The Application Layer: DNS Spoofing and its Defense Scheme

1820243077 Gleb Pimenov

Class 1107, School of Computer Science, Beijing Institute of Technology, No. 5, Unit 100081, Beijing

(gapimenov@stud.etu.ru)

Abstract

DNS (Domain Name System) spoofing, a critical cyber threat, involves falsifying DNS responses to redirect traffic to malicious sites. This paper investigates the intricacies of DNS spoofing, its impact on cybersecurity, and the defense mechanisms designed to counteract such attacks. Through a comprehensive analysis, we provide a practical example of DNS spoofing, demonstrating its execution and detection. Furthermore, we explore modern defense strategies to safeguard DNS integrity.

Keywords: DNS Spoofing, Cybersecurity, DNS Security Extensions (DNSSEC), Cache Poisoning, Man-in-the-Middle Attack.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background of DNS

The Domain Name System (DNS) is a cornerstone of the Internet, translating human-readable domain names into IP addresses, facilitating user access to websites and online services. DNS operates hierarchically, with root servers at the top, followed by top-level domains (TLDs) like .com, .org, and country-specific domains, then second-level domains, and so forth. This hierarchical structure ensures efficient resolution of domain names to IP addresses.

DNS servers are categorized into several types:

- **Root Name Servers**: These servers are at the top of the DNS hierarchy and handle requests for TLDs.

- **TLD Name Servers**: These servers handle requests for second-level domains under a specific TLD.
- **Authoritative Name Servers**: These servers provide answers to DNS queries for domains within their zone.
- **Recursive Resolvers**: These servers handle client queries, performing the necessary recursion to resolve the requested domain names.

1.2 Overview of DNS Spoofing

DNS spoofing, also known as DNS cache poisoning, is an attack that exploits the DNS protocol's vulnerabilities to inject false DNS data. This manipulation causes the DNS resolver to return incorrect IP addresses, redirecting users to malicious websites. DNS spoofing can lead to severe consequences, including data breaches, malware infections, and loss of trust in online services.

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2. Mechanisms of DNS Spoofing

DNS spoofing can be executed through various mechanisms, each exploiting different vulnerabilities within the DNS infrastructure. The primary methods include cache poisoning, man-in-the-middle (MITM) attacks, DNS hijacking, and additional techniques such as rogue DNS servers and DNS rebinding. Understanding these mechanisms is crucial for implementing effective defenses.

2.1 Cache Poisoning

Cache Poisoning Overview

Cache poisoning, also known as DNS cache poisoning, is a type of attack where an attacker introduces false DNS records into the cache of a DNS resolver. This causes the resolver to return incorrect IP addresses, redirecting users to malicious sites.

How Cache Poisoning Works:

1. **Initial Query:** A user queries a DNS resolver for a domain (e.g., example.com).
2. **Recursive Query:** If the resolver does not have the answer cached, it queries upstream DNS servers recursively.
3. **Spoofed Response:** An attacker intercepts this query and sends a spoofed response with a false IP address.
4. **Cache Storage:** The resolver caches this false information and returns it to users for subsequent queries.

Example of Cache Poisoning:

1. **Scenario Setup:**
    - The attacker targets a resolver with an initial query for a non-existent subdomain (e.g., nonexistent.example.com).
    - The resolver forwards the query to authoritative DNS servers.
2. **Intercepting and Spoofing:**
    - The attacker quickly sends a spoofed response to the resolver, pretending to be the authoritative server.
    - The spoofed response includes a false IP address and is crafted to appear legitimate.
3. **Caching the Spoofed Response:**
    - The resolver caches the false record.
    - Subsequent queries for example.com resolve to the attacker's IP address.
4. **Verification:**
    - Users querying example.com are redirected to the attacker's malicious site.

Impact of Cache Poisoning:

- **Redirecting Traffic:** Users can be redirected to malicious sites that steal data or install malware.
- **Disruption:** Legitimate services can be disrupted, causing denial of service.

2.2 Man-in-the-Middle (MITM) Attacks

MITM Attacks Overview

A man-in-the-middle attack involves an attacker intercepting and possibly altering communication between two parties without their knowledge. In the context of DNS, this means intercepting DNS queries and responses.

