



# Embedded Operating Systems

Lecture 10



# Embedded Operating Systems

usually called RTOS

- The purpose of an operating system
  - Abstractions
  - System calls
- Embedded Operating Systems
  - Real Time
- Tock OS



# Operating System

the purpose of and OS



# Bibliography

for this section

**Andrew Tanenbaum**, *Modern Operating Systems (4th edition)*

- Chapter 1 - *Memory Management*
  - Subchapter 1 - *Introduction*
    - Subchapter 1.1 - *What is an operating system?*
    - Subchapter 1.6 - *System calls*
    - Subchapter 1.7 - *Operating system structure*



# Operating System

the main role

## Allow Portability

- provides a hardware independent API
- applications should run on any hardware

## Resources Management and Isolation

- allow applications to access resources
- prevent applications from accessing hardware directly
- isolate applications





# Desktop and Server Operating Systems

abstractions

## Actions

- **process** and **threads**
- use the *Processor* and *Accelerators* (GPU, Neural Engine, etc)

## Data

- everything is a file
- peripherals are viewed as files (*POSIX*)
  - `/sys/class/gpio/gpio5/direction`
  - `/sys/class/gpio/gpio5/value`





# Embedded Operating Systems

## Actions

- **process** or **threads**
- use the *Processor* and *Accelerators*  
(Crypto Engines, Neural Engine, etc)

## Peripheral

- provide a hardware independent API
- prevent processes from accessing the peripheral

*usually* the applications and the kernel are compiled together into a **single binary**





# Scheduling Type

could a process stop the whole system?

## Preemptive

- processes can be suspended by the scheduler
- a misbehaving process cannot stop the system

## Cooperative

- processes **cannot be suspended** by the kernel
- a misbehaving process **can stop** the system





# Kernel Types

from the **kernel and drivers** point of view

## Monolithic



- all drivers in the kernel
- Windows, Linux, MacOS

## Microkernel



- all drivers are applications
- Minix

## Unikernel



- the kernel is bundled with all the drivers and one single application
- Unikraft/Linux
- Most of the microcontroller RTOSes



# System Call

the OS API

**accessing a peripheral can be performed only by the OS**

The application:

1. puts values in the registers
2. triggers an exception
  - `svc` instruction for ARM

The OS:

1. looks at the registers and determines what the required action is
2. performs the action
3. puts the return values into the registers





# Embedded Operating Systems

aka Real-Time Operating Systems (RTOS)



# Bibliography

for this section

**Alexandru Radovici, Ioana Culic**, *Getting Started with Secure Embedded Systems*

- Chapter 2 - *Embedded systems software development*



# Embedded Operating Systems

- small OSes that run on microcontrollers
- most of the times called *Real Time OS (RTOS)*
- applications are similar to *threads* (are considered friendly)
- the whole system is compiled into a single binary
- similar to frameworks



# Real Time?

upper bound

- **real time** means **performing** an action **always** in a **deterministic** amount of **time**
- the amount of time can be large
- **low latency** means that the amount of time must be small

The industry often uses real time interchangeably low latency.



# Most Used

OS	Owner	Description
FreeRTOS	Amazon	Oldest RTOS, heavily used in the industry.
SafeRTOS	High Integrity Systems	Certified for functional safety, based on FreeRTOS.
Zephyr	Linux Foundation	<i>Linux's little brother</i> , has an API inspired by Linux, is getting traction.





# Tock OS

An embedded operating system designed for running multiple concurrent, mutually distrustful applications on low-memory and low-power microcontrollers.





# Bibliography

for this section

**Alexandru Radovici, Ioana Culic**, *Getting Started with Secure Embedded Systems*

- Chapter 3 - *The Tock system architecture*



# Tock OS

an embedded operating systems that works like a desktop or server one

- A **preemptive** embedded OS (runs on MCUs)
  - Cortex-M
  - RISC-V
- Uses memory protection (**MPU required**)
- Has separate **kernel and user space**
  - most embedded OS have the one piece software philosophy
- Runs untrusted apps in user space
- **Hybrid** architecture
- Kernel (and drivers) written in Rust
- Apps written in C/C++ or Rust (any language that can be compiled)



# The Stack





# Processes

separate binaries

- compiled separately from the kernel
- written in any language that compiles (C, Rust,...)
- saved into the *Tock Binary Format (TBF)* / *Tock Application Bundle (TAB)*

