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# Design and implementation of a firewall device with a new method to harden SSL introduced

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I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been given, the work presented in this thesis is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; and the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program.

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Bin Yong  
Lugano, Yesterday September 2023



# Abstract

Design and implementation of a firewall device based on Raspberry Pi. The firewall will use a new method to harden the SSL protocol. It is designed for someone who would like to sacrifice some compatibility to pursue better security but still wants some balance between security and convenience. A sensitive target, like an investigative journalist, could be a potential user of this device. The new method to enhance SSL security introduced in this article is widely applicable to firewall designs.



# Acknowledgements

This document is a draft version of a working thesis of Bin Yong.





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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The goal of this work is to increase the chance of survival of the user from hacking, evasdropping, and digital fingerprinting. The device will work as a strict firewall which limits network activities and will also apply privacy enhancing technologies to reduce the attack surface of digital fingerprinting and it will also apply emerging technologies to increase the difficulty of eavesdropping. The device will run a SSL proxy to harden SSL protocol. It will use a screen to display selected real-time internet activities.

Using a hardware as a firewall has several advantages. Firstly, hardware firewall can provide complete isolation between highly unsafe code, like a browser, and firewall software (fun fact: I was hacked repeatedly through personally hardened latest version of firefox while writing this thesis). This could also work as a mitigation of CPU/BIOS level threats: Firmware malwares, bootkits, and doubttable proprietry technologies like Intel ME and the AMD PSP. Second, it will also provide convenience to the user: the configuration of this portable device will be applied to protect everything behind it, so people do not need to do the time consuming configuration work on different softwares and operating systems one by one.

Even things that could not be configured will be under the restriction of the firewall. In example, people cannot untrust a built-in trusted root certificate from iPhone via Settings app.





## Chapter 2

# Comparsion to existing works

### 2.1 Commercial hardware

Commercial firewalls are expensive. In switzerland, the price of a entry level firewall is more than twice of a raspberry pi. Raspberry Pi being used in this work could be replaced with some cheaper alternatives, making the cost will be even lower. Commercial firewalls also do not provide a screen to display network activities in real-time.

### 2.2 SSL proxy

Unlike traditional MITM SSL proxy, the proxy used in this device will work in non-intrusive way which means it will not decrypt SSL sessions.



## Chapter 3

# Design

### 3.1 Linux vs. BSD

Due to its security-focused nature, OpenBSD would be a great choice when buiding a firewall. However, as a portable device, it is designed to work as a USB network device but OpenBSD does not contain a device mode in its USB stack. Linux provides USB gadget mode. Using the combination of ECM and RNDIS mode, most of Linux, Windows, BSD and MacOS could be supported. FreeBSD USB stack can run in device mode and provided 3 virtual network itierface templates but none of them works with Microsoft WindowsProject [2023]. Considering the large market share of Microsoft Windows, linux is decided as the base OS of this firewall device.

### 3.2 Domain name resolving

A name resoving service is created to resolve domain name queries from firewall serices. It is a local RPC service that resolve domain name queries via public DoH (DNS-over-HTTPS) services. DoH can mitigate both passive surveillance and DNS spoofing attacksHoffman and McManus [2018]. DoT (DNS-over-TLS) is another DNS encryption standard that can do almost the same as DoH. The reason why I choose DoH instead of DoT is that DoT uses a unique server port number, 853, that can be easily filtered and identified as an encrypted DNS connection, while DoH, with the help of using the same port number and protocol as HTTPS, makes it much harder to be identified and filtered than DoT.

### 3.3 SSL Proxy

There are advantages of using a proxy from forwarding packets like a router. Firstly, a proxy can run under user level while packets forwarding run at kernel level. When there is a vulnerability, a userland one naturally to be less harmful than a kernel one. Second, proxies are easier and also safer to configure. It's hard to configure netfilter well. When the rule is not strict enough, like allowing any connection to 127.0.0.1 to success without a log, could cause potential problems if a malicious dhcp server assigned the address 127.0.0.1 to a physical network interface. Also, simply filtering packets by port numbers, addresses, and interfaces could not guarantee the packets being forwarded to the remote actually represent the protocols we are expecting. An

attacker can simply let the receiving end of a reverse shell listen to an allowed port to bypass this kind of defense. By contrast, a proxy only works for the protocols that it can understand. when you are configuring a DNS proxy, the chance that your misconfiguration makes an attacker able to make http request over this proxy is very rare. They have to hack the firewall or create tunnels over those protocols to make their reverse shell work, which increased the difficulty of their operations. Third, the packets from the proxy will be encoded again by Linux network stack so the TCP fingerprinting will be less useful to the devices under its protection.

The proxy will not decrypt SSL sessions, so that when the firewall itself is hacked will not cause a disaster to the user because the certificate verification is still working on the devices behind this firewall. If I give the proxy the ability to decrypt SSL sessions, when the firewall is hacked, the hacker can easily modify the encrypted data transferred over TLS while the devices behind the firewall will still consider the modified data are coming from a trusted connecting. To do this, the proxy will parse handshake packets. It will check algorithms provided by ClientHello and ServerHello, if the negotiation result could not be using strong encryptions, the connection will be blocked. Altering handshake packets without MITM is not viable because the HMAC of all handshake packets is used for encryption. The key\_share extension sometimes makes the certificate invisible to the proxy. Thus, in order to filter certificates, the proxy will handshake with remote server with a separate connection to verify the certificate used by the remote host. A cache of trusted endpoints is used to reduce delay caused by TLS handshakes used for certification check from proxy.

