INTELLIGENCE BRIEFING
Security Command Center
TLP:CLEAR
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Cisco SD-WAN Active Exploitation and Fake PoC Noise: Dual Threat to SOC Operations

THREAT CAMPAIGN | MEDIUM | CVSS 5.0

SCC Item ID	SCC-CAM-2026-0026
Type	Threat Campaign
Severity	MEDIUM
CVSS Base Score	5.0
Affected Products	Cisco Catalyst SD-WAN (multiple CVEs; specific versions per Cisco Security Advisories cisco-sa-sdwan-rpa-EHchtZk and cisco-sa-sdwan-authbp-qwCX8D4v)
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Executive Summary

Cisco Catalyst SD-WAN systems are under active exploitation by threat actor UAT-8616, targeting authentication bypass and privilege escalation vulnerabilities that could allow unauthorized access to network infrastructure. CISA has issued Emergency Directive ED 26-03 requiring federal agencies to mitigate these vulnerabilities, signaling elevated national-security concern. Organizations running Cisco SD-WAN face dual risk: real network compromise and wasted SOC capacity from fraudulent proof-of-concept code circulating online that is generating false escalations.

Technical Analysis

Active exploitation of Cisco Catalyst SD-WAN has been confirmed by CISA Emergency Directive ED 26-03 and reported by Cisco threat intelligence, attributed to threat actor UAT-8616. Two Cisco Security Advisories cover the affected vulnerabilities: cisco-sa-sdwan-rpa-EHchtZk (authentication bypass) and cisco-sa-sdwan-authbp-qwCX8D4v (multiple issues). Vulnerability classes include CWE-287 (improper authentication), CWE-20 (improper input validation), CWE-78 (OS command injection), and CWE-269 (improper privilege management). MITRE ATT&CK techniques mapped to this campaign include T1190 (Exploit Public-Facing Application), T1059 (Command and Scripting Interpreter), T1078 (Valid Accounts), T1068 (Exploitation for Privilege Escalation), T1203 (Exploitation for Client Execution), and T1588.005 (Obtain Capabilities: Exploits). Specific affected versions are detailed per each advisory; consult cisco-sa-sdwan-rpa-EHchtZk and cisco-sa-sdwan-authbp-qwCX8D4v for version-level scope. A secondary operational burden exists: fraudulent PoC code is circulating online misrepresenting exploitability, degrading triage fidelity and consuming analyst time. CVSS and EPSS scoring metadata in the source feed is incomplete; severity should be treated as higher than the raw score suggests given confirmed active exploitation and an

active CISA Emergency Directive.

Action Checklist

1. Step 1, Patch immediately: Apply Cisco-recommended fixes per advisories cisco-sa-sdwan-rpa-EHchtZk and cisco-sa-sdwan-authbp-qwCX8D4v. Federal agencies are under mandatory remediation timelines per CISA ED 26-03; treat those timelines as the ceiling, not the floor.
2. Step 2, Hunt for exploitation indicators: Review SD-WAN controller and vManage authentication logs for anomalous login patterns, unexpected privilege changes, and unusual command execution consistent with T1078, T1068, and T1059. Cross-reference against Cisco Talos and official Cisco advisory guidance for specific IOC indicators.
3. Step 3, Inventory affected systems: Identify all Cisco Catalyst SD-WAN deployments, map them to affected version ranges in both advisories, and prioritize internet-facing controllers and vManage instances for immediate patching.
4. Step 4, Triage PoC noise: Establish an internal filter for circulating fraudulent PoC claims. Require analysts to validate any purported exploit code against official Cisco advisory guidance and Cisco Talos threat intelligence reporting (blog.talosintelligence.com/uat-8616-sd-wan/) before escalating. Document the false-positive pattern to calibrate detection thresholds.
5. Step 5, Review network segmentation and access controls: Confirm SD-WAN management planes are not exposed directly to the internet. Audit administrative account access, enforce MFA on SD-WAN management interfaces, and review least-privilege configurations aligned with CIS Benchmarks for network devices.

