

# Research Proposal

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## Abstract

This literature review will introduce Continuous Integration/Continuous Delivery (CI/CD). Also, some attack surface and how the malicious attacker exploit these attack surface will be covered in this review. From the developers' and maintainers' point of view, the methods and frameworks are going to be introduced to counter the attack. In this literature review, the framework will focus on Supply Chain Level Security Artifacts (SLSA) which is adopted by Google.

## 1 Introduction

Continuous IntegrationContinuous Delivery (CI/CD) is a development process for quickly building and testing code changes that helps organizations maintain a consistent code base for their applications while dynamically integrating code changes. Therefore, CI/CD environments are attractive targets for malicious cyber actors (MCAs) whose goals are to compromise information by introducing malicious code into CI/CD applications, gaining access to intellectual property/trade secrets through code theft, or causing denial of service effects against applications.

Recent incidence like the infection of SolarWind's Orien platform [2, 7] which is used to monitor and manage the network is downloaded by thousands customers, including U.S. government agencies, critical infrastructure providers, and private companies.

Section 2 will briefly introduce CI/CD, and section 3 would target the attack surface within the process of CI/CD. Then, section 4, we are going to map the defense method to the attack method, and providing real world attack event. In section 5, our literature review would introduce SLSA framework from Google, and explain how SLSA can patch the vulnerable CI/CD process. In section 6, the aim and objects of the research will be explained. And the research plan will be introduced in section 7.

## 2 Definition of CI/CD

CI/CD is a development process for automatically building and testing code changes that support organizations maintain a consistent code base. CI involves developers frequently merging code changes into a central repository where automated builds and tests run. Build is the process of converting source code into executable code. Then, running the automated tests against the build. These process will avoid integration challenges that can happen when waiting for release day to merge changes into the release branch. CD defined the process of the releases

happened automatically. [6].

The convenience and capabilities of the third-party source code usually brings cybersecurity risks [4]. Software supply chain attacks aim at injecting code into software components to compromise downstream users [2]. Some vulnerabilities will be introduced in the next section.

## 3 Attack Surface and Impact

### 3.1 Source Code Repository

Obtain Git Repository credentials by dumping the environment Variables. Then, user the stolen secrets to access the Repository and modify the CI/CD configuration. Finally, the code will successfully be injected into the code base, and affects downstream users.

### 3.2 Build/Test

### 3.3 Deploy

Java Virtual Machine (JVM) executes Java bytecode and provides strong safety guarantees. However, the unsafe API, "sun.misc.Unsafe", will cause serious security issue if it is misused by the developers. The research [4] studied a large repository, Maven, and analyzed the compiled Java code. The security issues include violating type safety, crashing the virtual machine (VM) , uninitialized objects and so on. These misuse might impact third-party package management service.

## 4 Defense Method

These goals are seek to establish the trust in the software supply chain by verifying information about the participants or processes [5]. The complex CI/CD has the potential to catch the attackers more quickly via peer review, because the developers and distributors get a chance to review the code, increasing the chances of malicious code being discovered [3]. Providing cryptographic hashes if the software packages is of significance to verify the software's integrity [3]. Signing the releases of the packages by the providers with the public-key enable the users to verify the

### 4.1 OWASP Top 10 CI/CD Risks[1]

#### 1. Insufficient Flow Control Mechanisms

**Definition:** The attacker obtain permissions to a system within CI/CD process. The system did

not provide sufficient enforcement for approval and reviewed mechanisms.

**Impact:**

- The attackers can push code to a repository branch, which is automatically deployed to production and manually trigger by the attackers.
- Upload an artifact to the artifact repository, such as a package or container, in the guise of a legitimate artifact created by the build environment and picked up by a deploy pipeline and deployed to production.

**Remediation:**

- Configure strict branch protection rules
- Limit the usage of auto-merge rules
- Prevent drifts and inconsistencies between the running code in production and its CI/CD origin.

## 2. Inadequate identity and Access Management

**Definition:** This risks stem from the difficulties in managing the vast amount of identities. The identities are identified through personal access token, e-mail, password and so on.

- Overly permissive identities
- Stale identities - Some identities that are not active or no longer require access but have not had their account deactivated.
- External identities - (1) Employees registered with email from a domain not managed by the organization (2) External collaborators are outside of the organization's control.

**Impact:**

- Overly permissive accounts leads to a state where the attacker can compromise any user account on any system within the CI/CD pipeline.

**Remediation:**

- Continuously analyzed and mapped the identities' account to their permissions, and removed the permissions not necessary to the ongoing work.
- Ensure the identities are aligned to the principle of least privilege, and pre-defined an expiry date for the identities' permissions.

- Prevent the employees from using personal email addresses.
- Avoid the shared accounts. Created the dedicated accounts for each specific context.

## 3. Dependency Chain Abuse

**Definition:** Dependency chain abuse refers to an attacker's ability to abuse flaws relating to how engineering workstations and build environments fetch code dependencies. The build system download the malicious package instead of the one intended to be pulled. There are four scenarios where the developers might be tricked.

- Dependency confusion - Publication of malicious packages in public repositories with the same names as those private one.
- Obtain the control of the account of the package maintainer in order to upload the malicious version.
- Typosquatting - Publication of a similar names to those popular packages.
- Brandjacking - The malicious packages were consistent with the naming convention with the trusted brand.

**Impact:** Once the malicious code is running, it can be leveraged for credentials theft and move horizontally through a system and network. **Remediation:**

- Ensure the packages are not directly pulled through the internet, but through an internal proxy. And disallow pulling directly from external repositories.
- Verify checksum and signature of the pulled packages.
- Lock the packages' version instead of pulling the latest version.
- Installation scripts should not access to sensitive resources in the build process.
- Always ensure projects contain configuration files of package managers.
- The most important is deploy a quick detection, monitoring and mitigation to avoid further compromise.

## 4. Inadequate identity and Access Management

**Definition:**

**Impact:**

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#### Remediation:

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## 4.2 U.S. Department of Defense Recommend [6]

### 1. Zero Trust Approach

No user, endpoint device or process is fully trusted.

### 2. Strong Cryptographic Algorithm

Avoid using outdated cryptographic algorithm which poses a threat to CI/CD pipelines. The threat includes sensitive data exposure and keys generated across the CI/CD pipeline.

### 3. Minimize the Use of Long-Term Credentials

### 4. Add Signature to CI/CD Configuration and Cerify It

Ensure the code change is continuously signed, and the signaature is verified throughout CI/CD process. If the signing identity itself is compromised, it undermines trust.

### 5. Two-Person Rules for all Code Updates

The developer checks in the code which should be reviewed and approved by another developer.

Some of the projects aims at providing single solution that conflates multiple objectives [5].

Despite the previously introduced methods seems to address all the security issue existed in the code base and within the CI/CD, some of them may overemphasize one particular approach to address software supply chain security. without considering compounding factors that impact risk [5].

## 5 Supply Chain Level Security Artifacts

### 5.1 What is Software Supply Chain

Software supply chain is composed multiple components, first-party or third- party libraries, and processes used to develop, build, test, and publish a software artifact [6].

## 6 Research Aims and Objectives

## 7 Research Plan

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