INTELLIGENCE BRIEFING
Security Command Center
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Signal phishing campaign targets Germany's Bundestag President Julia Klöckner

THREAT CAMPAIGN | **HIGH** | CVSS 7.5

SCC Item ID	SCC-CAM-2026-0225
Type	Threat Campaign
Severity	HIGH
CVSS Base Score	7.5
Affected Products	Julia Klöckner (Bundestag President), German government officials, Signal users in Germany
Published	2026-04-24
Discovery Source	Gemini

Executive Summary

A targeted phishing campaign exploited Signal's linked-device feature to compromise the Signal account of Germany's Bundestag President Julia Klöckner, with reports indicating hundreds of German government and ministerial accounts were affected. Attackers gained persistent access to encrypted communications without breaking Signal's encryption by tricking officials into linking attacker-controlled devices to their accounts. Russia-linked threat actors are attributed at medium confidence, and the campaign indicates that nation-state actors are systematically targeting secure messaging platforms used by senior government officials as an alternative to attempting cryptographic attacks on Signal's encryption.

Technical Analysis

The attack exploited Signal's legitimate linked-device feature (Settings > Linked Devices) as a social-engineering vector. Victims were sent phishing links, crafted to appear as legitimate Signal device-linking invitations, that, when clicked, initiated the pairing of an attacker-controlled device to the victim's Signal account. This grants the attacker persistent read access to ongoing and incoming messages without decrypting Signal's end-to-end encryption. No cryptographic vulnerability in Signal was exploited. Relevant CWEs: CWE-1021 (Improper Restriction of Rendered UI Layers, phishing overlay/redirect), CWE-290 (Authentication Bypass by Spoofing, spoofed device-link invitation), CWE-346 (Origin Validation Error, victim cannot verify legitimacy of linking URI). MITRE ATT&CK techniques: T1566 (Phishing), T1566.003 (Spearphishing via Service, Signal platform used as delivery channel), T1550 (Use Alternate Authentication Material, linked device token abuse), T1078 (Valid Accounts, attacker operates as authenticated linked device), T1213 (Data from Information Repositories, access to Signal message history). This technique has been documented by Google Threat Analysis Group (TAG) and CERT-UA as actively used against high-value European targets; refer to their

published advisories for specific indicators. No CVE assigned. No patch is available for the underlying social-engineering vector; mitigation is procedural and configuration-based. Attribution: Russia-linked, specific group unconfirmed, medium confidence (requires validation against primary threat intelligence sources).

Action Checklist

1. Containment: Audit all Signal linked devices for every government-issued or sensitive-use account immediately. Open Signal > Settings > Linked Devices, review and remove any unrecognized devices. Prioritize accounts held by senior officials, political staff, and personnel with access to sensitive communications.
2. Detection: Review Signal account activity for unexpected linked devices added in the past 90 days. There is no centralized MDM log for Signal linked-device events; detection requires manual per-account review or user self-reporting. Brief all personnel to screenshot and report their current linked-device list to IT/security for review. Look for reports of unexpected message read receipts, unusual session activity, or unfamiliar device names in linked-device lists.
3. Eradication: Remove all unrecognized linked devices from affected Signal accounts immediately via Settings > Linked Devices > [device name] > Unlink. Advise affected users to re-register Signal on their primary device to rotate their account identity key, which invalidates all previously linked devices. If account-level compromise is confirmed, preserve logs where possible and escalate to relevant law enforcement or intelligence authorities (e.g., BSI in Germany).
4. Recovery: Verify that no unrecognized devices remain linked across all audited accounts. Monitor for continued unauthorized access indicators (unexpected read receipts, message anomalies) for 30 days post-remediation. Brief affected officials on the attack method so they can identify future attempts. Consider migrating the most sensitive government communications to air-gapped or strictly managed channels for high-risk personnel.
5. Post-Incident: This campaign exposes a procedural control gap: government personnel using consumer-grade secure messaging apps without device-linking hygiene policies. Implement a formal policy requiring periodic linked-device audits (monthly minimum) for all officials using Signal for sensitive communications. Evaluate whether Signal or any consumer messaging platform is appropriate for government-sensitive communications, and assess alternatives (e.g., government-managed encrypted platforms with MDM integration). Brief security awareness training on social-engineered device-linking attacks, including what a legitimate versus malicious Signal linking URI looks like.

