INTELLIGENCE BRIEFING
Security Command Center
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NSO Group Defies Federal Injunction With Fresh WhatsApp Phishing Campaign; Meta Files Contempt

THREAT CAMPAIGN | **HIGH** | CVSS 7.5

SCC Item ID	SCC-CAM-2026-0428
Type	Threat Campaign
Severity	HIGH
CVSS Base Score	7.5
Affected Products	WhatsApp (Meta), all platforms
Published	2026-06-08T13:08:44
Discovery Source	Rss

Executive Summary

NSO Group, an Israeli surveillance vendor under a U.S. federal court injunction and Commerce Department Entity List designation, has conducted a fresh spear-phishing campaign targeting WhatsApp users after a $168 million judgment against the company. The campaign used test accounts within WhatsApp to redirect targets to malicious external domains, consistent with credential harvesting or device exploitation delivery. Meta has filed a contempt motion; the legal and operational risk to organizations whose personnel use WhatsApp for business communication is immediate and ongoing.

Technical Analysis

This is a behavioral/operational campaign, not a discrete software vulnerability, no CVE has been assigned. NSO Group created WhatsApp test accounts and groups to redirect targeted users to external malicious domains, consistent with MITRE T1598.003 (Spearphishing Link via Service) and T1598.004, with follow-on techniques including T1566.002 (Spearphishing Link), T1071.001 (Application Layer Protocol: Web Protocols), T1587.001 (Develop Capabilities: Malware), T1583.001 (Acquire Infrastructure: Domains), T1589/T1592 (victim reconnaissance), and T1204.001 (User Execution: Malicious Link). CWE mapping reflects UI deception (CWE-451: User Interface Misrepresentation of Critical Information) and failed protection mechanism (CWE-693: Protection Mechanism Failure), consistent with phishing redirection abuse of a trusted messaging platform. NSO Group's Pegasus toolchain is associated with zero-click and one-click device exploitation at the OS level once delivery succeeds. No patch is applicable, the threat vector is social engineering via the WhatsApp platform itself. NSO Group remains on the U.S. Commerce Department Entity List. Meta's contempt

filing asserts the campaign violates the existing federal court injunction.

Action Checklist

1. Step 1: Containment, Identify personnel in high-risk roles (executives, legal, government affairs, journalists, activists, M&A teams) who use WhatsApp for business communication. Advise them to treat unsolicited WhatsApp messages containing external links as hostile until further notice. Block outbound connections to newly registered or unknown domains from mobile device management (MDM) profiles where feasible. Reference NIST AC-4 (Information Flow Enforcement) for network-level flow controls.
2. Step 2: Detection, Monitor DNS query logs and proxy logs for mobile devices resolving domains linked to WhatsApp redirect chains. Flag WhatsApp group invitations from unknown senders to high-value user accounts. Review endpoint detection telemetry for iOS and Android devices used by personnel in sensitive roles for signs of process injection, anomalous network beaconing, or privilege escalation consistent with Pegasus-class implants. Reference NIST AU-6 (Audit Record Review, Analysis, and Reporting) and CIS 8.2 (Collect Audit Logs).
3. Step 3: Eradication, No patch is available; the attack is platform-behavioral. Enforce WhatsApp privacy settings: restrict 'Who can add me to groups' to 'My Contacts' or 'My Contacts Except' for high-risk users. Disable link previews for external URLs in WhatsApp on managed devices. For personnel assessed as high-value targets of nation-state surveillance tooling, evaluate migrating sensitive communications to platform alternatives with stricter group-add controls. Reference NIST CM-7 (Least Functionality).
4. Step 4: Recovery, After tightening group-add and link-preview settings, validate MDM policy deployment across all managed mobile devices. Conduct a targeted sweep of devices belonging to personnel who received unsolicited WhatsApp group invitations or external links in the campaign window. Confirm DNS/proxy telemetry is logging mobile device traffic. Reference NIST AU-12 (Audit Record Generation) and NIST SI-4 (Information System Monitoring).
5. Step 5: Post-Incident, Conduct a tabletop exercise scoped to nation-state spear-phishing via consumer messaging platforms. Review whether high-risk personnel have received targeted threat awareness training specific to commercial spyware delivery vectors. Assess whether mobile device management policies adequately restrict messaging app behavior for executive and sensitive-role users. Reference NIST AC-17 (Remote Access) for remote-access policy review covering mobile platforms, and CIS 6.3 (Require MFA for Externally-Exposed Applications) for authentication hardening on business-linked accounts.

