# Time Division Multiplexing of Network Access by Security Groups in High Performance Computing Environments

by

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ABSTRACT

It is commonly known that High Performance Computing (HPC) systems are most frequently used by multiple users for batch job, parallel computations. Less well known, however, are the numerous HPC systems servicing such data so sensitive that administrators enforce either *a*) sequential job processing - only one job at a time on the entire system, or *b*) physical separation - devoting an entire HPC system to a single project until recommissioned. The driving forces behind this type of security are numerous but share the common origin of data so sensitive that measures above and beyond industry standard are used to ensure information security. This paper presents a network security solution that provides information security above and beyond industry standard, yet still enabling multi-user computations on the system. This paper's main contribution is a mechanism designed to enforce high level time division multiplexing of network access (Time Division Multiple Access, or TDMA) according to security groups. By dividing network access into time windows, interactions between applications over the network can be prevented in an easily verifiable way.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*To my wife, Sara, for her unwavering support*

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# Chapter 1

# Introduction

High Performance Computing (HPC) systems are comprised of numerous individual computing systems networked and administrated together such that they can be used as a single system. Popular examples of these systems include some custom made such as the Cray I and the modern IBM Sequoia [15], though more common are simple Computer Clusters in which Commercial Off The Shelf (COTS) equipment is utilized [6]. Security within these systems is often enforced through traditional Operating System (OS) mechanisms of memory protection and file access privileges [6].

Application developers for this domain of systems spans a broad spectrum, ranging from undergraduate students learning concurrent programming to defence contractors executing classified simulations. Moving towards the most demanding end of the spectrum, security concerns among application-side stakeholders increase and additional methods are employed to enforce information security. At some point along this spectrum stakeholders decide on physical separation to satisfy security concerns. The reasons behind this can be numerous, but likely stem from two major goals: simplicity of implementation and verification; and risk aversion/management. It is undeniable that physical separation provides a level of information security that is hard to replicate through the use of software, however the financial costs are significant - devoting entire HPC systems to running jobs sequentially.

This paper presents a Time Division Multiple Access (TDMA) scheme of network resources as a viable alternative to physical separation. By modulating network access between application security groups we can provide an intuitive security mechanism capable of being verified in real-time. Furthermore by implementing this mechanism at the operating system level it becomes transparent to user applications, meaning no modification to existing application code is necessary.

# Chapter 2

# Related Work

The problem statement and proposed solution represent the intersection of two somewhat disparate fields - Time Division Multiple Access and High Performance Computing Security. Related works are therefore divided between the two.

*High Performance Computing Security*

The size and cost of HPC environments dictates that each system is somewhat unique. The security solutions implemented within each are similarly unique. Sandholm et al. [20] make an attempt at rectifying this larger problem by creating a framework that uses automates user access permissions and resource allocation using ”XACML (eXtensible Access Control Markup Language)”. They further extend their solution by tying it in to existing job submission tools (Globus Toolkit [18] and NorduGrid [19]).

Allcock et al. [2] developed a high-speed data transport protocol, GridFTP, as well as a corresponding administrative service providing for the creation, registration, and secure transportation of scientific computing datasets. For efficient execution, HPC applications must carefully consider characteristics of the data set under operation such as file size statistics, data creation/consumption rates, and logical distribution [7]. GridFTP implements management of these characteristics while maintaining customizable security using the authentication mechanisms defined in RFC 2228 ”FTP Security Extensions” [10]. This solution, while useful in most scientific computing setting, still allows for application data, albeit encrypted, to be visible over the network to other user applications. This visibility renders it insufficient for the requirements of customers with the most stringent data security needs.

*Time Division Multiple Access*

Mages and Feng [17] patented a similar control scheme of computing resources via a centralized controller over the network. Their scheme, however, specifies only local media resources of the node as under the control of the central administrative node. Furthermore, their patent is intended for a much wider distributed use as digital rights management and security in consumer media devices, rather than our work on security in HPC environments.

Chapter 3

# Problem Definition

We begin by defining an abstract HPC environment through which the general case of our security challenge is shown. In this section we provide brief descriptions of the major resources common to most HPC systems. Furthermore, to design our mechanism, certain assumptions must be made on how each resources is operated.

## *Environmental Assumptions*

There are four basic resources in most HPC systems represented in Figure 3.1 as *a*) compute nodes, *b*) persistent storage, *c*) administrative nodes, *d*) network infrastructure. Worth consideration also is the process of job allocation and the execution of jobs.