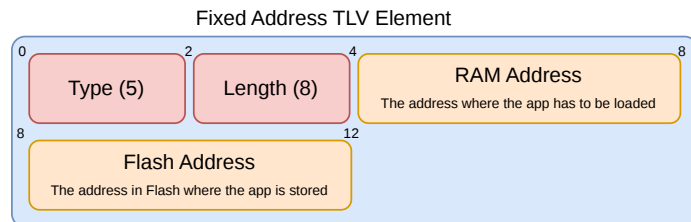
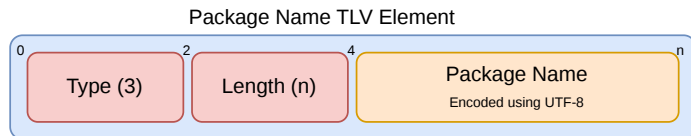
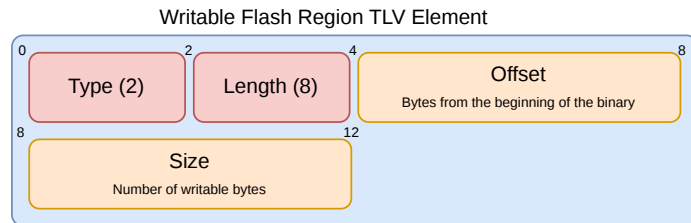
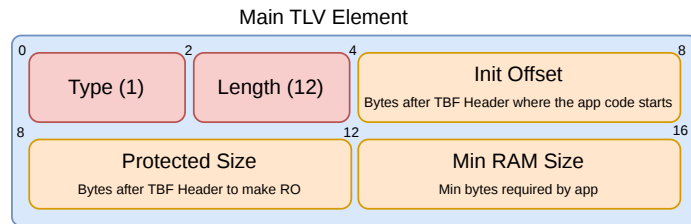
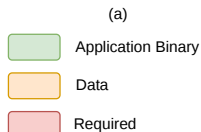
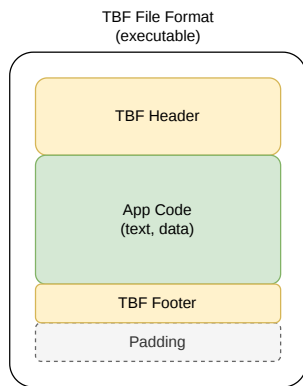




# Tock Binary Format

stores

- **headers** about how to load the application
- the **binary code** and **data**
- **credential** footers





# Memory Layout

for the RP2040

## Kernel

- is written in flash separated from the apps
- loads each app at boot

## Applications

- each application TBF is written to the flash separately
- each application has a separate
  - *stack* in RAM
  - *grant* section where the kernel stores data about the app
  - *data* section in RAM



\* drawing is not at scale, TBF sections are at least as large as the App Data sections



# Memory Layout

for the RP2040 at runtime

## Kernel

- sets up the MPU every time it switches to a process

## Applications

- can read and execute its code
- can read and write its *stack* and *data*
- can read and write the *allocated heap*

Applications are **not allowed** to access the **kernel's memory** or **the peripherals**.



\* drawing is not at scale, TBF sections are at least as large as the App Data sections



# Process States

- Tock runs only on *single core*
- *Running* state means the process is ready to run
- *Yielded* means the process waits for an event (*upcall*)
- *start* and *stop* are user commands
- a process is stopped only if the user asked it







# Application API

libraries

Tock provides two libraries:

- `libtock-c` that is fully supported
- `libtock-rs` that is in development [△](#) <sup>[1]</sup>

- 
1. Due to a Rust compiler issue, Rust applications are not relocatable. This means that developers have to know at compile time the load addresses for Flash and RAM. ←



# Example Application ( C )

```
1  #include <libtock-sync/services/alarm.h>
2  #include <libtock/interface/led.h>
3
4  int main(void) {
5      // Ask the kernel how many LEDs are on this board.
6      int num_leds;
7      int err = libtock_led_count(&num_leds);
8      if (err < 0) return err;
9
10     // Blink the LEDs in a binary count pattern and scale
11     // to the number of LEDs on the board.
12     for (int count = 0; ; count++) {
13         for (int i = 0; i < num_leds; i++) {
14             if (count & (1 << i)) {
15                 libtock_led_on(i);
16             } else {
17                 libtock_led_off(i);
18             }
19         }
20
21         // This delay uses an underlying alarm in the kernel.
22         libtocksync_alarm_delay_ms(250);
23     }
24 }
```