IR / Forensic Enrichment

Triage Priority	IMMEDIATE
Escalation Criteria	Escalate to national CERT (CERT-Bund) and BSI immediately if more than 10 senior official accounts are confirmed compromised, if evidence suggests active exfiltration of parliamentary communications is ongoing, or if the attacker-controlled linked device was registered more than 90 days prior (indicating a longer-duration persistent access window than currently scoped); GDPR Article 33 notification to BfDI is required within 72 hours if personal data of EU data subjects was accessed via the compromised Signal sessions.

Recovery Notes	Post-eradication, verify clean state by conducting a T+24h and T+7d re-audit of linked-device lists across all affected accounts, treating any newly appearing unrecognized device as evidence of re-compromise requiring immediate escalation. Monitor for Signal safety number change notifications in conversations involving affected officials for the full 30-day window, as this is the only in-app signal of a new device-linking event. For the highest-risk accounts (Bundestag President and ministerial leads), consider suspending Signal use entirely for sensitive communications until a BSI-approved alternative with MDM-enforced device management is provisioned.
Forensic Artifacts	Signal linked-device list screenshots (per-account, timestamped): the only available record of attacker-controlled device names and approximate registration periods, since Signal does not expose device-linking event logs to OS-level audit frameworks or MDM platforms | Inbound message and email gateway logs filtered for Signal device-linking URI patterns ('sgnl://linkdevice', 'tsdevice/?uuid=', 'signal.org/install' lookalikes): primary delivery vector artifact for the social-engineering phishing lure used to trick officials into scanning a malicious QR code or tapping a spoofed linking URI | Signal identity key / safety number records (before and after re-registration): cryptographic proof of account identity key rotation and confirmation that all prior linked sessions — including attacker-controlled devices — were invalidated | Network proxy or firewall logs for POST requests to 'https://chat.signal.org/v1/devices/' originating from unexpected source IPs or geographic locations: server-side device registration events that would correspond to the moment an attacker-controlled device was linked to a victim account | Android forensic artifact (if device is seized under legal authority): '/data/data/org.thoughtcrime.securesms/databases/signal.db' SQLite database containing the 'identities' and 'sessions' tables, which record secondary device session identifiers and identity keys for all linked devices — directly maps attacker device cryptographic identity to the compromise timeline

Per-Action IR Details

Containment — Audit all Signal linked devices for every government-issued or sensitive-use account immediately: open Signal > Settings > Linked Devices > review and remove any unrecognized devices. Prioritize accounts held by senior officials, political staff, and personnel with access to sensitive communications.

NIST Phase: Containment

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §3.3 — Containment Strategy: execute coordinated containment to limit ongoing attacker access to encrypted Signal sessions without alerting threat actors prematurely

Controls: NIST IR-4 (Incident Handling) — implement containment actions consistent with the incident response plan, NIST AC-2 (Account Management) — review and revoke unauthorized session access granted via Signal's linked-device provisioning mechanism, CIS 1.1 (Establish and Maintain Detailed Enterprise Asset Inventory) — enumerate all devices authorized to access sensitive Signal accounts as part of containment scope, CIS 5.1 (Establish and Maintain an Inventory of Accounts) — identify all senior official and political staff Signal accounts subject to the linked-device audit

Compensating: For a 2-person team without MDM: build a Signal Linked Device Audit Template (Google Sheet or encrypted spreadsheet) with columns — username, account phone number, listed device names, date added, authorized Y/N. Distribute via secure internal email requiring screenshot of Settings > Linked Devices within 2 hours. Use a Signal group (on a clean, non-compromised device) or Signal Note to Self to collect screenshots from users who cannot attend in person. Prioritize accounts using the ring-fence order: Bundestag leadership > ministerial staff > committee chairs > general political staff.

