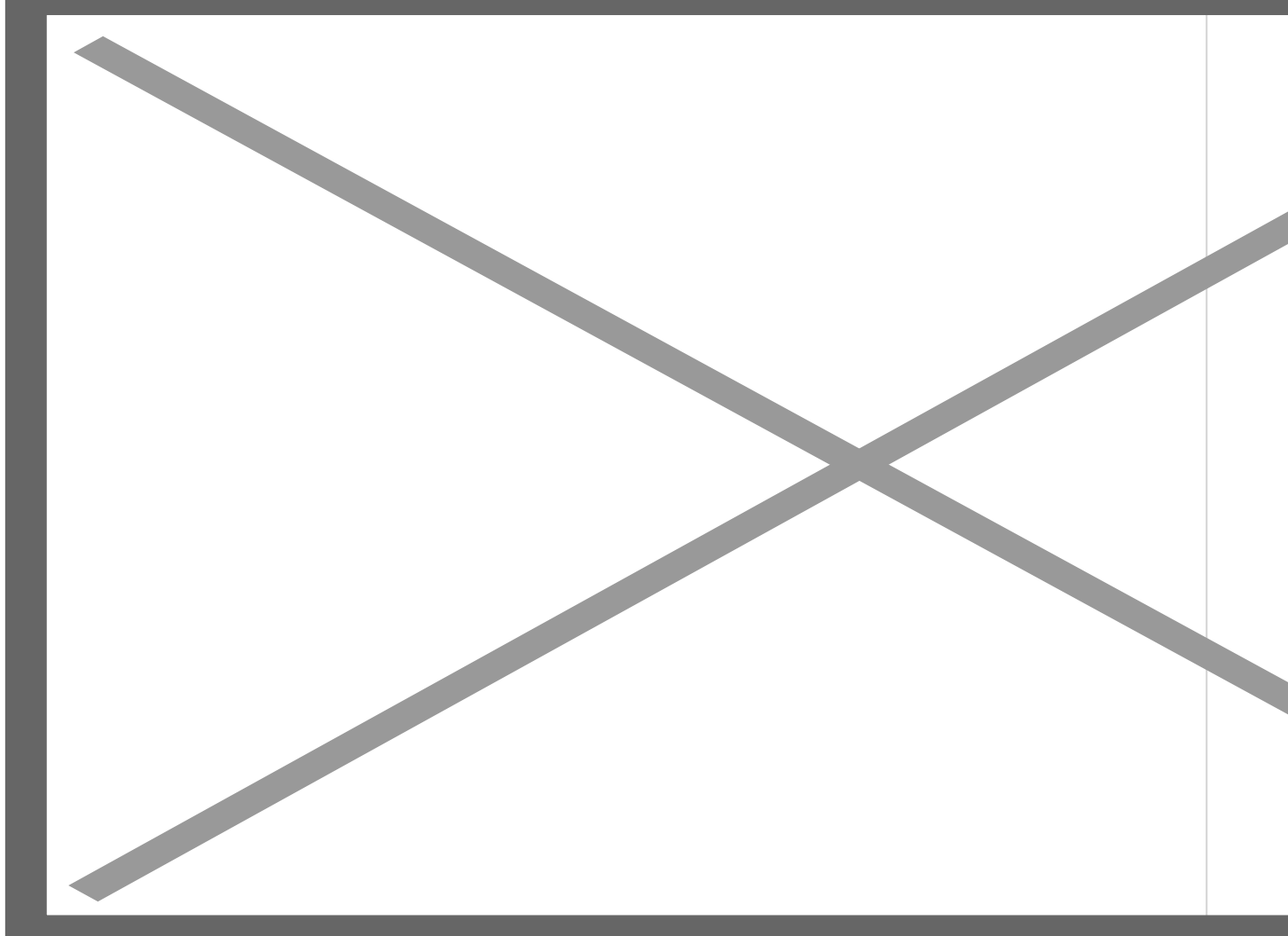


Russian intelligence agency says CIA hacked iPhones of diplomats

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A file photo by AP shows the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)'s logo.

Moscow, June 3 (RHC)-- A Russian intelligence agency has said that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) installed malware on thousands of Apple phones used by Russian citizens and foreign diplomats serving in the country.

In a statement released this week, the Federal Border Guard Service (FPS) said that a joint operation with the Federal Guard Service (FSO) had “uncover[ed] a surveillance operation by American intelligence agencies, carried out with the use of Apple’s mobile devices.”

An assessment of Russia’s telecom infrastructure revealed “anomalies” in the operations of some iPhones, caused by “a previously unknown malicious program that uses software vulnerabilities provided by the manufacturer,” the agency said. Several thousand phones made by Apple were infected with the malware, according to the FSB.

The FSB said that in addition to impacting domestic users, the malware also targeted foreign numbers and wireless subscribers who use SIM cards registered with diplomatic missions and embassies in Russia. Not only were Russian citizens targeted, but also “foreign phone numbers and subscribers that use SIM cards registered with diplomatic missions and embassies inside Russia, including countries from the NATO bloc and the post-Soviet space, as well as Israel, Syria, and China,” the statement read.

The discovery is more proof of the close cooperation between Apple and the US intelligence community, the FSB said, adding that “the declared policy of ensuring the privacy of personal data of Apple users has nothing to do with reality.”

The FSB also accused Apple of “providing the American intelligence services with a wide range of opportunities to survey any persons of interest to the White House, including their partners in anti-Russian activities, as well as their own citizens.”

In March the Kommersant newspaper reported that members of the Russian presidential administration had been told to discard their iPhones. According to the paper, the step was taken due to concerns that advanced cyber-warfare tools, such as the Israeli Pegasus software, could allow Apple gadgets to be breached despite the producer’s claims of their enhanced security features.

Smartphones infected with Pegasus can be turned into a listening device. In addition, the spyware allows the user to read the target’s messages, access their photos, track their location, and even turn on their camera without their knowledge

Last month, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) launched a campaign on social media platforms to recruit Russian nationals disaffected by the military operation in Ukraine as spies and agents.

According to a recent report by CNN, the CIA first released the Russian-language video on the popular social messaging service Telegram, calling on Russians to come forward with important intelligence information and share secrets.

Last March, the Washington Post reported that the CIA was attempting to recruit employees of the Russian embassy in Washington by means of sending social media ads to smartphones. In November last year, a report by the Wall Street Journal revealed that the U.S. spy agency has been seeking to recruit Russian nationals frustrated with the course of war in Ukraine.

Russia launched a military operation in Ukraine in late February 2022, following Kiev’s failure to implement the terms of the Minsk agreements and Moscow’s recognition of the breakaway regions of Donetsk and Luhansk.

The CIA is reportedly overseeing an undercover training program for Ukrainian forces in the United States.

President Putin had declared that one of the goals of the “special military operation” was to “de-Nazify” Ukraine.

Since the onset of the war, the West has supplied Ukraine with tens of billions of dollars worth of weapons, including rocket systems, drones, armored vehicles, tanks, and communication systems despite Russia's repeated warnings that the Western military assistance will only prolong the conflict.

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