### Compute Nodes

Compute nodes are independent computing devices designated to run user submitted applications. These devices are capable of storing temporary data locally. They send and receive data across network infrastructure for three main purposes:*a*) storing or accessing data on the persistent storage devices; *b*) relaying data between

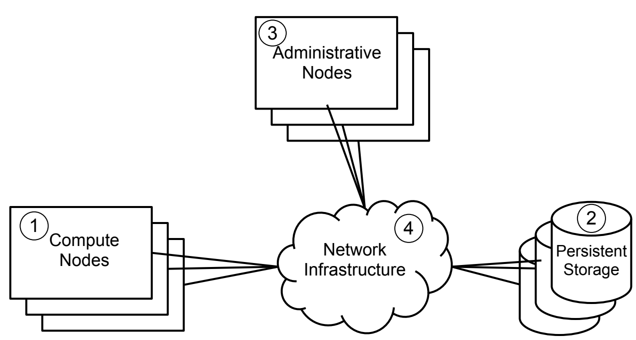


Figure 3.1: An abstract HPC environment.


Figure 3.2: The $KG-200$ Inline Media Encryptor, certified by the NSA for use in securing persistent storage [1].

other compute nodes working in tandem on the same user application; *c*) and sending or receiving commands (or reports, as the case may be) from the administrative nodes, through which users interact.

It is assumed that these compute nodes do not co-locate user applications (e.g., two different user applications are running in the same system memory) and that user applications are not given administrative access at this level. No assumption is made about the use of virtual machines on compute nodes.

### Persistent Storage

Persistent storage devices are capable of storing large quantities of user application data, and are usually of much higher capacity than the compute nodes. User data is commonly co-located across disks using RAID (redundant array of inexpensive disks) technology [13] for higher storage efficiency and redundancy.

It is assumed that Inline Media Encryptors (IMEs) and Posix permissions are used to enforce data access rules within persistent storage [8]. IMEs have been certified for use in classified networks by the U.S. National Security Administration since 2006 [1].

### Administrative Nodes

Administrative nodes are computing devices where *a*) both administrators and users interact with the system, common tasks of which include issuing job or system commands, accessing reports and results, and performing maintenance; *b*) resource management software is centrally located and executed [14], common examples include IBM's Tivoli Workload Scheduler and the MOAB Cluster Suite by Adaptive Computing [3][11].

It is assumed that the scheduler located here is capable of providing access to the list of current running applications and the hardware resources devoted to them.

### Network Infrastructure

Network infrastructure devices facilitate the transmission of data between nodes within the HPC system. Mediums vary widely and include copper, optical, and wireless. The most common technologies used in HPC environments are Ethernet and InfiniBand [5][16].

It is assumed that the network infrastructure uses Internet Protocol to communicate among nodes.

### Job Execution

Best practices for developing jobs run on HPC systems dictates the minimization of I/O, both to disk and over the network [22]. This I/O minimization is due to the dramatic increase in access time as data moves further away from the CPU and main memory. It's over 50 times more costly to access 1MB of data from the network than it is from main memory [9]. This overhead increases to almost a factor of 100 if that data is initially read from disk then sent over the network [9].

In the effort to minimize the cost of I/O transactions, previous researchers have shown that batching I/O into larger transactions can reduce overhead [21]. The difference between sequentially reading 1K files from network disks and reading 256MB from network disks shows a factor of 1700 improved performance by reading in larger batches [22]. The batching of I/O, especially the most costly forms

| Action | Time to Complete |
|---|---|
| L1 cache reference | 0.5 ns |
| L2 cache reference | 7 ns |
| Main memory reference | 100 ns |
| Read 1 MB sequentially from memory | 250,000 ns |
| Read 1 MB sequentially from network | 10,000,000 ns |
| Read 1 MB sequentially from disk | 30,000,000 ns |

Table 3.1: Access time examples showing the magnitude of difference between data over I/O and data locally stored [9].

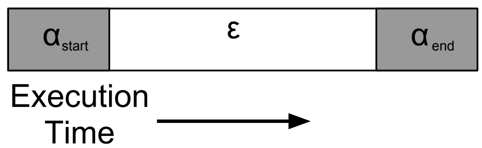


Figure 3.3: The assumed model of application execution in an HPC environment. $\alpha_{start}$ and $\alpha_{end}$ are periods where execution is I/O bound, and $\varepsilon$ is the prominent period where execution is CPU bound. This structure adheres to research showing batched I/O minimizes the I/O cost in terms of time.

(disk and network) is therefore considered best practice when possible [4]. It is therefore assumed that job developers will attempt to maximize I/O batching, the optimal case of which would have an I/O transaction history similar to that shown in Figure 3.3.

