Public Key Infrastructure Lab

1 Overview

Public key cryptography is the foundation of today's secure communication, but it is subject to man-in-the-middle attacks when one side of communication sends its public key to the other side. The fundamental problem is that there is no easy way to verify the ownership of a public key, i.e., given a public key and its claimed owner information, how do we ensure that the public key is indeed owned by the claimed owner?The Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) is a practical solution to this problem. The learning objective of this lab is for students to gain the first-hand experience on PKI. By doing the tasks in this lab, students should be able to gain a better understanding of how PKI works, how PKI is used to protect the Web, and how man-in-the-middle attacks can be defeated by PKI. Moreover, students will be able to understand the root of the trust in the public-key infrastructure, and what problems will arise if the root trust is broken. This lab covers the following topics:

- Public-key encryption
- Public-Key Infrastructure (PKI)
- Certificate Authority (CA) and root CA
- X.509 certificate and self-signed certificate
- Apache, HTTP, and HTTPS
- Man-in-the-middle attacks

2 Lab Environment

This lab has been tested on the Ubuntu 16.04 VM that you should have installed on your computer during the first lab of this course.

3 Submission

Submit a PDF document with your answers to the tasks and questions in this lab. Include the task numbers and the questions. Place your answers immediately after the task number and question. Note that some answers require you to include a screen shot. Paste any code that you write or use next to the corresponding question. Some answers ask you to attach the source code to the Blackboard assignment. Use meaningful and easy to read names for your source code files.

4 Lab Tasks

4.1 Task 1: Becoming a Certificate Authority (CA)

A Certificate Authority (CA) is a trusted entity that issues digital certificates. The digital certificate certifies the ownership of a public key by the named subject of the certificate. A number of commercial CAs are treated as root CAs; VeriSign is the largest CA at the time of writing. Users who want to get digital certificates issued by the commercial CAs need to pay those CAs. In this lab, we need to create digital certificates, but we are (obviously!) not going to pay any commercial CA. We will become a root CA ourselves, and then use this CA to issue certificate for others (e.g. servers). In this task, we will make ourselves a root CA, and generate a certificate for this CA. Unlike other certificates, which are usually signed by another CA, the root CA's certificates are self-signed. Root CA's certificates are usually preloaded into most operating systems, web browsers, and other software that rely on PKI. Root CA's certificates are unconditionally trusted.

The Configuration File `opsenssl.conf`. In order to use OpenSSL to create certificates, you have to have a configuration file. The configuration file usually has an extension `.cnf`. It is used by three OpenSSL commands: `ca,req` and `x509`. The manual page of `openssl.conf` can be found using Google search. You can also get a copy of the configuration file from `/usr/lib/ssl/openssl.cnf`. After copying this file into your current directory, you need to create several sub-directories as specified in the configuration file (look at the `[CAdefault]` section):

```
dir             = ./demoCA        # Where everything is kept
certs           = $dir/certs      # Where the issued certs are kept
crl_dir         = $dir/crl        # Where the issued crl are kept
new_certs_dir   = $dir/newcerts   # default place for new certs.
database        = $dir/index.txt  # database index file.
serial          = $dir/serial     # The current serial number
```

For the `index.txt` file, simply create an empty file. For the `serial` file, put a single number in string format (e.g. 1000) in the file. Once you have set up the configuration file `openssl.cnf`, you can create and issue certificates.

Certificate Authority (CA). As we described before, we need to generate a self-signed certificate for our CA. This means that this CA is totally trusted, and its certificate will serve as the root certificate. You can run the following command to generate the self-signed certificate for the CA:

```
$ openssl req -new -x509 -keyout ca.key -out ca.crt -config openssl.cnf
```

You will be prompted for information and a password. Do not lose this password, because you will have to type the passphrase each time you want to use this CA to sign certificates for others. You will also be asked to fill in some information, such as the Country Name, Common Name, etc. The output of the command are stored in two files: `ca.key` and `ca.crt`. The `fileca.key` contains the CA's private key, while `ca.crt` contains the public-key certificate. **Deliverable** No deliverable for this task.

4.2 Task 2: Creating a Certificate for SEEDPKILab2018.com

Now, we become a root CA, we are ready to sign digital certificates for our customers. Our first customer is a company called SEEDPKILab2018.com. For this company to get a digital certificate from a CA, it needs to go through three steps

Step 1: Generate public/private key pair. The company needs to first create its own public/private keypair. We can run the following command to generate an RSA key pair (both private and public keys).

