US offers $10 million bounty for members of Iranian hacking gang

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Graham CLULEY
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A US $10 million reward is being offered to anyone who has information about four members of an Iranian hacking group.

The US government's Rewards for Justice initiative is making the reward available for information about four men believed to be members of Shahid Hemmat, a hacking gang backed by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Cyber-Electronic Command (IRGC-CEC).

The Iranian hackers are accused of launching malicious attacks against various vital parts of United States critical infrastructure, including water facilities, energy infrastructure, and manufacturing plants.

Shahid Hemmat has been linked, for instance, to the hack of a booster station at the Municipal Water Authority in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, in November 2023, where a pump on a supply-line providing drinking water to nearby towns was shut down.

The water system's Programmable Logic Controller (PLC), made by Israeli firm Unitronics, displayed a dramatic image:

> "You have been hacked. Down with Israel. Every equipment 'Made in Israel' is Cyber Av3ngers legal target"

Within days, American cyber defence agency CISA had issued a warning to the water sector that Unitronics PLCs with exposed ports to the internet were being actively exploited.

The advisory recommended strongly that default passwords should be changed on vulnerable PLCs to strong, unique alternatives, and multi-factor authentication enabled, amongst other measures.

At the same time, it was reported that hackers had attacked a brewery control system, interrupting the production of beer.

The Shahid Hemmat hacking group has claimed responsibility for cyberattacks against facilities in Israel since 2020, often using the name "Cyber Av3ngers," and has reportedly been linked to another IRGC-hacking group known as Soldiers of Solomon.

The reward of up to US $10 million is being offered for information leading to the identification or location of Manuchehr Akbari, Amir Hosein Hoseini, Mohammad Hosein Moradi, and Mohammad Reza Rafatinezhad.

In the past the Rewards for Justice programme has attempted to attract responses by offering "relocation and rewards payments by cryptocurrency" for "eligible sources" - recognising that some of those with information about persons of interest may desire a higher level of protection, and perhaps even help starting a new life.

Tips can also be submitted via encrypted messaging app Signal or via its Tor-based tipline. Rewards for Justice says that it reads every tip it receives, and that messages can be sent in multiple languages.

More information can be found on the official Rewards for Justice website.

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Author

Graham CLULEY

Graham Cluley is an award-winning security blogger, researcher and public speaker. He has been working in the computer security industry since the early 1990s.

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