← 1995

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1996

DEFCON
First cyberexercises held in a competitive format, with a jury awarding points. Scoring was later automated.

2001

Cyber Defense Exercise
First cybersecurity exercises for U.S. military cadets.

UCSB iCTF
Local cyberexercises at University of California, Santa Barbara.

2004

UCSB iCTF
iCTF goes international, with participants from the U.S., Austria, Germany, Italy, and Norway.

Evolution of infosec competitions

and exercises

Most striking contests

2006

UralCTF
First CTF in Russia. Two teams participated.

2008

RuCTF
Russia's first open intermural contest, with participation of nine teams.

Codegate
Asia's first CTF is still going strong, with 324 teams competing in qualifiers in 2020.

2010

RuCTFE
First international online CTF contest organized in Russia, with 56 teams taking part.

Locked Shields
First red team vs. blue team international contest. Held annually on a cyber-range by the NATO-accredited cyberdefense center in Tallinn. The cyber-range provides an extensive training environment consisting of about 5,000 virtual machines, clients, servers, and network components. For example, Locked Shields 2019 had a virtual water treatment facility and a (real) mobile phone network with provider. These systems were targeted by the red team.

2011

PHDays CTF
First competition held at Positive Hack Days. The event's key differentiator is its closeness to real life. None of the vulnerabilities are fictional: all of them occur on information systems in the wild. Freedom of action is much greater than usual in a setting with unique "open world" possibilities: king of the hill, blind attacks, and more.

Over the years, the CTF infrastructure grows to include smart city components such as an electrical substation, rocket launchers, railroad, mobile operator, news agency, and bank.

2012

Hack.lu	Nuit du Hack
PlaidCTF	C3 CTF
HITB CTF	InCTF

More countries than ever are holding CTFs. Most CTFs are jeopardy-style (or task-based), where participants complete various challenges. Others, such as Nuit du Hack, have an attack–defense format in which each team is assigned a server or small network to defend. Teams score by protecting their server and stealing information (flags) from the servers of competitors.

2016

The Standoff
The PHDays CTF takes new form as an attackers vs. defenders cyberbattle. For the first time, teams fight for control of a mock city with real infrastructure performing real business functions. Action is monitored by the SOC.

Today

Over 180 CTFs take place around the world. Most are task-based and held online. Approximately 6 percent of CTFs are held at infosec conferences and require physical presence.
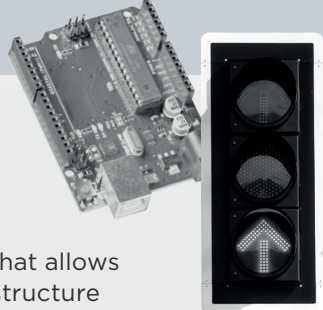
The Standoff
The world's only environment that allows observing changes in the infrastructure of a modern metropolis in the context of true-to-life interaction between technologies and the influence of hackers on this process. Most recently, 29 attacker teams, 6 defender teams, and 3 SOCs participated.

↓ 2022