You will also be required to provide a password to encrypt the private key (using the AES-128 encryption algorithm, as is specified in the command option). The keys will be stored in the file `server.key`:

```
$ openssl genrsa -aes128 -out server.key 1024
```

The `server.key` is an encoded text file (also encrypted), so you will not be able to see the actual content, such as the modulus, private exponents, etc. To see those, you can run the following command:

```
$ openssl rsa -in server.key -text
```

Step 2: Generate a Certificate Signing Request (CSR). Once the company has the key file, it should generates a Certificate Signing Request (CSR), which basically includes the company's public key. The CSR will be sent to the CA, who will generate a certificate for the key (usually after ensuring that identity information in the CSR matches with the server's true identity). Please use SEEDPKILab2018.com asthe common name of the certificate request.

```
$ openssl req -new -key server.key -out server.csr -config openssl.cnf
```

It should be noted that the above command is quite similar to the one we used in creating the self-signed certificate for the CA. The only difference is the `-x509` option. Without it, the command generates a request; with it, the command generates a self-signed certificate.

Step 3: Generating Certificates. The CSR file needs to have the CA's signature to form a certificate. In the real world, the CSR files are usually sent to a trusted CA for their signature. In this lab, we will use our own trusted CA to generate certificates. The following command turns the certificate signing request (`server.csr`) into an X509 certificate (`server.crt`), using the CA's `ca.crt` and `ca.key`:

```
$ openssl ca -in server.csr -out server.crt -cert ca.crt -keyfile ca.key \
            -config openssl.cnf
```

If OpenSSL refuses to generate certificates, it is very likely that the names in your requests do not match with those of CA. The matching rules are specified in the configuration file (look at the [policymatch] section). You can change the names of your requests to comply with the policy, or you can change the policy. The configuration file also includes another policy (called `policy_anything`), which is less restrictive. You can choose that policy by changing the following line:" `policy = policy_match`" change to "`policy = policy_anything`".

Deliverables. None.

4.3 Task 3: Deploying Certificate in an HTTPS Web Server

In this lab, we will explore how public-key certificates are used by websites to secure web browsing. We will set up an HTTPS website using openssl's built-in web server.

Step 1: Configuring DNS. We choose SEEDPKILab2018.com as the name of our website. To get our computers recognize this name, let us add the following entry to `/etc/hosts`; this entry basically maps the hostname `SEEDPKILab2018.com` to our `localhost` (i.e., 127.0.0.1):

```
127.0.0.1  SEEDPKILab2018.com
```

Step 2: Configuring the web server. Let us launch a simple web server with the certificate generated in the previous task. OpenSSL allows us to start a simple web server using the server command:

```
# Combine the secret key and certificate into one file
% cp server.key server.pem
% cat server.crt >> server.pem
# Launch the web server using server.pem
% openssl s_server -cert server.pem -www
```

By default, the server will listen on port 4433. You can alter that using the `-accept` option. Now, you can access the server using the following URL: `https://SEEDPKILab2018.com:4433/`. Most likely, you will get an error message from the browser. In Firefox, you will see a message like the following: “`seedpkilab2018.com:4433 uses an invalid security certificate. The certificate is not trusted because theissuer certificate is unknown"`.

Step 3: Getting the browser to accept our CA certificate. Had our certificate been assigned by VeriSign, we will not have such an error message, because VeriSign's certificate is very likely preloaded into Firefox's certificate repository already. Unfortunately, the certificate of SEEDPKILab2018.com is signed by our own CA (i.e., using `ca.crt`), and this CA is not recognized by Firefox. There are two ways to get Firefox to accept our CA's self-signed certificate.

- We can request Mozilla to include our CA's certificate in its Firefox software, so everybody using Firefox can recognize our CA. This is how the real CAs, such as VeriSign, get their certificates into Firefox. Unfortunately, our own CA does not have a large enough market for Mozilla to include our certificate, so we will not pursue this direction.

- Load `ca.crt` into Firefox: We can manually add our CA's certificate to the Firefox browser by clicking the following menu sequence: `Edit -> Preference -> Privacy & Security -> View Certificates`. You will see a list of certificates that are already accepted by Firefox. From here, we can “import” our own certificate. Please import `ca.crt`, and select the following option: “Trust this CA to identify web sites”. You will see that our CA's certificate is now in Firefox's list of the accepted certificates.

Step 4. Testing our HTTPS website. Now, point the browser to `https://SEEDPKILab2018.com:4433`. **Deliverable**. YOu answer to the following questions:

1. Modify a single byte of `server.pem`, and restart the server, and reload the URL. What do you observe? Make sure you restore the original `server.pem` afterward. Note: the server may not be able to restart if certain places of `server.pem` is corrupted; in that case, choose another place to modify.

2. Since SEEDPKILab2018.com points to the localhost, if we use `https://localhost:4433` instead, we will be connecting to the same web server. Please do so, describe and explain your observation.