*Security Challenge*

The security fear of customers with sensitive data is that a different customer could, through chance or intention, acquire or manipulate their data. The three main components assumed within an HPC system described above represent the resources across which data may be exposed. Table 3.2 shows the standard ways in which these resources are secured. [REMOVE: WRITE ON HOW CURRENT METHODS OF SECURING NETWORK ARE NOT ENOUGH]

| | | Solutions | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Hardware Location** | **Security Challenge** | Board Separation | IME | Posix Permissions |
| Compute Nodes | Local Data Storage | ✓ | | ✓ |
| | Local Data Processing | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Persistent Storage | Co-location of user data | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Administrative Node | Accept and Schedule User Jobs | | | ✓ |
| Network Infrastructure | Transmit intra-application data between compute nodes | | | |
| | Transmit data to/from compute nodes and persistent storage | | | |
| | Transmit commands from scheduler to compute nodes | | | |

Table 3.2: Security challenges and technology used to solve them

# Chapter 4
# Design Goals

Here we describe the major goals in the design and implementation of the TDMA security mechanism.

*Mechanism and Policy Separation*

Envisioning the tool as enabling a more secure form of HPC for mutually distrusting users, the type, number, and scale of jobs assigned to any of the systems can be widely varied. To handle this, at the least, the tool must be capable of receiving and modifying policy at the start of each new job. Furthermore, to provide more fine-grained control an online policy modification scheme is desirable for managing performance tradeoffs between security groups. We define the mechanism and policy split of our tool to be an ability to receive and actuate policy changes at the finest granularity in which the tool operates.

*Network Fabric Agnostic*

Two major technologies are used to network HPC systems: Ethernet and InfiniBand. Any tool for improving security across the broad spectrum of HPC systems must be capable of operating in each. Further, numerous network topologies exist within these technologies; switched fabric and tree structures are the most common for InfiniBand and Ethernet, respectively. For our purposes we define this tool to be network fabric agnostic if the tool is conceptually capable of being implemented in either Ethernet or InfiniBand networks.

*User Application Transparent*

A fundamental requirement of the tool is that it be transparent to user applications. Applications written for HPC environments are often quite complex and it is likely that customers would be reluctant to make even minor modifications, especially to programs written in the past that are under re-use. For our purposes we define user application transparency as the ability to run an application without modification to successful end on an HPC system using our tool, given that it can also do so on a system not using our tool.

# Chapter 5
# Formal Definition

Before discussing how our mechanism is implemented, we must first define the abstract definition that describes how the mechanism works beyond any specific implementation. The best way to describe this mechanism is through a language that represents the mechanism in operation. This language is defined formally by stating the grammar that generates it.

Suppose $S$ is a finite set of security groups, s.t. each security group $s \in S$ is made up of a number of compute nodes. Given $S$, the language our mechanism operates on can be generated by the following grammar. Because the language is dependent on the security groups $S$, this grammar must be generated based on it. This is done in two steps:

First, we define the base grammar:

$$
\begin{aligned}
& G^1 = (V^1, \Sigma^1, R^1, \mathscr{A}), \text{ where} & \\
& V^1 = \{\mathscr{A}, W\} & \text{non-terminal symbols} \\
& \Sigma^1 = \{\emptyset\} & \text{terminal symbols} \\
& R^1 = \{ \quad \mathscr{A} \to \varepsilon, & \text{rules of production} \\
& \qquad\quad \mathscr{A} \to W\mathscr{A} | W\} &
\end{aligned}
$$

This base grammar, through the non-terminal symbols and production rules, establishes a means of generating the base language form of unordered windows ($W \in V^1$) in an arbitrary length such as $WW$ or $WWWWW$.

Next, we generate the $S$ specific definitions. To do so it is first necessary to define notation for two special terminal symbols and three special sets:

$o_{s,i}$ - an open command issued to node $i$ within security group $s$,

$a_{s,i}$ - an acknowledgement received from node $i$ within security group $s$,

$\theta_s$ - the set of all $o_{s,i}$ terminals for security group $s$,

$\alpha_s$ - the set of all $a_{s,i}$ terminals for security group $s$, and

$\pi(A)$ - the set of all permutations of the set A.

These definitions allow us to define a final, special set:

$$\Lambda_s = \pi(\theta_s) \times \pi(\alpha_s)$$

Intuitively, $\Lambda_s$ is a set of ordered sets expressing each permutation of $\theta_s$ matched with each permutation of $\alpha_s$. For example, given a security group $s$ made up of two elements s.t. $s = \{1,2\}$, $\Lambda_s$ is defined:

$$\begin{aligned}\Lambda_s = \{&(o_{s,1}, o_{s,2}, a_{s,1}, a_{s,2}), \quad (o_{s,2}, o_{s,1}, a_{s,1}, a_{s,2}),\\ &(o_{s,1}, o_{s,2}, a_{s,2}, a_{s,1}), \quad (o_{s,2}, o_{s,1}, a_{s,2}, a_{s,1})\}\end{aligned}$$

The sets within $\Lambda_s$ represent all legitimate command sequences within a window ($W$) for security group $s$. The key property of the sets within $\Lambda_s$ is that each node within the security group is issued an open command, in any order, followed by acknowledgements from each node within the security group, once again in any order.