IR / Forensic Enrichment

Triage Priority	IMMEDIATE
Escalation Criteria	Escalate to CISO, legal counsel, and external IR retainer immediately if any device belonging to executive, legal, government affairs, or M&A personnel tests positive via MVT for Pegasus IOCs, or if DNS/proxy logs confirm outbound connections to NSO Group-linked infrastructure, given active federal court proceedings, potential attorney-client privilege implications, and the U.S. Commerce Department Entity List designation of NSO Group which may trigger export control and notification obligations.

Recovery Notes	Recovery is not complete until MVT scans return clean results on all devices that received suspicious WhatsApp messages during the campaign window and MDM compliance reports confirm group-add and link-preview controls are enforced across 100% of high-risk user devices. Continue monitoring DNS and proxy telemetry for mobile device traffic for a minimum of 90 days post-remediation, as Pegasus-class implants have demonstrated delayed callback behavior and NSO Group's documented willingness to operate in defiance of legal injunctions indicates ongoing campaign risk. Given Meta's active contempt motion, coordinate with legal counsel before disposing of any digital evidence collected during this response.
Forensic Artifacts	WhatsApp SQLite message databases (iOS: /private/var/mobile/Containers/Shared/AppGroup/[UUID]/ChatStorage.sqlite; Android: /data/data/com.whatsapp/databases/msgstore.db) — contain sender JIDs, message timestamps, group invitation tokens, and external URL payloads delivered in the NSO Group campaign. | MVT (Mobile Verification Toolkit) scan output against device backups — specifically checks for Pegasus IOCs including known malicious process names, anomalous launchd plist entries (iOS), modified system libraries (Android), and C2 domain matches against Amnesty International's published NSO Group infrastructure indicators. | DNS resolver query logs for mobile device IP ranges — Pegasus infrastructure uses low-TTL algorithmically generated subdomains; filter for A-record queries with TTL under 60 seconds from WhatsApp-active device IPs during the campaign window. | iOS CrashReporter logs (/private/var/mobile/Library/Logs/CrashReporter/) and Android tombstone files (/data/tombstones/) — Pegasus zero-click exploit chains targeting WebKit (iOS) or Chromium WebView (Android) produce crash artifacts in these locations at the moment of initial exploitation. | Apple iCloud or iTunes encrypted backup metadata and Android ADB backup archives from the campaign window — required for MVT forensic analysis and serve as legal-hold evidence directly relevant to the Meta v. NSO Group contempt proceedings.

Per-Action IR Details

Step 1: Containment — Identify personnel in high-risk roles (executives, legal, government affairs, journalists, activists, M&A teams) who use WhatsApp for business communication. Advise them to treat unsolicited WhatsApp messages containing external links as hostile until further notice. Block outbound connections to newly registered or unknown domains from mobile device management (MDM) profiles where feasible. Reference NIST AC-4 (Information Flow Enforcement) for network-level flow controls.

NIST Phase: Containment

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §3.3 — Containment Strategy

Controls: NIST AC-4 (Information Flow Enforcement), NIST AC-6 (Least Privilege), CIS 4.4 (Implement and Manage a Firewall on Servers), CIS 4.5 (Implement and Manage a Firewall on End-User Devices)

Compensating: For teams without enterprise MDM: push a manual advisory to all high-risk users with step-by-step screenshots for WhatsApp Settings → Privacy → Groups → 'My Contacts Only'. On Android corporate devices enrolled in basic MDM (e.g., Intune free tier), create a conditional-access policy blocking traffic to domains registered within the last 30 days using a free DNS filtering service such as Quad9 or NextDNS (free tier). On iOS devices not MDM-enrolled, issue guidance to enable Lockdown Mode (iOS 16+) which suppresses WhatsApp link previews and restricts unsolicited invitations at the OS level — no enterprise tooling required.

Evidence: BEFORE issuing the advisory, extract and preserve: (1) WhatsApp message delivery receipts and group invitation logs from the WhatsApp Business API or device backup (iOS: /private/var/mobile/Containers/Shared/AppGroup/[WhatsApp UUID]/ChatStorage.sqlite; Android: /data/data/com.whatsapp/databases/msgstore.db) to establish which personnel received messages in the campaign window; (2) MDM enrollment records showing which high-risk devices were online and reachable during the suspected campaign period; (3) network proxy or DNS resolver logs showing any outbound connections from mobile device IP ranges to external domains referenced in WhatsApp redirect chains prior to containment action.