4.4 Task 4: Deploying Certificate in an Apache-Based HTTPS Website

The HTTPS server setup using openssl's `s_server` command is primarily for debugging and demonstration purposes. In this lab, we set up a real HTTPS web server based on Apache. The Apache server, which is already installed in our VM, supports the HTTPS protocol. To create an HTTPS website, we just need to configure the Apache server, so it knows where to get the private key and certificates. We give an example in the following to show how to enable HTTPS for a website `www.example.com`. You task is to do the same for SEEDPKILab2018.com using the certificate generated from previous tasks. An Apache server can simultaneously host multiple websites. It needs to know the directory where a website's files are stored. This is done via its `VirtualHost` file, located in the `/etc/apache2/sites-available` directory. To add an HTTP website, we add a `VirtualHost` entry to the file `000-default.conf`. See the following example.

```
<VirtualHost *:80>
ServerName one.example.com
DocumentRoot /var/www/Example_One
DirectoryIndex index.html
</VirtualHost>
```

To add an HTTPS website, we need to add aVirtualHostentry to the `default-ssl.conf` file in the same folder.

```
<VirtualHost *:443>
ServerName  two.example.com
DocumentRoot      /var/www/Example_Two
DirectoryIndex  index.html
SSLEngine On
SSLCertificateFile    /etc/apache2/ssl/example_cert.pem
SSLCertificateKeyFile    /etc/apache2/ssl/example_key.pem
</VirtualHost>
```

The `ServerName` entry specifies the name of the website, while the `DocumentRoot` entry specifies where the files for the website are stored. The above example sets up the HTTPS site https://two.example.com (port443 is the default HTTPS port). In the setup, we need to tell Apache where the server certificate and private key are stored. After the `default-ssl.conf` file is modified, we need to run a series of commands to enable SSL. Apache will ask us to type the password used for encrypting the private key. Once everything is set up properly, we can browse the web site, and all the traffic between the browser and the server will be encrypted.

```
// Test the Apache configuration file for errors
$ sudo apachectl configtest
// Enable the SSL module
$ sudo a2enmod ssl
// Enable the site we have just edited
$ sudo a2ensite default-ssl
// Restart Apache
$ sudo service apache2 restart
```

Please use the above example as guidance to set up an HTTPS server for SEEDPKILab2018.com.

Deliverables. Please describe the steps that you have taken, the contents that you add to Apache's configuration file, and screenshots of the final outcome showing that you can successfully browse the HTTPS site.

4.5 Task 5: Launching a Man-In-The-Middle Attack

In this task, we will show how PKI can defeat Man-In-The-Middle (MITM) attacks. Assume Alice wants to visit example.com via the HTTPS protocol. She needs to get the public key from the example.com server; Alice will generate a secret, and encrypt the secret using the server's public key, and send it to the server. If an attacker can intercept the communication between Alice and the server, the attacker can replace the server's public key with its own public key. Therefore, Alice's secret is actually encrypted with the attacker's public key, so the attacker will be able to read the secret. The attacker can forward the secret to the server using the server's public key. The secret is used to encrypt the communication between Alice and server, so the attacker can decrypt the encrypted communication.

The goal of this task is to help students understand how PKI can defeat such MITM attacks. In the task, we will emulate an MITM attack, and see how exactly PKI can defeat it. We will select a target website first. In this document, we use example.com as the target website, but you should pick a popular website, such as a banking site or a social network site.

Step 1: Setting up the malicious website. In Task 4, we have already set up an HTTPS website for SEEDPKILab2018.com. We will use the same Apache server to impersonate example.com (or the site you chose). To achieve that, we will follow the instruction in Task 4 to add a VirtualHost entry to Apache's SSL configuration file: the `ServerName` should be example.com, but the rest of the configuration can be the same as that used in Task 4. Our goal is the following: when a user tries to visit example.com, we are going to get the user to land in our server, which hosts a fake website for example.com. If this were a social network website, The fake site can display a login page similar to the one in the target website. If users cannot tell the difference, they may type their account credentials in the fake web page, essentially disclosing the credentials to the attacker.

Step 2: Becoming the man in the middle. There are several ways to get the user's HTTPS request to land in our web server. One way is to attack the routing, so the user's HTTPS request is routed to our web server. Another way is to attack DNS, so when the victim's machine tries to find out the IP address of the target webserver, it gets the IP address of our web server. In this task, we use "attack" DNS. Instead of launching an actual DNS cache poisoning attack, we simply modify the victim's machine's `/etc/hosts` file to emulate the result of a DNS cache positing attack (the `IPAddress` in the following should be replaced by the actual IP address of the malicious server).

```
<IP_Address>  example.com
```

Step 3: Browse the target website. With everything set up, now visit the target real website, and see what your browser would say. Please explain what you have observed.

Hint. The man-in-the-middle attack should fail. So, do not generate a new certificate for your malicious website for this task. Use the same certificate that you used in Task 4. You will generate a new certificate in the next task.

Deliverable.

4.6 Task 6: Launching a Man-In-The-Middle Attack with a Compromised CA

Unfortunately, the root CA that we created in Task 1 is compromised by an attacker, and its private key is stolen. Therefore, the attacker can generate any arbitrary certificate using this CA's private key. In this task, we will see the consequence of such a compromise. Please design an experiment to show that the attacker can successfully launch MITM attacks on any HTTPS website. You can use the same setting created in Task 5, but this time, you need to demonstrate that the MITM attack is successful, i.e., the browser will not raise any suspicion when the victim tries to visit a website but land in the MITM attacker's fake website.