With these definitions established we can now formally define an $S$ specific grammar:

$G^2 = (V^2, \Sigma^2, R^2, \emptyset)$, where

$V^2 = \{W\}$

$\Sigma^2 = \{[o_{s,i}, a_{s,i}] : \forall i \in \forall s \in S\}$

$R^2 = \{[W \rightarrow \lambda] : \forall \lambda \in \Lambda_s : \forall s \in S\}$

These definitions add new terminal symbols and the necessary production rules to generate them. Note the use of $\Lambda_s$ in the production rules. These rules provide every possible command sequence possible for any window $W$ s.t. every node issued an open command is required to report back with an acknowledgement before continuation onto another window.

Finally, the language our mechanism accepts for security group $S$ can be formed using the union of the previous two grammars:

$G = (V, \Sigma, R, \mathscr{A})$, where

$V = V^1 \cup V^2$

$\Sigma = \Sigma^1 \cup \Sigma^2$

$R = R^1 \cup R^2$

# Chapter 6

# Implementation

As a proof of concept we have implemented a version of the tool for the Linux operating system using C++11. In this section we will describe the tool's architecture, operation, and how it adheres to the design goals from the previous section.

*Overview*

**Algorithm 1** Window Controller opening and closing network access windows.

```
function Open_Windows(Scheduler)
    Scheduler.initialize();
    while End_Command_Not_Received do
        Security_Group ← Scheduler.get_next_group();
        Security_Group.state ← STATE.OPEN;
        for each node ∈ Security_Group do
            send(node.address,
                   Security_Group.crypto_sign(COMMAND.OPEN));
            node.state ← STATE.OPEN;
        while Security_Group.state == STATE.OPEN do
            node_response ← block_on_receive_message();
            if node_response.state == STATE.CLOSED then
                node.state ← STATE.CLOSED;
            else
                throw ERROR.UNCLOSED_NODE;
            Security_Group.state ← STATE.CLOSED;
            for each node ∈ Security_Group do
                if node.state == STATE.OPEN then
                    Security_Group.state ← STATE.OPEN;
```

The tool is composed of four major components: the window scheduler, ingress controller, egress controller, and the state controller. The window scheduler can be located on any administrative node within the system, preferably co-located with the system job scheduler. The remaining controllers are located throughout the

**Algorithm 2** Node Control Mechanism opening and closing access to the network.

```
function Node_Control_Mechanism
    Queue ← initialize_queue;
    while exit_command_not_received do
        state ← Close_Network_Access(Queue);
        while open_command_not_received do
            message ← block_on_receive_message();
        state ← Open_Network_Access(Queue);
        sleep(message.time);
        state ← Close_Network_Access(Queue);
        send_acknowledgement(state);

function Close_Network_Access(Queue)
    state.egress ← Network_Egress.enqueue(Queue);
    state.ingress ← Network_Ingress.drop_packets();
    return state

function Open_Network_Access(Queue)
    state.ingress ← Network_Ingress.accept_packets();
    state.egress ← Queue.process_packets_to_network();
    return state
```

HPC environment, with a copy on each compute node that is designated to execute user applications.

The system provides enhanced security by time dividing access to the network according to security groups. As jobs are scheduled on the system, the window scheduler must be informed of the intended location and their assigned security group. As jobs are run on compute nodes throughout the system the window scheduler communicates with the state controller on each node to designate time windows. During any individual time window only one security group has authorization to access the network. For any given time window in which a security group does not have access to the network, outgoing network packets are stored in a local queue while incoming packets are just ignored and deleted. The window scheduler is tasked with alternating time window authorization between security groups.

The following subsections describe each components operations in further detail.

*State Controller*

The state controller has three major tasks:

1. Securely send and receive communication with the window scheduler for the system
2. Transit both the ingress and egress controllers between states of network access and denial
3. Collect and store performance data on the egress queue's memory usage

*Ingress Controller*

The ingress controller is a firewall of incoming network packets and has two states:

1. Open access of network packets to applications on the node
2. Closed to network packets except for those from explicitly allowed sources (a whitelist style of firewall)

During the open state incoming packets are processed normally. During the ingress closure, incoming packets, except those allowed by the whitelist, are dropped. The whitelist is designated to allow only necessary infrastructure communications such as Network Time Protocol (NTP), performance measurements, and especially packets from the window scheduler.

*Egress Controller*

The egress controller, similar to the ingress controller, has two major states:

1. Open flow of packets onto the network
2. Diversion of outgoing packets into a blocked queue

*Window Scheduler*

The window scheduler has three major tasks:

Determine system network access states for the next time window Validate the closure of the previous time window Communicate the next time window states to compute nodes To determine the network access states for the next time window the scheduler must run a scheduling algorithm on a few historical inputs. The base case scheduling algorithm is round robin (i.e., equal window size for each security group). To improve performance, a number of heuristics have been considered for the creation of a dynamic priority scheduling algorithm: the egress controller memory usage of compute nodes, number of TCP timeouts, and externally imposed priorities.