Step 2: Detection — Monitor DNS query logs and proxy logs for mobile devices resolving domains linked to WhatsApp redirect chains. Flag WhatsApp group invitations from unknown senders to high-value user accounts. Review endpoint detection telemetry for iOS and Android devices used by personnel in sensitive roles for signs of process injection, anomalous network beaconing, or privilege escalation consistent with Pegasus-class implants. Reference NIST AU-6 (Audit Record Review, Analysis, and Reporting) and CIS 8.2 (Collect Audit Logs).

NIST Phase: Detection Analysis

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §3.2 — Detection and Analysis

Controls: NIST AU-6 (Audit Record Review, Analysis, And Reporting), NIST AU-2 (Event Logging), NIST AU-3 (Content Of Audit Records), CIS 8.2 (Collect Audit Logs)

Compensating: Without a SIEM: (1) Deploy iVerify (free basic tier for individuals, low-cost for orgs) on iOS/Android devices belonging to high-risk personnel — iVerify performs Pegasus-specific behavioral detection including anomalous process trees and known IOCs published by Amnesty International's Mobile Verification Toolkit (MVT). Run MVT (free, open-source: github.com/mvt-project/mvt) against device backups using the most recent Pegasus IOC list from Amnesty's database. (2) On network perimeter, configure pfSense or OPNsense DNS query logging and filter for domains matching newly registered (<30 days) or single-label patterns typical of Pegasus C2 infrastructure. (3) Use the open-source tool 'Pi-hole' with logging enabled to capture DNS queries from mobile VLAN and grep for domains matching patterns published in prior NSO Group infrastructure disclosures (e.g., Citizen Lab reports on Pegasus domains).

Evidence: BEFORE concluding detection scope: (1) Acquire full DNS query logs from the corporate resolver or NextDNS/Quad9 account covering the campaign window — Pegasus infrastructure historically uses algorithmically generated subdomains under attacker-controlled apex domains; look for low-TTL (<60s) A-record resolutions from WhatsApp-active mobile device IPs. (2) Run MVT against encrypted iTunes backups (iOS) or ADB backups (Android) for the suspected campaign window, specifically checking for com.apple.CrashReporter entries referencing WebKit or JavaScriptCore processes on iOS (Pegasus zero-click vectors exploit these), and anomalous entries in /data/tombstones/ on Android. (3) Review WhatsApp network traffic captures (if a corporate proxy terminates mobile TLS) for HTTP 301/302 redirect chains originating from wa.me or whatsapp.com shortlinks redirecting to non-Meta-owned domains.

Step 3: Eradication — No patch is available; the attack is platform-behavioral. Enforce WhatsApp privacy settings: restrict 'Who can add me to groups' to 'My Contacts' or 'My Contacts Except' for high-risk users. Disable link previews for external URLs in WhatsApp on managed devices. For personnel assessed as high-value targets of nation-state surveillance tooling, evaluate migrating sensitive communications to platform alternatives with stricter group-add controls. Reference NIST CM-7 (no mapped control in provided KB for this specific mitigation — no mapped control).

NIST Phase: Eradication

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §3.4 — Eradication

Controls: CIS 4.6 (Securely Manage Enterprise Assets and Software), CIS 4.7 (Manage Default Accounts on Enterprise Assets and Software)

Compensating: For teams without enterprise MDM configuration push: (1) Distribute a verified, screenshot-annotated configuration guide for WhatsApp Settings → Privacy → Groups → 'My Contacts Only' AND Settings → Chats → disable 'Show Preview' — verify compliance by requesting confirmation screenshots from high-risk users within 2 hours. (2) For personnel flagged as likely Pegasus targets based on role (lawyers, executives, journalists), issue a wipe-and-restore instruction using Apple's iCloud Erase or Android Factory Reset with subsequent MVT scan on fresh device to confirm clean state — Pegasus persistence survives app deletion and requires OS-level remediation. (3) Where Signal is the replacement platform candidate, enforce Signal's 'Note to Self' note-only linking policy and disable link previews under Signal Settings → Chats → Generate Link Previews → Off.