Evidence: Before removing any device, capture a full screenshot of Settings > Linked Devices showing all device names and (where visible) registration timestamps. Export or photograph the device list — Signal does not provide a downloadable log. Document device names character-for-character: Russia-linked operators in similar campaigns

(e.g., APT44/Sandworm Signal targeting reported by Google TAG in 2024) have used device names mimicking legitimate Signal desktop clients (e.g., 'Signal Desktop' or localized German equivalents). Note any device registered within the 90-day window aligned to the campaign timeline.

Detection — Review Signal account activity for unexpected linked devices added in the past 90 days. There is no centralized MDM log for Signal linked-device events; detection requires manual per-account review or user self-reporting. Brief all personnel to screenshot and report their current linked-device list to IT/security for review. Look for reports of unexpected message read receipts, unusual session activity, or unfamiliar device names in linked-device lists.

NIST Phase: Detection Analysis

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §3.2 — Detection and Analysis: correlate user-reported indicators (unexpected read receipts, unfamiliar device names) as primary detection signal in the absence of centralized logging for Signal linked-device provisioning events

Controls: NIST IR-5 (Incident Monitoring) — track and document each reported linked-device anomaly as a discrete incident record with timestamp, account, and device name, NIST IR-6 (Incident Reporting) — require personnel to report suspected Signal linked-device anomalies to the organizational IR capability within a defined window (recommend 2 hours from briefing), NIST AU-2 (Event Logging) — document the logging gap: Signal does not emit OS-level or MDM-visible events for linked-device additions on mobile, creating a detection blind spot requiring procedural compensating controls, CIS 8.2 (Collect Audit Logs) — acknowledge that Signal linked-device events are not collectible via standard enterprise log pipelines; establish manual collection as interim compensating control

Compensating: Detection without SIEM: (1) Deploy a user self-reporting phishing-style form (Microsoft Forms, Google Forms on a clean domain, or encrypted Nextcloud form) with fields: account phone number, device names listed, date each device was added (if visible), and whether any phishing link (signal.org lookalike URI or QR code) was received in the past 90 days. (2) Search organizational email logs and messaging platform logs for inbound messages containing 'sgnl.page.link', 'signal.group', or any URI with 'tsdevice' query parameter — these are the Signal device-linking URI formats weaponized in this campaign. (3) On Android devices, check Google Play Store > Manage Apps & Devices > Installed Apps for Signal Desktop sideloads or unknown companion apps. On iOS, check Settings > General > VPN & Device Management for unauthorized MDM profiles that could proxy Signal traffic.

Evidence: Primary detection artifacts for this attack vector: (1) Inbound message or email logs containing Signal device-linking URIs — format: 'sgnl://linkdevice?uuid=&pub_key=' or QR code images encoded with this URI scheme — sourced from organizational email gateway logs, Teams/Slack message export, or SMS logs if available. (2) User-reported screenshots of linked-device lists showing device names and registration timestamps. (3) On Android: '/data/data/org.thoughtcrime.securesms/databases/signal.db' (requires root) contains session records — if forensic access to a device is authorized, this database logs linked secondary device session identifiers. (4) Network logs: Signal's device linking process contacts 'https://chat.signal.org/v1/devices/' — proxy or firewall logs showing POST requests to this endpoint from an unexpected source IP or at an unexpected time indicate a linking event occurred.

Eradication — Remove all unrecognized linked devices from affected Signal accounts immediately via Settings > Linked Devices > [device name] > Unlink. Advise affected users to re-register Signal on their primary device to rotate their account identity key, which invalidates all previously linked devices. Coordinate with Signal's support if account-level compromise is confirmed.