Chapter 7

# Performance

*Expected Values*

MAKE SURE TO CITE NETPERF [12] Leading systems in high performance computing can serve as indicators of where commercial HPC systems will be in the upcoming years. The Titan system at Oak Ridge National Laboratories (ORNL) is one such system, the technical details of which are displayed in Table 7.1.

Here we attempt to quantify how the mechanism affects memory usage at the compute node level and effective bandwidth.

$T_{on,n}$ Time, within a window, where compute node $n$ has access to the network.

$T_{window}$ Length in time of a single window.

$\Pi_{app,n}$ Speed at which the application on compute node $n$ generates network traffic.

$\Pi_{NIC,n}$ Speed at which the NIC on compute node $n$ can transmit traffic onto the network.

*Case Study*

To verify and test the mechanism a test bed was created out of five Dell 1955 servers seen in Figure 7.7. These servers run Ubuntu server version 12.04 and had their network interfaces configured and connected according to Figure 7.6.

| Technical Specifications | |
|---|---|
| CPUs | 16 cores @ 2.2GHz |
| Main Memory | 32GB @ DDR3 |

Table 7.1: Technical specifications of compute nodes within the Titan at ORNL.

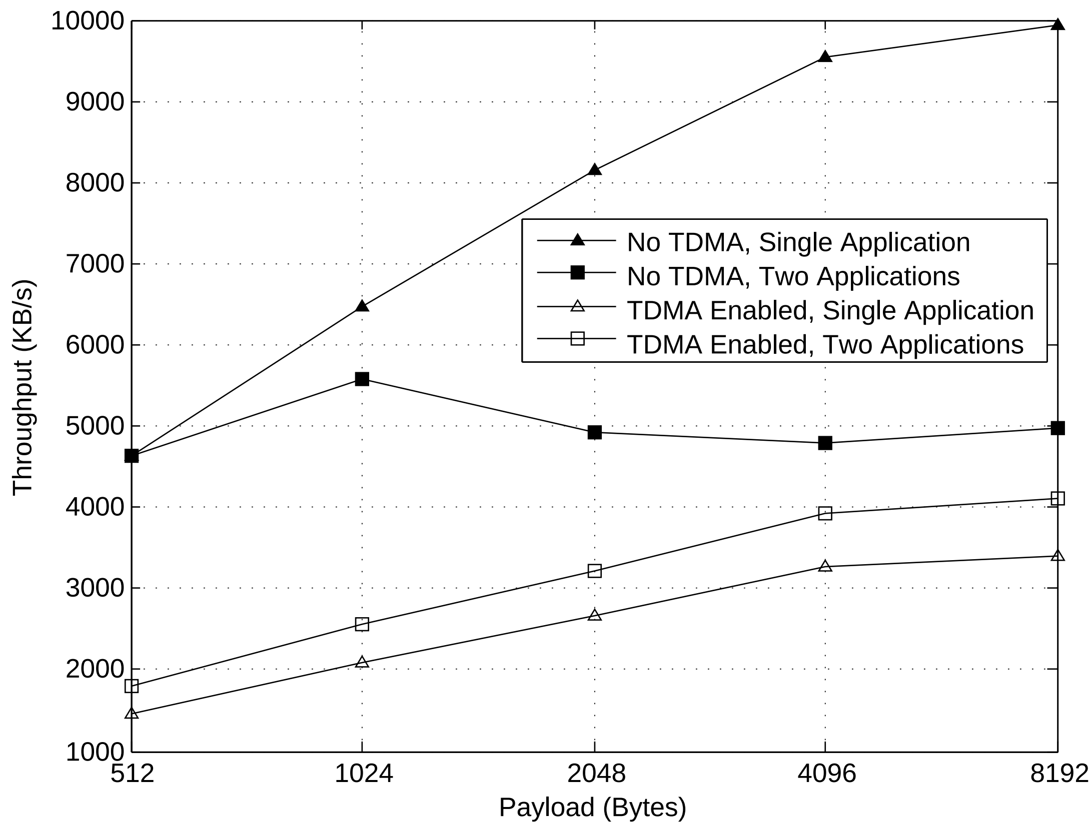


Figure 7.1: TDMA effect on TCP application performance and demonstration of payload size effect on network throughput.