Evidence: BEFORE executing eradication steps: (1) Preserve the current WhatsApp privacy settings state on each high-risk device (screenshot or MDM configuration export) to document the pre-remediation attack surface. (2) For any device flagged by MVT or iVerify as potentially compromised by Pegasus, image the full device via iMazing (iOS) or

ADB full backup before factory reset — Pegasus artifacts include modified system daemons (e.g., launchd plist additions on iOS, anomalous entries in /system/lib/ on Android) that will be lost on wipe. (3) Export and preserve the WhatsApp group invitation history and message metadata from ChatStorage.sqlite (iOS) or msgstore.db (Android) before settings changes, as these records establish the delivery chain for any future legal proceedings related to the NSO Group contempt motion.

Step 4: Recovery — After tightening group-add and link-preview settings, validate MDM policy deployment across all managed mobile devices. Conduct a targeted sweep of devices belonging to personnel who received unsolicited WhatsApp group invitations or external links in the campaign window. Confirm DNS/proxy telemetry is logging mobile device traffic. Reference NIST AU-12 (Audit Record Generation) and NIST SI-4 (no mapped control in provided KB — no mapped control).

NIST Phase: Recovery

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §3.5 — Recovery

Controls: NIST AU-12 (Audit Record Generation), NIST AU-4 (Audit Storage Capacity), CIS 8.2 (Collect Audit Logs), CIS 1.1 (Establish and Maintain Detailed Enterprise Asset Inventory)

Compensating: Without enterprise MDM validation tooling: (1) Build a manual compliance checklist using a shared spreadsheet — list each high-risk user, their device OS version, WhatsApp version, and confirmation timestamp of settings change, signed off by the user and their manager. (2) Run MVT post-remediation on devices that received suspicious messages to confirm no residual Pegasus IOCs remain — compare against Amnesty's current IOC database. (3) Validate DNS logging coverage by sending a canary DNS query from a test mobile device (e.g., curl http://canary.[your-domain].com from the mobile network) and confirming it appears in the DNS log within 60 seconds — if it does not appear, DNS logging for mobile devices is not functioning and is a gap requiring immediate remediation before declaring recovery complete.

Evidence: BEFORE declaring recovery: (1) Confirm that AU-12-compliant DNS and proxy logs are actively capturing queries from all mobile device IP ranges — verify by checking log timestamps show continuous coverage with no gaps during the campaign window. (2) Document the full list of devices swept via MVT and their clean/compromised determination, retaining MVT JSON output reports for each device in the incident case file. (3) Capture and preserve WhatsApp delivery metadata (message timestamps, sender JIDs, group invitation tokens) from the campaign window from msgstore.db or ChatStorage.sqlite for any devices that received suspicious invitations — this evidence directly supports Meta's ongoing contempt motion against NSO Group and may be subject to legal hold obligations.

Step 5: Post-Incident — Conduct a tabletop exercise scoped to nation-state spear-phishing via consumer messaging platforms. Review whether high-risk personnel have received targeted threat awareness training specific to commercial spyware delivery vectors. Assess whether mobile device management policies adequately restrict messaging app behavior for executive and sensitive-role users. Reference NIST AC-17 (Remote Access) for remote-access policy review covering mobile platforms, and CIS 6.3 (Require MFA for Externally-Exposed Applications) for authentication hardening on business-linked accounts.

NIST Phase: Post Incident

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §4 — Post-Incident Activity

Controls: NIST AC-17 (Remote Access), CIS 6.3 (Require MFA for Externally-Exposed Applications), CIS 6.5 (Require MFA for Administrative Access), CIS 7.1 (Establish and Maintain a Vulnerability Management Process), CIS 5.4 (Restrict Administrator Privileges to Dedicated Administrator Accounts)

Compensating: For teams without a formal tabletop facilitation budget: (1) Use the CISA Tabletop Exercise Packages (CTEPs) — free, downloadable, and include a nation-state spear-phishing scenario adaptable to consumer messaging platforms; add a WhatsApp-specific inject where a simulated NSO Group phishing message reaches an executive's personal device used for business. (2) Distribute Citizen Lab's freely available 'Pegasus: How Governments Use Spyware' briefing materials as awareness training for high-risk personnel — this directly addresses the NSO Group/Pegasus delivery model rather than generic phishing awareness. (3) Review and update MDM profiles to add an explicit policy section on approved vs. prohibited messaging apps for business communication, with WhatsApp restricted to non-sensitive communications and Signal or a FIPS-compliant alternative mandated for sensitive discussions.