IR / Forensic Enrichment

Triage Priority	IMMEDIATE
Escalation Criteria	Escalate to CISO and legal immediately if any authentication logs show successful unauthorized logins to vManage, or if forensic analysis confirms command execution by non-administrative accounts; escalate to external IR firm if compromise extends beyond SD-WAN management plane to underlying network infrastructure.
Recovery Notes	Post-eradication: re-baseline all SD-WAN controller configurations against Cisco hardening guides (CIS Benchmarks for network devices). Re-issue all administrative credentials and enforce MFA enrollment. Conduct 30-day enhanced monitoring of authentication logs and command execution (T1078, T1068, T1059 indicators) to detect post-exploitation persistence mechanisms. Document lessons learned: false-positive PoC patterns, patching timeline gaps, and network segmentation failures.
Forensic Artifacts	vManage audit logs (/opt/vmanage/logs/audit.log) — authentication events, privilege changes, configuration modifications | SD-WAN controller syslog (configure logging enabled-level 7) — authentication failures, command execution, API calls | vManage user authentication session records (Administration > Users > Login History export) — failed logins, anomalous geolocations, off-hours access | Firewall access logs and flow records for management plane traffic (ports 443, 8443, 22) — source IP, timing, protocol, destination | Network captures (tcpdump/Wireshark) from management VLAN during suspected exploitation window — SSL/TLS handshakes, HTTP POST bodies, command payloads

Per-Action IR Details

Step 1, Patch immediately: Apply Cisco-recommended fixes per advisories cisco-sa-sdwan-rpa-EHchtZk and cisco-sa-sdwan-authbp-qwCX8D4v. Federal agencies are under mandatory remediation timelines per CISA ED 26-03; treat those timelines as the ceiling, not the floor.

NIST Phase: Preparation

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §2.1 (preparation phase emphasis on preventive controls)

Controls: NIST 800-53 SI-2 (Flaw Remediation), NIST 800-53 CA-7 (Continuous Monitoring), CIS Controls 3.10 (Address Unauthorized Software)

Compensating: If patch deployment is blocked by change management delays: immediately apply network-layer compensating controls (restrict SD-WAN management plane access to trusted IP ranges via firewall ACLs; enforce SSH key-only authentication; disable HTTP management interfaces). Document deviation and escalate for expedited approval.

Evidence: Capture baseline of running Cisco SD-WAN versions and build numbers before patching (show version on device CLI or vManage UI dashboard). Preserve pre-patch system configurations, running-config file snapshots, and vManage database backups. Record patch deployment timestamps and confirmation logs for chain-of-custody.

Step 2, Hunt for exploitation indicators: Review SD-WAN controller and vManage authentication logs for anomalous login patterns, unexpected privilege changes, and unusual command execution consistent with T1078, T1068, and T1059. Cross-reference against Cisco Talos and official Cisco advisory guidance for specific IOC indicators.

NIST Phase: Detection Analysis

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §3.2 (detection and analysis); §3.2.4 (prioritization by severity and type)

Controls: NIST 800-53 AU-12 (Audit Generation), NIST 800-53 SI-4 (Information System Monitoring), CIS Controls 8.5 (Log all access to audit records)

Compensating: Without SIEM: export vManage audit logs (Settings > Logging > Export) and parse locally using grep + awk to identify failed login attempts (pattern: 'auth failed' or 'invalid credentials'), privilege escalation (pattern: 'role changed' or 'permission granted'), and non-standard commands (pattern: CLI exec or API calls outside normal maintenance windows). Cross-reference usernames against known administrators; flag any logins outside business hours or from unexpected geolocations.

Evidence: Preserve vManage audit logs (/opt/vmanage/logs/audit.log on vManage instances). Capture Cisco SD-WAN controller syslog (configure logging levels to capture authentication events). Export all authentication session records from vManage UI (Administration > Users > Login History). Preserve timestamps in UTC to align with external threat intelligence timelines.

Step 3, Inventory affected systems: Identify all Cisco Catalyst SD-WAN deployments, map them to affected version ranges in both advisories, and prioritize internet-facing controllers and vManage instances for immediate patching.

NIST Phase: Preparation

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §2.1 (preparation: tools and resources for incident detection and handling)

Controls: NIST 800-53 CM-2 (Baseline Configuration), NIST 800-53 CM-8 (Information System Component Inventory), CIS Controls 1.1 (Inventory and Control of Enterprise Assets)

Compensating: Without asset management tools: query network using Cisco device discovery methods. SSH into each vManage instance and run 'show version' to capture software release; export results to CSV. Cross-reference output against Cisco Security Advisories cisco-sa-sdwan-rpa-EHchtZk (affected versions listed in advisory body) and cisco-sa-sdwan-authbp-qwCX8D4v. Flag any device matching affected version range. For internet-exposed instances, run 'nmap -p 443,8443 ' from external network to confirm accessibility.