# Example Application ( Rust )

```
1  //! A simple libtock-rs example. Just blinks all the LEDs.
2
3  #![no_main]
4  #![no_std]
5
6  use libtock::alarm::{Alarm, Milliseconds};
7  use libtock::leds::Leds;
8  use libtock::runtime::{set_main, stack_size};
9
10 set_main! {main}
11 stack_size! {0x200}
12
13 fn main() {
14     if let Ok(leds_count) = Leds::count() {
15         loop {
16             for led_index in 0..leds_count {
17                 let _ = Leds::toggle(led_index as u32);
18             }
19             Alarm::sleep_for(Milliseconds(250)).unwrap();
20         }
21     }
22 }
```



# Faults

similar to segfaults

- the kernel and apps can fault
- a detailed debug message can be displayed
- due to MPU usage Tock apps fault on:
  - trying to access memory outside its data (includes peripheral access)
  - stack overflow
  - trying to perform privileged operations

---| Fault Status |---

Data Access Violation: true  
Forced Hard Fault: true  
Faulting Memory Address: 0x00000000  
Fault Status Register (CFSR): 0x00000082  
Hard Fault Status Register (HFSR): 0x40000000

---| App Status |---

App: crash\_dummy - [Fault]  
Events Queued: 0 Syscall Count: 0 Dropped Callback Count  
Restart Count: 0  
Last Syscall: None

Address	Region Name	Used	Allocated (bytes)	
0x20006000	▼ Grant	948	948	
0x20005C4C	Unused			
0x200049F0	▲ Heap	0	4700	S
0x200049F0	Data	496	496	R
0x20004800	▼ Stack	72	2048	M
0x200047B8	Unused			
0x20004000				



# System Calls

0. Yield
1. Subscribe
2. Command
3. ReadWriteAllow
4. ReadOnlyAllow
5. Memop
6. Exit
7. UserspaceReadableAllow





## 5: Memop

Memop expands the memory segment available to the process, allows the process to retrieve pointers to its allocated memory space, provides a mechanism for the process to tell the kernel where its stack and heap start, and other operations involving process memory.

```
memop(op_type: u32, argument: u32) -> [[ VARIES ]] as u32
```

### Arguments

- `op_type` : An integer indicating whether this is a `brk` (0), a `sbrk` (1), or another memop call.
- `argument` : The argument to `brk` , `sbrk` , or other call.

### Return

- Dependent on the particular *memop* call.

Each memop operation is specific and details of each call can be found in the memop syscall documentation.



## 6: Exit

The process signals the kernel that it has no more work to do and can be stopped or that it asks the kernel to restart it.

```
tock_exit(completion_code: u32)
tock_restart(completion_code: u32)
```

### **Return**

None



## 2: Command

Command instructs the driver to perform a specific action.

```
command(driver: u32, command_number: u32, argument1: u32, argument2: u32) -> CommandReturn
```

### Arguments

- `driver` : integer specifying which driver to use
- `command_number` : the requested command.
- `argument1` : a command-specific argument
- `argument2` : a command-specific argument

One Tock convention with the *Command* system call is that command number 0 will always return a value of 0 or greater if the driver is present.

### Return

- three `u32` numbers
- Errors
  - `NODEVICE` if `driver` does not refer to a valid kernel driver.
  - `NOSUPPORT` if the driver exists but doesn't support the `command_number`.
  - Other return codes based on the specific driver.





# 1: Subscribe

Subscribe assigns upcall functions to be executed in response to various events.

```
subscribe(driver: u32, subscribe_number: u32, upcall: u32, userdata: u32) -> Result<Upcall, (Upcall, ErrorCode)>
```

## Arguments

- `driver` : integer specifying which driver to use
- `subscribe_number` : event number
- `upcall` : function's pointer to call upon event

```
void upcall(int arg1, int arg2, int arg3, void* userdata)
```

- `userdata` : value that will be passed back, usually a pointer

## Return

- The previously registered upcall or `TOCK_NULL_UPCALL`
- Errors
  - `NODEVICE` if `driver` does not refer to a valid kernel driver.
  - `NOSUPPORT` if the driver exists but doesn't support the `subscribe_number`.