NIST Phase: Eradication

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §3.4 — Eradication: remove the attacker's persistent access mechanism (the linked secondary device session) and rotate the Signal identity key to invalidate all active sessions, including any attacker-controlled devices not yet identified

Controls: NIST IR-4 (Incident Handling) — execute eradication phase actions to remove threat actor foothold from Signal account infrastructure, NIST SI-2 (Flaw Remediation) — re-registration and identity key rotation addresses the procedural vulnerability exploited: absence of device-linking hygiene and verification controls, NIST AC-2 (Account Management) — revoke all unauthorized linked-device sessions as a form of unauthorized account access termination, CIS 5.3 (Disable Dormant Accounts) — treat unrecognized linked devices as unauthorized sessions and revoke immediately, analogous to disabling dormant or unauthorized accounts

Compensating: For teams without enterprise Signal management capability: (1) Draft and distribute a step-by-step unlink instruction card specific to Signal iOS and Android (versions differ slightly in menu path — confirm against current Signal release). (2) Script a PowerShell or bash notification tool that sends an encrypted briefing to each affected user's verified secondary contact (not Signal) with re-registration instructions and a 30-minute completion deadline. (3) Re-registration procedure: on the primary mobile device, go to Signal > Settings > Account > Delete Account, then re-register with the same phone number — this rotates the identity key and forces all previously linked devices (including attacker-controlled ones) to lose session access. Warn users: message history on the primary device is preserved; linked desktop clients will need to be re-paired legitimately after re-registration.

Evidence: Before executing eradication, preserve: (1) The full linked-device list screenshot (device names, count, any visible timestamps) — this is the primary forensic record of attacker persistence. (2) If the attacker-controlled device name is known, document it verbatim for threat intelligence — APT-linked operators often reuse device naming conventions across targets. (3) Note the Signal safety number for the affected account before and after re-registration — a change in safety number is cryptographic proof that identity key rotation occurred and can be documented for incident records. (4) If Signal support is engaged, request any available account audit data (linked-device history) before account modification, as Signal may retain server-side device registration metadata.

Recovery — Verify that no unrecognized devices remain linked across all audited accounts. Monitor for continued unauthorized access indicators (unexpected read receipts, message anomalies) for 30 days post-remediation. Brief affected officials on the attack method so they can identify future attempts. Consider migrating the most sensitive government communications to air-gapped or strictly managed channels for high-risk personnel.

NIST Phase: Recovery

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §3.5 — Recovery: restore secure Signal account state, verify eradication completeness through re-audit, and establish monitored operational posture for 30-day observation window

Controls: NIST IR-4 (Incident Handling) — verify recovery actions and restore normal operations under monitored conditions, NIST SI-7 (Software, Firmware, and Information Integrity) — verify Signal account integrity post-eradication by confirming identity key rotation and absence of unauthorized linked devices, NIST CP-2 (Contingency Plan) — evaluate migration of highest-risk communications to government-managed encrypted channels as a recovery-phase continuity decision, CIS 4.6 (Securely Manage Enterprise Assets and Software) — establish device-linking as a managed configuration parameter for Signal accounts used in sensitive government communications

Compensating: Recovery verification for a 2-person team: (1) Conduct a T+24h re-audit: re-collect linked-device screenshots from all affected accounts and compare against the post-eradication baseline — any new unrecognized device indicates re-compromise or incomplete eradication. (2) Establish a 30-day Signal anomaly reporting channel using a non-Signal medium (encrypted email or a government-managed platform) where officials can report unexpected read receipts or safety number change notifications — safety number change alerts within Signal are the closest available indicator of a re-linking attempt. (3) For highest-risk officials (Bundestag leadership, ministerial heads), evaluate interim use of Threema Work or Wire for Business — both offer MDM integration and are used by German government entities — pending formal platform assessment.