Evidence: Document all device versions, serial numbers, and management IP addresses in a configuration management database or spreadsheet. Capture network topology diagrams showing SD-WAN controller placement and internet exposure. Record DNS records pointing to vManage management interfaces. Preserve network scan

results (nmap output) showing exposed management ports.

Step 4, Triage PoC noise: Establish an internal filter for circulating fraudulent PoC claims. Require analysts to validate any purported exploit code against official Cisco advisory guidance and Cisco Talos threat intelligence reporting (blog.talosintelligence.com/uat-8616-sd-wan/) before escalating. Document the false-positive pattern to calibrate detection thresholds.

NIST Phase: Detection Analysis

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §3.1 (preparation for detection) and §3.2.3 (analyst competency and decision frameworks)

Controls: NIST 800-53 SI-4 (Information System Monitoring), NIST 800-53 RA-3 (Risk Assessment), CIS Controls 6.1 (Establish a process for receiving, documenting and acting upon vulnerability disclosures)

Compensating: Create a manual validation checklist: (1) Verify PoC source against official Cisco Talos blog and CISA advisories (check domain WHOIS and SSL cert for legitimacy); (2) Test PoC in isolated lab environment against known-affected version; (3) Cross-reference any IOCs in PoC against Cisco advisory CVE-specific sections; (4) Document result (valid/fraudulent) in incident log with timestamp and source URL. Share checklist with SOC team and establish Slack/email workflow requiring sign-off before any escalation.

Evidence: Preserve all circulating PoC code samples (capture full GitHub gist URLs, pastebin links, email attachments). Screenshot URLs and timestamps of first appearance in internal communication channels. Archive both legitimate advisory sources (Cisco Security Advisories, Talos blog) and fraudulent sources for post-incident analysis of analyst susceptibility.

Step 5, Review network segmentation and access controls: Confirm SD-WAN management planes are not exposed directly to the internet. Audit administrative account access, enforce MFA on SD-WAN management interfaces, and review least-privilege configurations aligned with CIS Benchmarks for network devices.

NIST Phase: Preparation

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §2.1 (preparation: defensive tools and techniques); NIST 800-53r5 AC-3 (access control implementation)

Controls: NIST 800-53 AC-2 (Account Management), NIST 800-53 AC-3 (Access Enforcement), NIST 800-53 IA-2 (Authentication), NIST 800-53 SC-7 (Boundary Protection), CIS Controls 5.2 (Establish and maintain a data asset inventory), CIS Controls 6.2 (Implement automated patch management)

Compensating: Without enterprise MFA: implement SSH key-based authentication only (disable password login on vManage SSH). Restrict administrative access by source IP using firewall ACLs (allow only from jump-host or corporate VPN subnet). Create separate administrative accounts with role-based access (read-only for monitoring staff, write access for change control only). Document all account modifications in syslog. Use device-local TACACS/RADIUS if available, or maintain audit log of manual account reviews (monthly CSV export listing all admin accounts with last login date).

Evidence: Export firewall ACL rules protecting SD-WAN management interfaces (show access-lists on firewall CLI). Capture vManage user account list with creation dates and assigned roles (Administration > Users > export CSV). Preserve any MFA configuration documentation or screenshots. Log network flows showing management plane traffic sources (capture pcap on management VLAN if possible; minimum: firewall flow logs showing source IPs accessing vManage ports 443/8443).

Detection Guidance

Focus detection on Cisco vManage and SD-WAN controller authentication logs. Look for: (1) authentication attempts followed by immediate privilege escalation sequences, indicative of CWE-287 and CWE-269 chaining; (2) unexpected OS-level command execution from management processes, consistent with CWE-78 exploitation via T1059; (3) new or modified administrative accounts created outside change-management windows, consistent with T1078 persistence; (4) inbound connections to management interfaces from unexpected external IP ranges. For PoC noise filtering: any externally sourced PoC claiming exploitability

against these advisories should be validated against official Cisco advisory guidance and Cisco Talos threat intelligence reporting (blog.talosintelligence.com/uat-8616-sd-wan/) before triggering escalation. Do not treat PoC publication alone as a confirmed exploitation event. Specific IP, domain, and hash IOCs from Cisco Talos reporting have not been independently cross-verified against secondary sources here, so validate findings with your threat intelligence platform.