How MITM Attacks Work:

1. **Network Interception:** The attacker positions themselves on the same network as the victim (e.g., through a compromised router or Wi-Fi network).
2. **DNS Query Interception:** The attacker captures DNS queries sent by the victim.
3. **Spoofed Response:** The attacker sends a fake DNS response before the legitimate DNS server responds.
4. **User Redirection:** The victim's device accepts the spoofed response and directs traffic to the attacker's server.

Example of a MITM Attack:

1. **Setting Up the Attack:**
    - The attacker gains access to the network, perhaps through ARP spoofing, to redirect traffic through their device.
2. **Intercepting Queries:**
    - Tools like ettercap or dsniff can be used to intercept DNS queries from the victim.
3. **Sending Spoofed Responses:**
    - The attacker responds to intercepted DNS queries with a malicious IP address.
    - For example, a query for bank.com might receive a response with the attacker's IP address.
4. **Verification:**
    - The victim's browser is redirected to the attacker's site, which could be a phishing page designed to steal credentials.

Impact of MITM Attacks:

- **Data Theft:** Sensitive information such as login credentials can be captured.
- **Malware Distribution:** Users can be directed to sites hosting malware.

2.3 DNS Hijacking

DNS Hijacking Overview

DNS hijacking involves an attacker taking control of DNS settings, redirecting traffic from legitimate sites to malicious ones. This can be done at the user level, network level, or even at the DNS server level.

How DNS Hijacking Works:

1. **User Level:** Malware changes the DNS settings on a user's device to point to a rogue DNS server.
2. **Network Level:** An attacker compromises a router or network to redirect DNS traffic.
3. **Server Level:** The attacker gains control of a DNS server or alters DNS records through unauthorized access.

Example of DNS Hijacking:

1. **User Level Hijacking:**
    - Malware is installed on the victim’s device, altering DNS settings to point to a malicious DNS server.
    - All future DNS queries are resolved by the attacker’s server, redirecting to malicious sites.
2. **Network Level Hijacking:**
    - The attacker compromises a router, changing its DNS settings to use a rogue DNS server.
    - Devices on the network use this rogue server, unknowingly being redirected to malicious sites.
3. **Server Level Hijacking:**

- The attacker exploits vulnerabilities in a DNS server or uses stolen credentials to modify DNS records.
- For example, changing the A record for example.com to point to a malicious IP address.

Impact of DNS Hijacking:

- **Phishing and Fraud:** Users are redirected to fake sites that steal information.
- **Traffic Interception:** Legitimate traffic can be rerouted for surveillance or data theft.

2.4 Rogue DNS Servers

Rogue DNS Servers Overview

A rogue DNS server is a malicious server set up to respond to DNS queries with false information. Attackers may trick users or network devices into using these rogue servers.

How Rogue DNS Servers Work:

1. **Setting Up the Server:** The attacker sets up a DNS server configured to provide false DNS records.
2. **Changing DNS Settings:** Through malware or social engineering, the attacker changes the DNS settings on target devices to use the rogue server.
3. **Responding to Queries:** The rogue server responds to DNS queries with malicious IP addresses.

Example of Rogue DNS Server Attack:

1. **Setting Up a Rogue DNS Server:**
   - Configure a DNS server (e.g., BIND) with malicious entries.

```
zone "example.com" IN {
    type master;
    file "/etc/bind/db.example.com";
};
```

    - Modify db.example.com to point example.com to a malicious IP.
2. **Changing DNS Settings:**
    - Use malware or social engineering to change the DNS settings on target devices.
    - Alternatively, compromise a network router to distribute the rogue DNS server's IP via DHCP.
3. **Verification:**
    - Devices using the rogue DNS server will resolve queries to the attacker's chosen IP addresses, redirecting traffic.

Impact of Rogue DNS Servers:

- **Malware Distribution:** Users are directed to sites hosting malware.
- **Phishing:** Users are redirected to fake sites designed to steal sensitive information.

2.5 DNS Rebinding

DNS Rebinding Overview

DNS rebinding is a technique that allows an attacker to bypass the same-origin policy in web browsers, gaining access to internal network resources.