Evidence: Recovery-phase evidence to collect and retain: (1) Post-eradication linked-device screenshots for all audited accounts — timestamp-stamped and stored in the incident record as proof of clean state. (2) Signal safety number screenshots for key official accounts, taken immediately post re-registration, to establish a verified baseline for future comparison. (3) Document any safety number change notifications received by contacts of affected officials during the 30-day monitoring window — these indicate a new device linking event and warrant immediate re-investigation. (4) Retain all user-reported anomaly logs (unexpected read receipts, unfamiliar device names) from the monitoring period as evidence of either attacker persistence or false positives for post-incident review.

Post-Incident — This campaign exposes a procedural control gap: government personnel using consumer-grade secure messaging apps without device-linking hygiene policies. Implement a formal policy requiring periodic linked-device audits (monthly minimum) for all officials using Signal for sensitive communications. Evaluate whether Signal — or any consumer messaging platform — is appropriate for government-sensitive communications, and assess alternatives (e.g., government-managed encrypted

platforms with MDM integration). Brief security awareness training on social-engineered device-linking attacks, including what a legitimate vs. malicious Signal linking URI looks like.

NIST Phase: Post Incident

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §4 — Post-Incident Activity: conduct lessons-learned analysis to identify the procedural control gap (absence of device-linking hygiene policy for consumer messaging apps used in government contexts) and update policies, training, and platform selection criteria to prevent recurrence

Controls: NIST IR-4 (Incident Handling) — update the incident handling capability to incorporate Signal linked-device audit procedures as a standing preparedness control, NIST IR-2 (Incident Response Training) — deliver targeted awareness training on Signal device-linking phishing attacks, including live demonstration of what a malicious 'sgnl://linkdevice' URI or QR code looks like versus a legitimate Signal desktop setup flow, NIST IR-8 (Incident Response Plan) — revise the IR plan to include consumer messaging app compromise as a named incident category with Signal-specific containment and eradication procedures, NIST SI-5 (Security Alerts, Advisories, and Directives) — integrate CISA and BSI (Germany's Federal Office for Information Security) advisories on messaging platform risks into the organization's standing advisory monitoring process, CIS 7.1 (Establish and Maintain a Vulnerability Management Process) — extend vulnerability management scope to include procedural and configuration vulnerabilities in approved communication platforms, including Signal's linked-device feature, CIS 6.3 (Require MFA for Externally-Exposed Applications) — evaluate government-managed messaging platforms with enforced MFA and MDM integration as Signal replacements for classified or sensitive-tier communications

Compensating: Post-incident hardening for resource-constrained teams: (1) Publish a one-page Signal Security Hygiene Policy (internal, German/English bilingual for Bundestag context) covering: monthly linked-device self-audit procedure, prohibition on linking Signal to personally-owned or unmanaged devices, and mandatory reporting of any unsolicited Signal linking QR code or URI. (2) Create a phishing simulation exercise using a mock 'sgnl://linkdevice' URI sent via internal email to test staff recognition — use GoPhish (free, open source) to track click rates. (3) Submit a formal platform assessment request to BSI (Bundesamt für Sicherheit in der Informationstechnik) for approved government messaging alternatives — BSI has published guidance on messenger security for German federal entities and maintains an approved products list. (4) Add a YARA rule to email gateway scanning (if ClamAV or similar is deployed) to flag inbound messages containing Signal device-linking URI patterns: rule signal_linkdevice_uri { strings: $a = "sgnl://linkdevice" $b = "tsdevice/?uuid=" condition: any of them }

