hacked data was also offered for sale on the internet.

US Attorney Erek Barron said the indicted GRU officers were members of a subset of unit 29155 of the Russian Main Intelligence Directorate, which he described as "a military intelligence agency responsible for attempted deadly dirty tricks around the world."

They were named in the indictment as Colonel Yuriy Denisov, commanding officer of cyber operations for Unit 29155, and four lieutenants: Vladislav Borovkov, Denis Denisenko, Dmitriy Goloshubov and Nikolay Korchagin.

The unsealing of the indictment comes a day after the United States accused Russia's state-

funded news outlet RT of seeking to influence the 2024 US presidential election.

Attorney General Merrick Garland also announced the seizure of 32 internet domains that were part of an alleged campaign "to secure Russia's preferred outcome," which U.S. officials have said would be Donald Trump winning the November vote.

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