How DNS Rebinding Works:

1. **Initial Query:** The attacker lures the victim to visit a malicious site.
2. **DNS Response:** The site provides a DNS response with a short TTL (time-to-live), causing the browser to re-query frequently.
3. **IP Address Change:** The attacker changes the IP address in subsequent DNS responses to an internal network IP.
4. **Access Internal Resources:** The browser, trusting the same-origin, allows the attacker's script to interact with internal network resources.

Example of DNS Rebinding:

1. **Setting Up the Malicious Site:**

- Host a malicious site with a script to perform actions on internal network resources.

```
<script>
    // JavaScript to access internal resources
    var img = new Image();
    img.src = "http://192.168.1.1/admin";
</script>
```

2. **DNS Configuration:**
    - Configure the DNS server to return a short TTL and change the IP address on subsequent queries.

```
@    IN    A    203.0.113.10
@    IN    A    192.168.1.1
```

3. **Verification:**
    - When the victim visits the site, the script executes and accesses internal resources.

Impact of DNS Rebinding:

- **Internal Network Access:** Attackers can gain unauthorized access to devices and services within the victim's internal network.
- **Data Theft:** Sensitive information from internal resources can be extracted.

2.6 Additional DNS Spoofing Techniques

1. ARP Spoofing

ARP spoofing involves sending falsified ARP messages on a local network, causing the victim's device to associate the attacker’s MAC address with the IP address of a legitimate network device, such as a gateway or DNS server.

How ARP Spoofing Works:

1. **Sending Spoofed ARP Messages:** The attacker sends ARP responses mapping their MAC address to the IP address of a legitimate device.
2. **Traffic Redirection:** The victim's device updates its ARP table with the attacker's MAC address, redirecting traffic to the attacker.
3. **DNS Spoofing:** The attacker can now intercept and modify DNS queries and responses.

Example of ARP Spoofing:

1. **Setting Up ARP Spoofing:**
    - Use tools like arpspoof to send spoofed ARP messages.

```
arpspoof -i eth0 -t 192.168.1.100 192.168.1.1
```

2. **Intercepting DNS Queries:**
    - Once ARP spoofing is in place, use dsniff to intercept DNS queries.

```
dsniff -i eth0
```

Impact of ARP Spoofing:

- **Traffic Interception:** The attacker can intercept, modify, or block network traffic.
- **DNS Spoofing:** DNS queries can be redirected to malicious servers.

2. DNS Flooding

DNS flooding involves overwhelming a DNS server with a large volume of queries, causing it to become unresponsive or fail, potentially allowing the attacker to insert malicious responses during the disruption.

How DNS Flooding Works:

1. **Sending Massive Queries:** The attacker sends a high volume of DNS queries to the target server.
2. **Resource Exhaustion:** The DNS server's resources are exhausted, causing it to fail or become slow.

3. **Opportunity for Spoofing:** During the server's recovery or high load, the attacker may insert spoofed responses.

Example of DNS Flooding:

1. **Executing a DNS Flood:**
    - Use tools like dnsperf to generate a high volume of DNS queries.

```
dnsperf -s 192.168.1.1 -d queryfile.txt -Q 1000
```

2. **Inserting Spoofed Responses:**
    - During the flood, send crafted DNS responses to the server.

Impact of DNS Flooding:

- **Denial of Service:** Legitimate users are unable to resolve domain names.
- **Spoofing Opportunity:** Malicious responses may be inserted during the attack.

3. DNS Amplification

DNS amplification is a type of DDoS attack that uses DNS servers to flood a target with a high volume of traffic. The attacker sends DNS queries with spoofed source IP addresses (the target's IP), causing the DNS servers to send large responses to the target.

How DNS Amplification Works:

1. **Sending Spoofed Queries:** The attacker sends DNS queries with the target's IP address as the source.
2. **Amplification:** DNS servers respond to the target with large responses.
3. **Flooding the Target:** The target is overwhelmed by the volume of traffic.

Example of DNS Amplification:

1. **Crafting Spoofed Queries:**
    - Use tools like hping3 to send spoofed DNS queries.

```
hping3 -c 1000 -d 120 -S -w 64 -p 53 --flood --spoof <target-IP> <DNS-server-IP>
```

2. **Monitoring the Impact:**
    - Observe the target's network for a significant increase in traffic volume.