# 0: Yield

Yield transitions the current process from the Running to the Yielded state.

```
1 // waits for the next upcall
2 // The process will not execute again until another upcall re-schedules the
3 // process.
4 yield()
5
6 // does not wait for the next upcall
7 // If a process has no enqueued upcalls, the
8 // process immediately re-enters the Running state.
9 yield_no_wait()
```

## Return

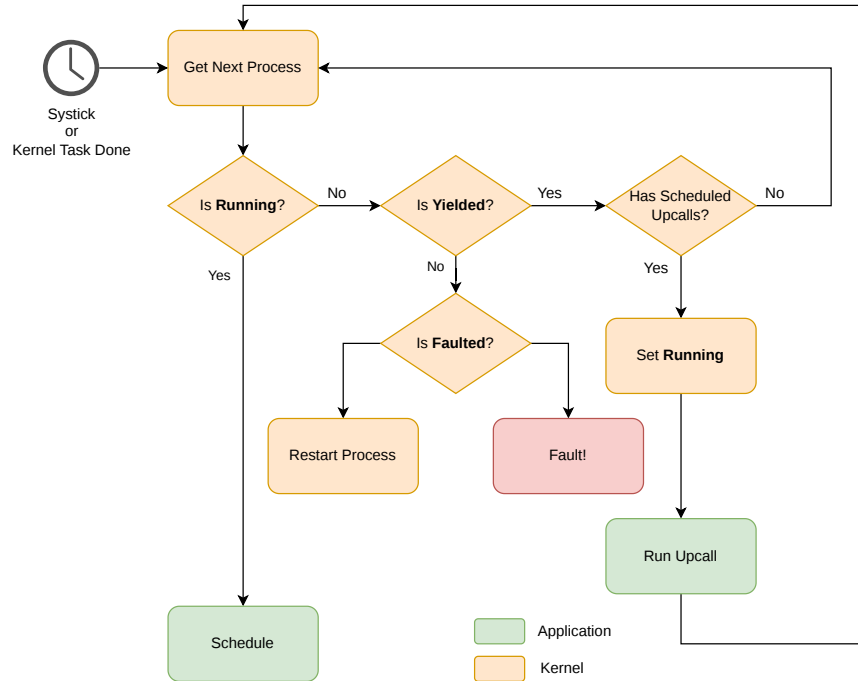
*yield*: None

*yield\_no\_wait*:

- 1 - *upcall* ran
- 0 - there was no queued *upcall* function to execute

# Scheduler

using command, subscribe and yield



how the scheduler works



how drivers work



## 3 and 4: AllowRead(Write/Only)

Allow shares memory buffers between the kernel and application.

```
allow_readwrite(driver: u32, allow_number: u32, pointer: usize, size: u32) -> Result<ReadWriteAppSlice, (ReadWriteAppSlice,  
allow_readonly(driver: u32, allow_number: u32, pointer: usize, size: u32) -> Result<ReadWriteAppSlice, (ReadWriteAppSlice,
```

### Arguments

- `driver` : integer specifying which driver to use
- `allow_number` : driver-specific integer specifying the purpose of this buffer
- `pointer` : pointer to the buffer in the process memory space
  - null pointer revokes a previously shared buffer
- `size` : the length of the buffer

### Return

- The previous allowed buffer or NULL
- Errors
  - `NODEVICE` if `driver` does not refer to a valid kernel driver.
  - `NOSUPPORT` if the driver exists but doesn't support the `allow_number`.
  - `INVAL` the buffer referred to by `pointer` and `size` lies completely or partially outside of the processes addressable RAM.



# System Call Pattern

1. *allow*: if data exchange is required, share a buffer with a driver
2. *subscribe* to the *action done* event
3. send a *command* to ask the driver to start performing an action
4. *yield* to wait for the *action done* event
  - the kernel calls a *callback*
  - verify if the expected event was triggered, if not *yield*
5. *unallow*: get the buffer back from the driver





# Conclusion

we discussed about

- The purpose of an operating system
  - Abstractions
  - System calls
- Embedded Operating Systems
  - Real Time
- Tock OS