To simulate job execution each node ran a program that sent ICMP (ping) commands at stochastic intervals and speeds to the other member other member of the security group. The mechanism, started and controlled at the control server (see Figure 7.7) alternated between network access for each security group at a time interval of one second of network access per group. A Wireshark (REF PACKET SNIFFING) trace was ran at the control server and the results of which can be seen in Figure 7.8 showing a history of packets sent through the network. The black entries represent communications originating from the control server, while the red and blue entries represent packets originating from nodes within the security group. [REMOVE MAKE IMAGE OF RANDOMIZED PINGING AND COM-

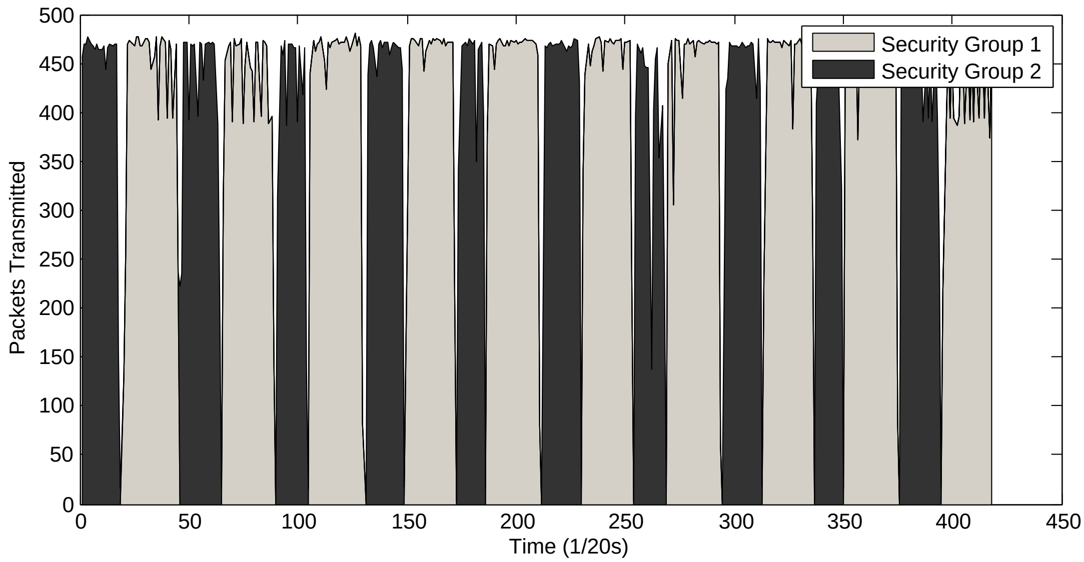


Figure 7.2: A trace of network traffic under performance testing while TDMA controls access.

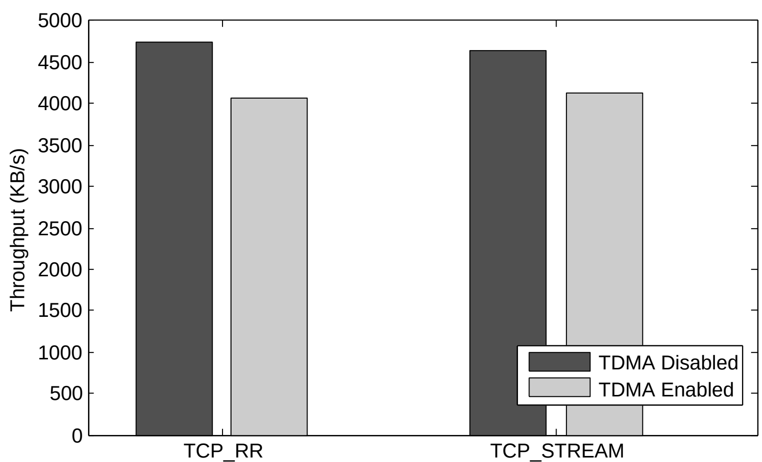


Figure 7.3: The impact of TDMA on TCP performance under two different 'netperf' tests.

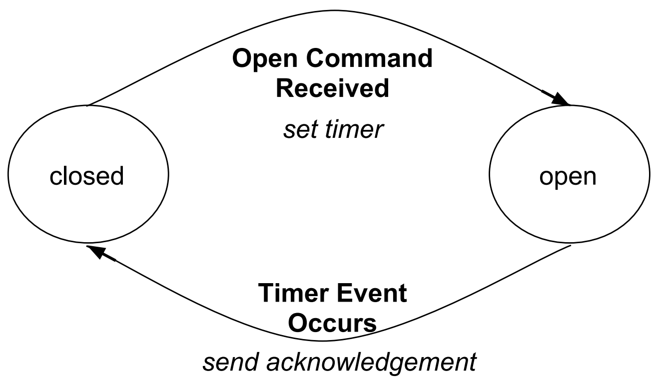


Figure 7.4: State diagram of a compute node.