Impact of DNS Amplification:

- **Denial of Service:** The target is overwhelmed by traffic, causing service disruption.
- **Resource Exhaustion:** Network resources and bandwidth are consumed by the attack.

2.7 Execution of DNS Spoofing

To comprehend how the execution of DNS spoofing is doing, let's walk through a detailed process of a cache poisoning attack. The goal of this attack is to poison the DNS cache of a target resolver so that it returns a malicious IP address for a specific domain.

Step-by-Step Process:

1. **Identify the target DNS resolver**: Determine the IP address of the DNS resolver used by the target system.
2. **Monitor DNS queries**: Use a packet-sniffing tool to monitor DNS queries from the target system.
3. **Craft malicious DNS responses**: Create fake DNS responses that appear to come from authoritative servers.
4. **Send malicious responses**: Flood the target resolver with fake responses until one is accepted and cached.
5. **Verify cache poisoning**: Check if the target resolver is returning the malicious IP address for the spoofed domain.

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3. Impacts of DNS Spoofing

3.1 Security Implications

Data Theft: DNS spoofing can redirect users to fake websites designed to steal sensitive information such as login credentials, credit card numbers, and personal data.

Malware Distribution: Attackers can direct users to websites that host malware, leading to widespread infections and compromised systems.

Unauthorized Access: By redirecting traffic, attackers can gain unauthorized access to network resources, posing a significant threat to organizational security.

3.2 Economic and Social Implications

Financial Losses: Businesses can suffer substantial financial losses due to DNS spoofing attacks, including revenue loss from compromised online transactions and the cost of remediation.

Damage to Reputation: DNS spoofing can erode trust in online services, leading to a damaged reputation and loss of customer confidence.

Social Engineering Risks: Redirecting users to phishing sites can facilitate social engineering attacks, further compromising security.

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4. Defense Schemes Against DNS Spoofing

DNS spoofing is a serious threat to internet security, but several defense mechanisms can significantly mitigate this risk. This section will discuss DNS Security Extensions (DNSSEC), DNS Over HTTPS (DoH), DNS Over TLS (DoT), and other advanced techniques to secure DNS communications.

4.1 DNS Security Extensions (DNSSEC)

DNSSEC Overview

DNSSEC is a suite of extensions to DNS that provides authentication and integrity checks for DNS data. It aims to protect the internet from certain attacks, such as DNS spoofing and cache poisoning, by digitally signing data to ensure its authenticity.

How DNSSEC Works:

- Zone Signing: Each DNS zone is signed with a private key. This process generates a digital signature for each DNS record in the zone.
- Key Distribution: The public key corresponding to the private signing key is published in DNSKEY records within the zone.
- Chain of Trust: A resolver can verify the authenticity of DNS data by following a chain of trust. This starts from a trusted root and progresses through the hierarchy of DNS zones.
- Validation: When a DNS response is received, the resolver checks the digital signature using the public key. If the signature is valid, the data is accepted as authentic.

Example of DNSSEC in Action:

Signing a Zone:

Use the dnssec-signzone tool to sign a zone file. Assume we have a zone file named example.com.zone.

```
dnssec-keygen -a RSASHA256 -b 2048 -n ZONE example.com

dnssec-signzone -o example.com example.com.zone
```

This process generates DNSKEY and RRSIG records, which are added to the zone file.

Configuring a Resolver to Validate DNSSEC:

Use BIND as an example DNS resolver. Configure it to validate DNSSEC-signed responses.

```
options {

    directory "/var/named";
```

```
    dnssec-validation auto;

    allow-query { any; };

};
```

Querying a DNSSEC-Signed Domain:

Use the dig command to query a DNSSEC-signed domain and request DNSSEC-related records.

```
dig +dnssec example.com
```

The response will include RRSIG records that contain the digital signatures.

Benefits of DNSSEC:

- Authentication: Ensures that DNS data has not been tampered with and originates from a trusted source.
- Integrity: Protects against data corruption by validating the integrity of DNS responses.

