

# That whatsapp call will inject spyware!

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● The tool was developed by a shadowy Israel-based firm called the NSO Group

● The latest exploit was discovered earlier this month

San Francisco, United States

A security flaw in WhatsApp, one of the most popular messaging apps in the world, allowed sophisticated attackers to install spyware on phones, the company said yesterday, in the latest trouble for its parent Facebook.

The vulnerability -- first reported by the *Financial Times*, and fixed in the latest WhatsApp update -- allowed hackers to insert malicious software on phones by calling the target using the app, which is used by 1.5 billion people around the world.

The FT cited a spyware dealer as saying the tool was developed by a shadowy Israel-based firm called the NSO Group, which has been accused of helping governments from the Middle East to Mexico snoop on activists and journalists. Security researchers said the malicious code bore similarities to other tech developed by the firm, according to *The New York Times*.

The latest exploit -- which impacts Android devices and

Apple's iPhones, among others -- was discovered earlier this month and WhatsApp scrambled to fix it, rolling out an update in less than 10 days.

"WhatsApp encourages people to upgrade to the latest version of our app, as well as keep their mobile operating system up to date, to protect against potential targeted exploits designed to compromise information stored on mobile devices," a spokesperson said in a statement.

The firm did not comment on the number of users affected or who targeted them, and said it had reported the matter to US authorities.

The breach is the latest in a series of issues troubling WhatsApp's parent Facebook, which has faced intense criticism for allowing its users' data to be harvested by research companies and over its slow response to Russia using the platform as a means to spread disinformation during the 2016 US election campaign.

The WhatsApp spyware is sophisticated and "would be avail-

able to only advanced and highly motivated actors", the company said, adding that a "select number of users were targeted".

## Highly invasive software

"This attack has all the hallmarks of a private company that works with a number of governments around the world" according to initial investigations, it added, but did not name the firm.

WhatsApp has briefed human rights organizations on the matter, but did not identify them.

The Citizen Lab, a research group at the University of Toronto, said in a tweet it believed an attacker tried to target a human rights lawyer as recently as Sunday using this flaw, but was blocked by WhatsApp.

The NSO Group came to prominence in 2016 when researchers accused it of helping spy on an activist in the United Arab Emirates. Its best-known product is Pegasus, a highly invasive tool that can reportedly switch on a target's phone camera and microphone, and access data on it.

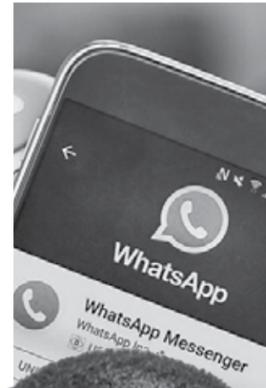
The firm said Tuesday that it only licenses its software to governments for "fighting crime and terror".

The NSO Group "does not operate the system, and after a rigorous licensing and vetting process, intelligence and law enforcement determine how to use the technology to support their public safety missions", it said in a statement.

"We investigate any credible allegations of misuse and if necessary, we take action, including shutting down the system."

The Citizen Lab, a research group at the University of Toronto, said in a tweet it believed an attacker tried to target a human rights lawyer as recently as Sunday using this flaw, but was blocked by WhatsApp.

WhatsApp encouraged its users to upgrade the app to plug a security breach that allowed sophisticated attackers to sneak spyware into phones, in the latest trouble for its parent Facebook.



Vulnerability exists in the following versions of WhatsApp:

● WhatsApp for Android prior to v2.19.134

● WhatsApp Business for Android prior to v2.19.44

● WhatsApp for iOS prior to v2.19.51

● WhatsApp Business for iOS prior to v2.19.51

● WhatsApp for Windows Phone prior to v2.18.348



## What to do when you suspect an infection?

Experts ask to use a strong anti-virus software or application to run a security check.

In case it displays results, then the software prompts you to delete the same.

Not satisfied, then try resetting your phone. Resetting removes all data that is stored in the phone memory and hence, your phone is as good as new.

## How to recognize that your phone is infected

- Your phone is suddenly very slow.
- You suddenly start getting unnecessary pop-ups.
- If you notice that your device is getting hotter than usual.
- You see a number of strange apps that you don't remember downloading.
- If you notice a loss of data such as documents, images, videos, etc.
- Apps suddenly are slower.

## Never do this update

- People sending links saying that there is an updated version of WhatsApp. It's entirely possible to infect a message with a virus, even though the link in the message opens to Play Store or App Store.
- Never click on such messages. Set your phone to automatically update apps or to prompt you when there is such an update available. You can then avoid clicking on such messages.

Pegasus spyware can turn on a phone's camera and mic and collect emails, messages, and location data

## NBK Credit Card announces buy 1 and get 1 movie ticket offer

TDI | Manama

The National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has entered into its first-ever partnership with VOX Cinemas, Bahrain, to give movie lovers in Bahrain a buy one get one free ticket offer.

Customers can now avail of this exclusive offer on the purchase of movie tickets from VOX Cinemas using their NBK credit card.

This offer is available at The Avenues - Bahrain and City Centre Bahrain. Customers can redeem this offer both online and at the cinemas.

To celebrate the partnership, NBK hosted a special screening of the Avengers Endgame movie for their premier customers, and key media and social media influencers at VOX Cinemas "The Avenues".

"We are extremely happy to have entered this partnership with VOX Cinemas and are hope-



In pictures, during a special screening of the Avengers Endgame movie organised by NBK

ful that more and more people of Bahrain will start using our

credit cards and benefit from our unique offers," stated Ali Fardan,

General Manager, NBK.