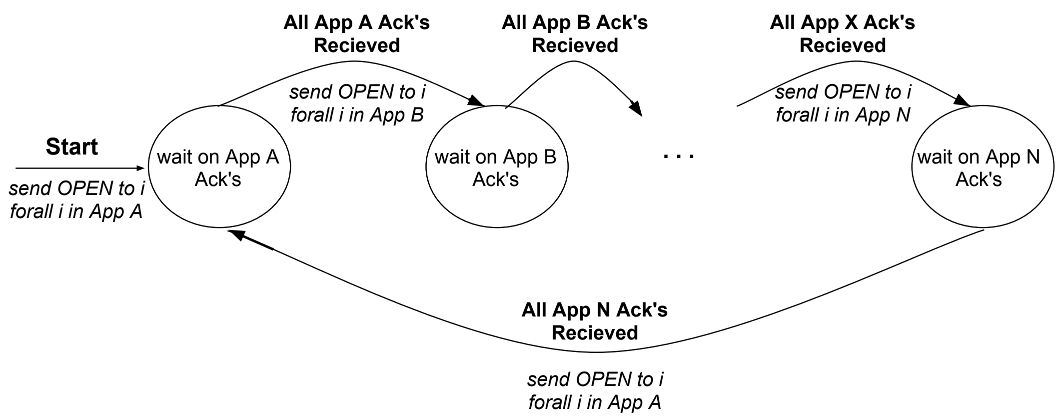


Figure 7.5: State diagram of an example window controller.

PARE THE BEFORE AFTER - MENTION THIS IS EGRESS INFORMATION, FIND WAY TO SHOW INGRESS.]

*Security Validation*

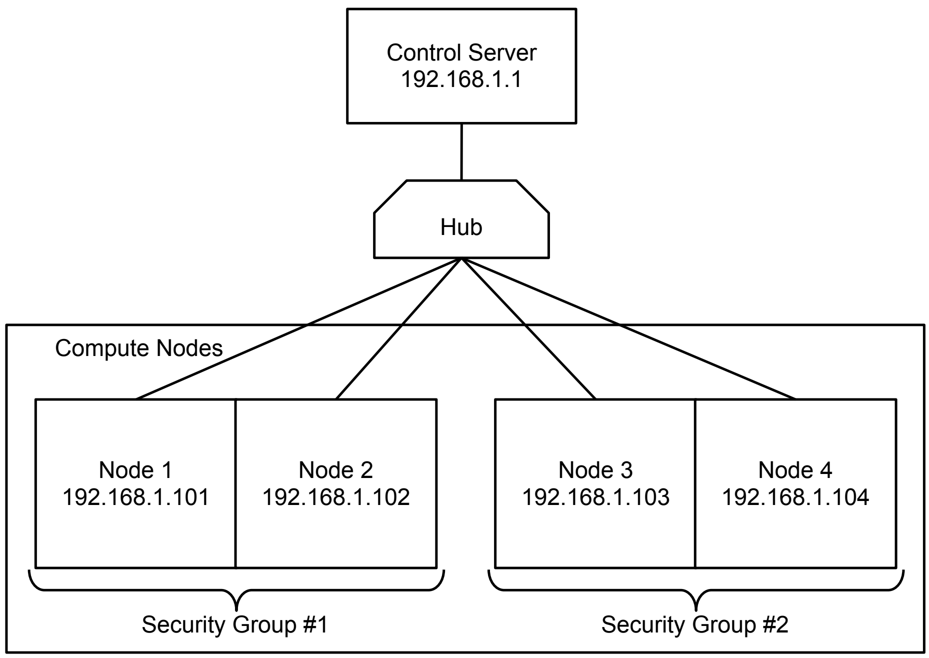


Figure 7.6: The network architecture of our demonstration test bed.

Figure 7.7: The TDMA test bed located in Impact Lab at Arizona State University.