Challenges of DNSSEC:

- Complexity: Requires significant changes to DNS infrastructure and continuous management of cryptographic keys.
- Performance Impact: The addition of cryptographic data increases the size of DNS responses, which can impact performance.

4.2 DNS Over HTTPS (DoH)

DoH Overview

DNS Over HTTPS (DoH) is a protocol that encrypts DNS queries and responses using HTTPS, protecting DNS data from interception and tampering. By leveraging the security features of HTTPS, DoH enhances the privacy and integrity of DNS communications.

How DoH Works:

- Encryption: DNS queries are sent over HTTPS, encrypting the data using Transport Layer Security (TLS).
- Authentication: HTTPS ensures that the server is authenticated, preventing man-in-the-middle attacks.
- Privacy: Encrypted DNS queries are indistinguishable from other HTTPS traffic, providing privacy against eavesdroppers.

Example of DoH in Action:

Use a browser or a tool like curl to send a DoH query. Modern browsers like Firefox and Chrome support DoH natively.

```
curl -H 'accept: application/dns-json'
'https://dns.google/resolve?name=example.com&type=A'
```

This command sends a DNS query for example.com using Google's DoH service.

Configuring a DoH Resolver:

Use Cloudflare's 1.1.1.1 DoH service by configuring a DNS resolver to forward queries to it.

```
doh-proxy --listen-port=3000 --upstream-resolver=https://cloudflare-
dns.com/dns-query
```

Verifying DoH Queries:

Use tools like Wireshark to capture and analyze the network traffic. You will see DNS queries encapsulated within HTTPS packets, encrypted and secure.

Benefits of DoH:

- Privacy: Encrypts DNS queries, preventing eavesdropping by third parties.
- Security: Ensures data integrity and authenticity through HTTPS.

Challenges of DoH:

- Performance: Encryption adds overhead, which may impact latency.
- Complexity: Requires changes to DNS infrastructure and client configuration.

4.3 DNS Over TLS (DoT)

DoT Overview

DNS Over TLS (DoT) is a protocol that encrypts DNS queries using TLS, providing privacy and security similar to DoH but using a dedicated port for DNS traffic (port 853).

How DoT Works:

- Encryption: DNS queries are sent over a TLS connection, encrypting the data to protect against eavesdropping and tampering.
- Authentication: TLS ensures that the server is authenticated, preventing man-in-the-middle attacks.
- Dedicated Port: DoT uses port 853, allowing easier identification and management of DNS traffic.

Setting Up a DoT Client:

Use a tool like stubby to configure a DoT client.

```
stubby -C stubby.yml
```

The stubby.yml configuration file specifies the DoT servers to use, such as 1.1.1.1 and 9.9.9.9.

Configuring a DoT Resolver:

Use Unbound as an example DNS resolver configured to use DoT.

```
server:

    do-tls-upstream: yes

    forward-zone:
```

```
name: "."

forward-addr: 1.1.1.1@853

forward-addr: 9.9.9.9@853
```

Verifying DoT Queries:

Use tools like tcpdump or Wireshark to capture and analyze the network traffic on port 853, verifying encrypted DNS queries.

Benefits of DoT:

- Privacy: Encrypts DNS queries, preventing eavesdropping by third parties.
- Security: Ensures data integrity and authenticity through TLS.
- Management: Uses a dedicated port, simplifying traffic management and monitoring.

Challenges of DoT:

- Performance: Encryption adds overhead, which may impact latency.
- Adoption: Requires support from both DNS clients and resolvers.

4.4 Additional Techniques to Secure DNS

1. DNS Transaction Signatures (TSIG)

TSIG uses shared secret keys and one-way hashing to secure DNS transactions. It is primarily used to secure communication between DNS servers, such as zone transfers and dynamic updates.

How TSIG Works:

- Shared Secret: Both parties (e.g., primary and secondary DNS servers) share a secret key.
- Hashing: Each DNS message is hashed using the shared secret and a hashing algorithm (e.g., HMAC-MD5).

- Verification: The receiving party verifies the hash to ensure the message's authenticity and integrity.

Example of TSIG in Action:

Generating a TSIG Key:

```
tsig-keygen -a hmac-md5 example.com
```

This command generates a TSIG key for the domain example.com.