Indicators of Compromise

Type	Value	Context	Confidence
URL	`https://blog.talosintelligence.com/uat-8616-sd-wan/`	Cisco Talos primary source for UAT-8616 campaign IOCs — consult directly for current indicator set; specific IOC values not independently verified for this output	HIGH
URL	`https://www.cisa.gov/news-events/directives/ed-26-03-mitigate-vulnerabilities-cisco-sd-wan-systems`	CISA Emergency Directive ED 26-03 — authoritative remediation guidance and federal agency deadlines	HIGH
URL	`https://sec.cloudapps.cisco.com/security/center/content/CiscoSecurityAdvisory/cisco-sa-sdwan-rpa-EHchtZk`	Cisco advisory for SD-WAN authentication bypass vulnerability — affected versions and patch details	HIGH
URL	`https://sec.cloudapps.cisco.com/security/center/content/CiscoSecurityAdvisory/cisco-sa-sdwan-authbp-qwCX8D4v`	Cisco advisory for SD-WAN multiple vulnerabilities including input validation and privilege management — affected versions and patch details	HIGH

Framework Mappings

MITRE-ATTACK

- **T1588.005** — Exploits
- **T1190** — Exploit Public-Facing Application
- **T1059** — Command and Scripting Interpreter
- **T1078** — Valid Accounts
- **T1068** — Exploitation for Privilege Escalation
- **T1203** — Exploitation for Client Execution

NIST-800-53R5

- **CA-8** — Penetration Testing
- **RA-5** — Vulnerability Monitoring and Scanning
- **SC-7** — Boundary Protection
- **SI-2** — Flaw Remediation

- **SI-7** — Software, Firmware, and Information Integrity
- **CM-7** — Least Functionality
- **SI-3** — Malicious Code Protection
- **SI-4** — System Monitoring
- **AC-2** — Account Management
- **AC-6** — Least Privilege
- **IA-2** — Identification and Authentication (Organizational Users)
- **IA-5** — Authenticator Management
- **SI-10** — Information Input Validation
- **IA-8** — Identification and Authentication (Non-Organizational Users)
- **IR-5** — Incident Monitoring

OWASP-TOP10-2021

- **A03:2021** — Injection
- **A07:2021** — Identification and Authentication Failures
- **A01:2021** — Broken Access Control

CIS-V8

- **2.5**
- **16.10**
- **6.3**
- **6.4**
- **6.5**
- **5.4**
- **6.8**
- **8.2** — Collect Audit Logs

ISO-27001-2022

- **A.8.26** — Application security requirements

SOC2-TSC

- **CC6.1** — The entity implements logical access security software, infrastructure, and architectures over protected information assets

HIPAA-SECURITY

- **164.312(d)** — Person or Entity Authentication

NIST-CSF-2

- **DE.CM-01** — Networks and network services are monitored
- **DE.AE-08** — Incidents are declared when adverse events meet the defined incident criteria

MITRE ATT&CK Mapping

Technique ID	Technique Name	Tactic
T1588.005	Exploits	Resource-Development
T1190	Exploit Public-Facing Application	Initial-Access
T1059	Command and Scripting Interpreter	Execution
T1078	Valid Accounts	Defense-Evasion
T1068	Exploitation for Privilege Escalation	Privilege-Escalation
T1203	Exploitation for Client Execution	Execution

Sources

Source	URL	Tier
Security News	https://www.darkreading.com	T3
Cisco Catalyst SD-WAN Controller Authentication Bypass Vulnerability	https://sec.cloudapps.cisco.com/security/center/content/CiscoSecuri...	T3
Cisco Catalyst SD-WAN Vulnerabilities	https://sec.cloudapps.cisco.com/security/center/content/CiscoSecuri...	T3
ED 26-03: Mitigate Vulnerabilities in Cisco SD-WAN Systems	https://www.cisa.gov/news-events/directives/ed-26-03-mitigate-vulne...	T1
Active exploitation of Cisco Catalyst SD-WAN by UAT-8616	https://blog.talosintelligence.com/uat-8616-sd-wan/	T3

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