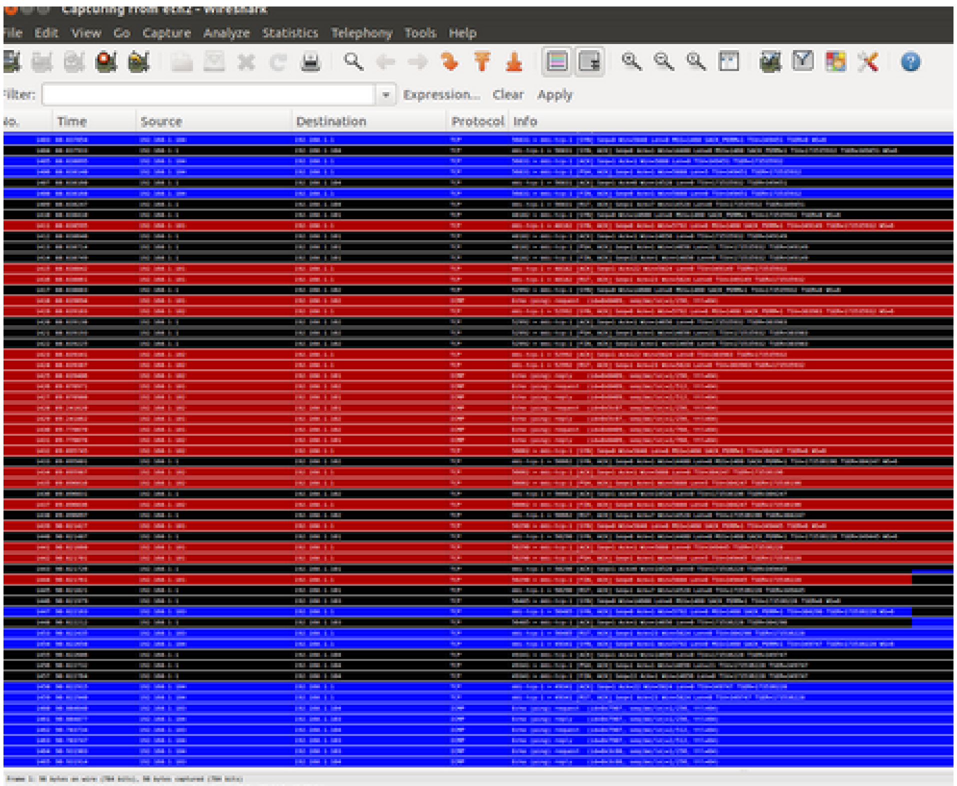


Figure 7.8: An example trace of the mechanism's time division property captured using the packet capturing application Wireshark. The colored records represent traffic based from compute nodes of two separate security groups - denoted as red and blue.

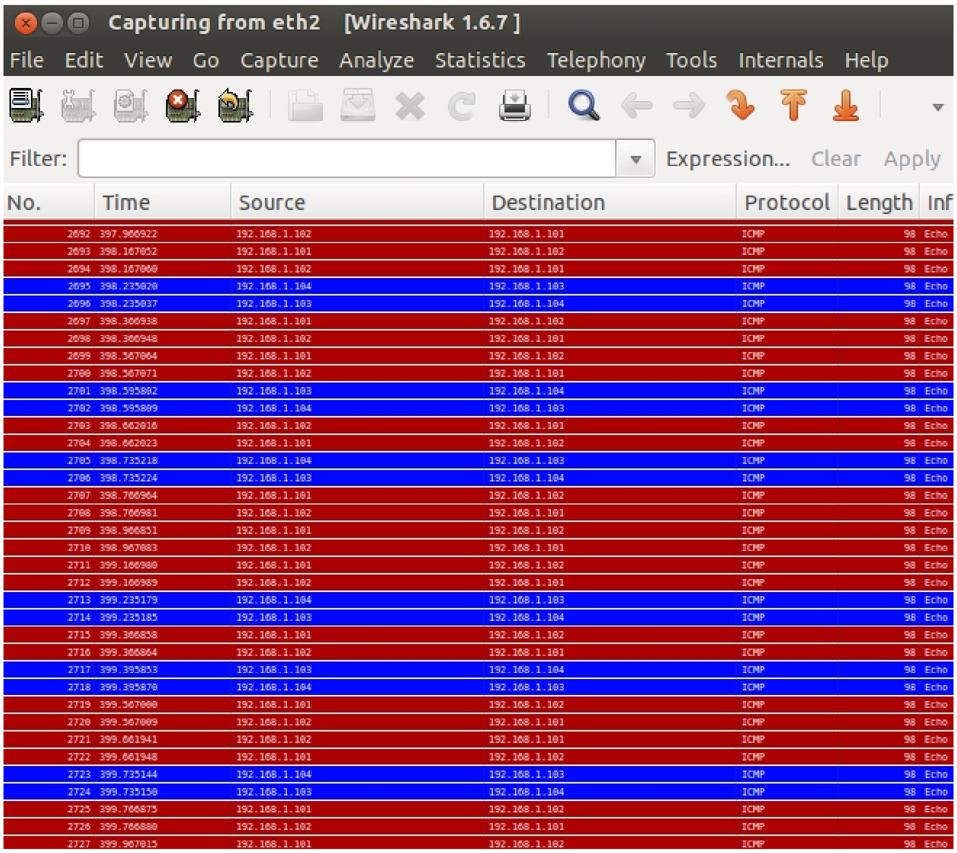


Figure 7.9: An example trace of applications operating without TDMA.Note the interweaving of traffic from the different security groups - denoted as red and blue.

# Chapter 8

# Conclusion

The problem of enforcing authenticated access to resources in an HPC environment is a difficult one. Further, creating a solution that is intuitive and secure enough to convince highly sceptical stakeholders of its security narrows available options. This thesis presents a method of solving this problem that is both intuitive and verifiably secure, in real time. The worst case performance penalty of utilizing this mechanism is shown to be within bounds of reasonable expectations. Practical performance is expected to minimize the overhead of the mechanism.

## *Further Work*

Implement dynamic scheduling algorithm on the window scheduler using memory usage statistics from compute nodes.

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