Configuring DNS Servers to Use TSIG:

In BIND, add the TSIG key to the configuration file.

```
key example.com. {
    algorithm hmac-md5;
    secret "base64-encoded-secret-key";
};
server 192.168.1.1 {
    keys { example.com.; };
};
```

Benefits of TSIG:

- Authentication: Ensures that DNS messages are authentic and unaltered.
- Integrity: Protects against data corruption and spoofing.

Challenges of TSIG:

- Management: Requires secure distribution and management of shared secret keys.
- Scope: Primarily used for securing server-to-server communication, not end-user queries.

2. DNS Cookies

DNS cookies provide a lightweight mechanism to protect DNS servers from various types of attacks, including spoofing, amplification, and denial-of-service attacks. They use cookies to validate the authenticity of DNS queries and responses.

How DNS Cookies Work:

- Client Cookie: The client includes a cookie in the DNS query, generated using a hash of the client's IP address and a secret.
- Server Cookie: The server responds with a cookie generated using a hash of the client's and server's IP addresses and a secret.
- Validation: Both parties use cookies to validate the authenticity of subsequent queries and responses.

Example of DNS Cookies in Action:

Configuring DNS Cookies in BIND:

```
options {

    cookies yes;

};
```

Verifying DNS Cookies:

Use tools like dig to query a DNS server and check the presence of DNS cookies in the response.

```
dig @192.168.1.1 example.com +cookie
```

Benefits of DNS Cookies:

- Protection: Mitigates spoofing, amplification, and denial-of-service attacks.
- Lightweight: Adds minimal overhead to DNS queries and responses.

Challenges of DNS Cookies:

- Compatibility: Requires support from both DNS clients and servers.
- Limited Scope: Provides protection against specific types of attacks, not a comprehensive solution.

3. Response Rate Limiting (RRL)

RRL is a technique used to mitigate DNS amplification attacks by limiting the rate of responses to identical queries from the same source. It helps protect DNS servers from being exploited in denial-of-service attacks.

How RRL Works:

- Rate Limiting: The DNS server tracks the rate of identical queries from the same source IP address.
- Threshold: If the rate exceeds a predefined threshold, the server limits the responses, either by dropping them or sending truncated responses.

Example of RRL in Action:

Configuring RRL in BIND:

```
options {
    rate-limit {
        responses-per-second 5;
        window 5;
    };
};
```

Verifying RRL:

Simulate multiple identical queries to the DNS server and observe the rate-limited responses.

```
for i in {1..10}; do dig @192.168.1.1 example.com; done
```

Benefits of RRL:

- Mitigation: Reduces the impact of DNS amplification attacks.
- Resource Management: Helps protect DNS server resources from being overwhelmed.

Challenges of RRL:

- Configuration: Requires careful configuration to balance legitimate traffic and attack mitigation.
- Limited Scope: Primarily protects against amplification attacks, not a comprehensive solution.

5. Case Studies and Real-World Examples

5.1 Notable Incidents of DNS Spoofing

Google (2013): Attackers exploited weaknesses in the Turkish ISP's DNS infrastructure, redirecting users attempting to access Google services to malicious sites. This incident highlighted the need for robust DNS security measures and the risks posed by untrusted DNS resolvers.

Kaminsky Vulnerability (2008): Security researcher Dan Kaminsky discovered a fundamental flaw in the DNS protocol that allowed for efficient cache poisoning attacks. This vulnerability led to widespread awareness and the adoption of DNSSEC to mitigate such risks.

Analysis of Specific Cases:

- **Incident Description**: Detailed accounts of the attacks, how they were executed, and their impacts.
- **Response and Mitigation**: Steps taken to address the attacks and lessons learned for future prevention.

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6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Key Points

DNS spoofing poses a significant threat to Internet security, with the potential for data theft, malware distribution, and unauthorized access. Understanding the mechanisms of DNS spoofing and implementing robust defense strategies are crucial for maintaining DNS integrity.

6.2 Future Directions in DNS Security

Emerging technologies and ongoing research continue to enhance DNS security. Quantum-resistant cryptographic algorithms and AI-based threat detection systems hold promise for future developments. Continuous improvement in DNS security practices and infrastructure will be essential to counteract evolving threats.

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