### 3.4 Dealing with plaintext connections

By design, only HTTP and HTTPS protocols are allowed to pass-through the firewall. A proxy is used to filter, protect HTTP plaintext connections. The proxy checks the host name with a known list of OCSP servers. Only the connections to OCSP servers are allowed to be plaintext. The connections to other hosts will be converted to HTTPS connections. If a remote host accepts only HTTP connections, the connection attempt will be failed.

### 3.5 Disguise and randomization

The device disguises itself as other common devices. It will generate random hostname and MAC address on startup so when local network administrators check their DHCP server they will always see different device information.

### 3.6 Untrust certificates

Even if CAs (certificate authorities) do not want to do evil, their private key could still have been stolen. Thus, none of them are trustworthy. However, whole SSL is based on it, if we trust none of those authorities, there will be almost no website we can use and things will be worse if without SSL. When trying to decide which certificates to untrust, people could at first consider the CAs of the place you living in, the CAs of the place you come from, and their enemies and allies. SSL-pinning can prevent MITM attacks from a trusted CA when the user knows the remote endpoint should use the certificate from another authority. However, configuring SSL-pinning to all the websites they use is hard and time consuming to average users and if they do not have

a basic trusted environment, they cannot be certain whether they are doing it correctly. Even if they have done it correctly, it is still not strange for a website to switch to another CA. Thus, this can only be used in very limited circumstances. SSL-pinning can be configured to the proxy when needed.



## Chapter 4

# Improvements to be done in the future

### 4.1 LSM and seccomp

Use LSMs, like AppArmor, and seccomp to protect all as much process as possible. The programs that do not support seccomp can be changed by `LD_LOAD_LIBRARY`.

### 4.2 Compile time hardening

Use strict compiler options to harden everything, including kernel, like what Gentoo Linux is doing now, to try to mitigate some unpublished vulnerabilities, and also to increase the difficulty of attacking the firewall itself.

### 4.3 Network stack fingerprinting

Spoof network stacks, like TCP stacks and TLS stacks, to make the firewall and the devices behind it to be less detectable.





## Chapter 5

# The attacks that I have encountered during the time I was working on this thesis

### 5.1 Malicious hardwares

Normal attackers will use network, bluetooth or wifi for communications between malware and the host. In example, casting the screen to another device via wifi or sending keyboard inputs via bluetooth. Those kind of attacks can be detected by a RF detector. RF sheilding fabrc, RF detectors, and signal jammers could be used to fight against such kind of attacks.

However, There are still other ways exist. Some even without wireless communications. Despite I have already bought a RF detector to alert me wireless communications between unknown hardwares, unknown attackers still managed to monitor my progress by modified hardwares. Take the devices that I am using to develop this project for example. Raspberry 4B has a usb chip that can communicate to the power source. If the charger is specially crafted with the ability to forward the usb connection to the remote endpoint via power lines, then, with the help from the malware installed on the pi itself, data can be leaked silently via power lines even without any network connections to the computer. The same story can also be happened to the portable screen that I am using now. I have found two counter measurements to this kind of attack: One is to use USB-C to DC adapter when connecting a USB-C charger to the laptop. Another is to tape the two pins in the middle of male USB-A port to prevent data communications.

### 5.2 Sounds

Another attack that can bypass a rfkilled computer is to use AI / ML to identify the sounds of keyboard hits. The detected types can be send to remote via power lines or mobile phones. The sound could even be recorded from the room of a neighbor which makes this attack more stealthy than other methods. I use cardboards to extend the pillar of the key cap to shorten the key travel to lower the volume of the sound of the key hit to counter this attack but I am

uncertain about the effect because I have no attack tools to test this. AliPay also used to use sound waves to transmit data between phones and vending machines. My raspberry pi recently started to emit strange noises from the speakers on the screen, which could be because of the same technology being used for hackers.

## Chapter 6

A chapter title which will run over two lines — it's for testing purpose

### 6.1 The first section

### 6.2 The second, math section

**Theorem 1 (Residue Theorem).** Let  $f$  be analytic in the region  $G$  except for the isolated singularities  $a_1, a_2, \dots, a_m$ . If  $\gamma$  is a closed rectifiable curve in  $G$  which does not pass through any of the points  $a_k$  and if  $\gamma \approx 0$  in  $G$  then

$$\frac{1}{2\pi i} \int_{\gamma} f = \sum_{k=1}^m n(\gamma; a_k) \text{Res}(f; a_k).$$

**Theorem 2 (Maximum Modulus).** Let  $G$  be a bounded open set in  $\mathbb{C}$  and suppose that  $f$  is a continuous function on  $G^-$  which is analytic in  $G$ . Then

$$\max\{|f(z)| : z \in G^-\} = \max\{|f(z)| : z \in \partial G\}.$$

### 6.3 A very very long section, titled “The third section”, with a rather short text alternative (third)

Some Test

```
1 import IntSpec, ItemSpec;
2
3 sort cart;
4
5 constructors
6 create()  $\longrightarrow$  cart;
7 insert(cart, item)  $\longrightarrow$  cart;
8 observers
```

```
9 amount(cart)  $\longrightarrow$  int;
10 transformers
11 delete(cart, item)  $\longrightarrow$  cart;
12
13 axioms
14 forall c: cart, i, j: item
15
16 amount(create()) = 0;
17 amount(insert(c,i)) = amount(c) + price(i);
18 delete(create(),i) = create();
19 delete(insert(c,i),j) =
20 if (i == j) c
21 else insert(delete(c,j),i);
22 end
```

As you can easily see from the above listing Baresi et al. [2007a] define something weird based on the BPEL specification [Andrews et al., 2003].

## Appendix A

### Some retarded material

#### A.1 It's over...



## Glossary





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