Evidence: Post-incident documentation to compile for lessons-learned and potential regulatory reporting: (1) Complete incident timeline: first linked-device anomaly date, campaign detection date, containment execution date, eradication completion date — correlated against the reported 90-day campaign window. (2) Aggregate count of affected accounts by role tier (senior official, ministerial staff, political staff) — required for breach scope assessment and potential notification to German data protection authorities (BfDI) under GDPR Article 33 if personal communications data was accessed. (3) All collected linked-device screenshots, user anomaly reports, and safety number change records, preserved in the incident management system with chain-of-custody documentation. (4) ATT&CK technique mapping for the lessons-learned report: T1078 (Valid Accounts — leveraging legitimate Signal session via linked device), T1566 (Phishing — social-engineered linking URI delivery), T1550.001 (Use Alternate Authentication Material — linked-device session token as authentication bypass), T1111 (Multi-Factor Authentication Interception — bypassing Signal's E2E encryption at the session layer).

Detection Guidance

There is no automated, centralized log source for Signal linked-device additions; Signal does not expose MDM or SIEM-compatible telemetry. Detection relies on manual and procedural controls. Instruct all at-risk personnel to navigate to Signal > Settings > Linked Devices and document all active linked devices. Any device not recognized by the account holder should be treated as a potential compromise indicator. Behavioral indicators include: unexpected message read receipts on messages the user did not open, contacts reporting receiving unusual messages the user did not send, and unfamiliar device names (e.g., 'Signal Desktop, Unknown' or generic device strings) in the linked-device list. For network-level detection: monitor for Signal-related URIs containing 'sgnl://linkdevice' or equivalent deep-link schemes delivered via email, SMS, or third-party messaging

platforms, these are the expected format of malicious linking invitations. Refer to published CERT-UA and Google TAG advisories for domain and URL indicators specific to German-targeted campaigns. No additional IOCs for this specific campaign have been confirmed in available source reporting.

Framework Mappings

MITRE-ATTACK

- **T1566.003** — Spearphishing via Service
- **T1566** — Phishing
- **T1550** — Use Alternate Authentication Material
- **T1078** — Valid Accounts
- **T1213** — Data from Information Repositories

NIST-800-53R5

- **AT-2** — Literacy Training and Awareness
- **CA-7** — Continuous Monitoring
- **SC-7** — Boundary Protection
- **SI-3** — Malicious Code Protection
- **SI-4** — System Monitoring
- **SI-8** — Spam Protection
- **AC-2** — Account Management
- **AC-6** — Least Privilege
- **IA-2** — Identification and Authentication (Organizational Users)
- **IA-5** — Authenticator Management
- **SC-13** — Cryptographic Protection

CIS-V8

- **14.2** — Train Workforce Members to Recognize Social Engineering Attacks

HIPAA-SECURITY

- **164.308(a)(5)(i)** — Security Awareness and Training
- **164.312(e)(1)** — Transmission Security

ISO-27001-2022

- **A.5.34** — Privacy and protection of personal information
- **A.8.24** — Use of cryptography

MITRE ATT&CK Mapping

Technique ID	Technique Name	Tactic
T1566.003	Spearphishing via Service	Initial-Access

Technique ID	Technique Name	Tactic
T1566	Phishing	Initial-Access
T1550	Use Alternate Authentication Material	Defense-Evasion
T1078	Valid Accounts	Defense-Evasion
T1213	Data from Information Repositories	Collection

Sources

Source	URL	Tier
President of German parliament hit by Signal hack, report says	https://www.politico.eu/article/hackers-attack-phone-of-german-parl...	T3
Signal phishing campaign targets Germany's Bundestag President ...	https://securityaffairs.com/191224/intelligence/signal-phishing-cam...	T3
Russia-linked hack hits hundreds of Signal accounts in Germany	https://english.nv.ua/nation/signal-messenger-hacked-in-germany-pre...	T3
The Speaker of Germany's Parliament, Julia Klöckner, has been ...	https://www.facebook.com/BrusselsTimes/posts/the-speaker-of-germany...	T3
Germany's Bundestag President Julia Klöckner was reportedly ...	https://x.com/clashreport/status/2047660338590499006/photo/1	T3

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