Evidence: For post-incident documentation: (1) Compile a lessons-learned report documenting the timeline from NSO Group campaign detection to full remediation, cross-referenced against the Meta contempt filing timeline — this establishes organizational due diligence in the event of regulatory inquiry. (2) Retain all MVT scan outputs, DNS log extracts, and device sweep records for a minimum of 3 years given active federal court proceedings involving NSO Group, as these records may be subject to litigation hold. (3) Document the pre- and post-incident state of WhatsApp privacy configurations across the high-risk user population to evidence policy enforcement effectiveness for any future GRC audit or regulatory review.

Detection Guidance

There are no CVE-specific signatures for this campaign. Detection relies on behavioral and network indicators. Monitor DNS/proxy logs for mobile endpoints resolving external domains delivered via WhatsApp redirect chains, flag domains registered within the past 30 days or with low Alexa/popularity rankings. Review WhatsApp group-add event logs or MDM app-usage telemetry for high-value users receiving invitations from unknown numbers. On managed iOS and Android devices, correlate EDR/MTD (mobile threat defense) alerts for anomalous process spawning, network beaconing from messaging app processes, or certificate pinning bypasses. Indicators consistent with Pegasus-class implants include: unexpected background data usage spikes, microphone/camera access from non-foreground apps, and SSH or reverse-shell-style outbound connections from mobile OS processes. MITRE T1598.003 and T1566.002 detection: log and alert on users clicking external links delivered through messaging platform group invitations. Cross-reference sender numbers against known NSO Group infrastructure where threat intelligence feeds provide coverage. Specific IOC data (domains, IPs) for this campaign was not confirmed in available source material; validate any published IOC lists independently before implementing blocking rules.

Indicators of Compromise

Type	Value	Context	Confidence
DOMAIN	`not confirmed in available sources`	Malicious external domains used as redirect targets in NSO Group WhatsApp campaign — specific domains not disclosed in available T3 sources; validate against threat intelligence feeds before acting	LOW

Framework Mappings

MITRE-ATTACK

- **T1583.001** — Domains
- **T1589** — Gather Victim Identity Information
- **T1587.001** — Malware
- **T1598.003** — Spearphishing Link
- **T1598.004** — Spearphishing Voice
- **T1204.001** — Malicious Link
- **T1071.001** — Web Protocols

- **T1592** — Gather Victim Host Information
- **T1566.002** — Spearphishing Link

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- **SC-7** — Boundary Protection
- **AT-2** — Literacy Training and Awareness
- **SI-3** — Malicious Code Protection
- **SI-4** — System Monitoring
- **SI-8** — Spam Protection

CIS-V8

- **6.3** — Require MFA for Externally-Exposed Applications
- **14.2** — Train Workforce Members to Recognize Social Engineering Attacks
- **8.2** — Collect Audit Logs

HIPAA-SECURITY

- **164.312(d)** — Person or Entity Authentication
- **164.308(a)(5)(i)** — Security Awareness and Training

SOC2-TSC

- **CC6.1** — Logical access security software, infrastructure, and architectures
- **CC9.2** — Manages risks associated with vendors and business partners

ISO-27001-2022

- **A.8.8** — Management of technical vulnerabilities
- **A.5.34** — Privacy and protection of personal information
- **A.5.21** — Managing information security in the ICT supply chain

NIST-CSF-2

- **DE.CM-01** — Networks and network services are monitored

MITRE ATT&CK Mapping

Technique ID	Technique Name	Tactic
T1583.001	Domains	Resource-Development
T1589	Gather Victim Identity Information	Reconnaissance
T1587.001	Malware	Resource-Development
T1598.003	Spearphishing Link	Reconnaissance
T1598.004	Spearphishing Voice	Reconnaissance
T1204.001	Malicious Link	Execution

Technique ID	Technique Name	Tactic
T1071.001	Web Protocols	Command-And-Control
T1592	Gather Victim Host Information	Reconnaissance
T1566.002	Spearphishing Link	Initial-Access

Sources

Source	URL	Tier
Security News	https://thehackernews.com/2026/06/meta-blocks-nso-groups-new-whatsa...	T3
Meta Discloses 2 WhatsApp Vulnerabilities In New Security Advisory	https://www.forbes.com/sites/daveywinder/2026/05/02/meta-discloses-...	T3
WhatsApp Security Advisories	https://www.whatsapp.com/security/advisories?lang=en_US	T3
WhatsApp Security Advisories 2025	https://www.whatsapp.com/security/advisories/2025?lang=en_US	T3
Meta Security Fail for WhatsApp -- 1500 Engineers Have ... - YouTube	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCNeU0ek_Xc&vl=en-US	T3

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