

# End-Host Networking

These slides are taken from the lessons of Prof. Gianni Antichi @Polimi  
for the Network Computing course

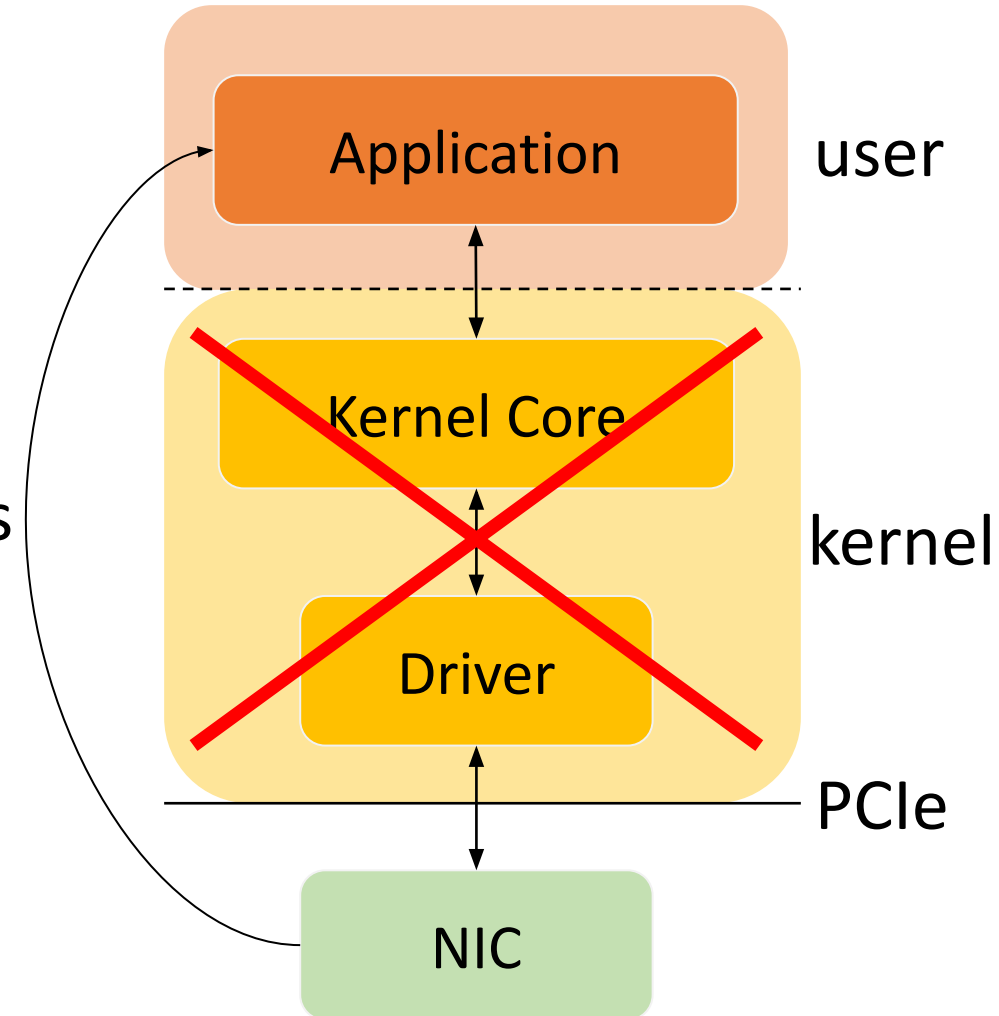
# Advanced network processing

DPDK, RDMA and eBPF

Option #1: kernel bypass

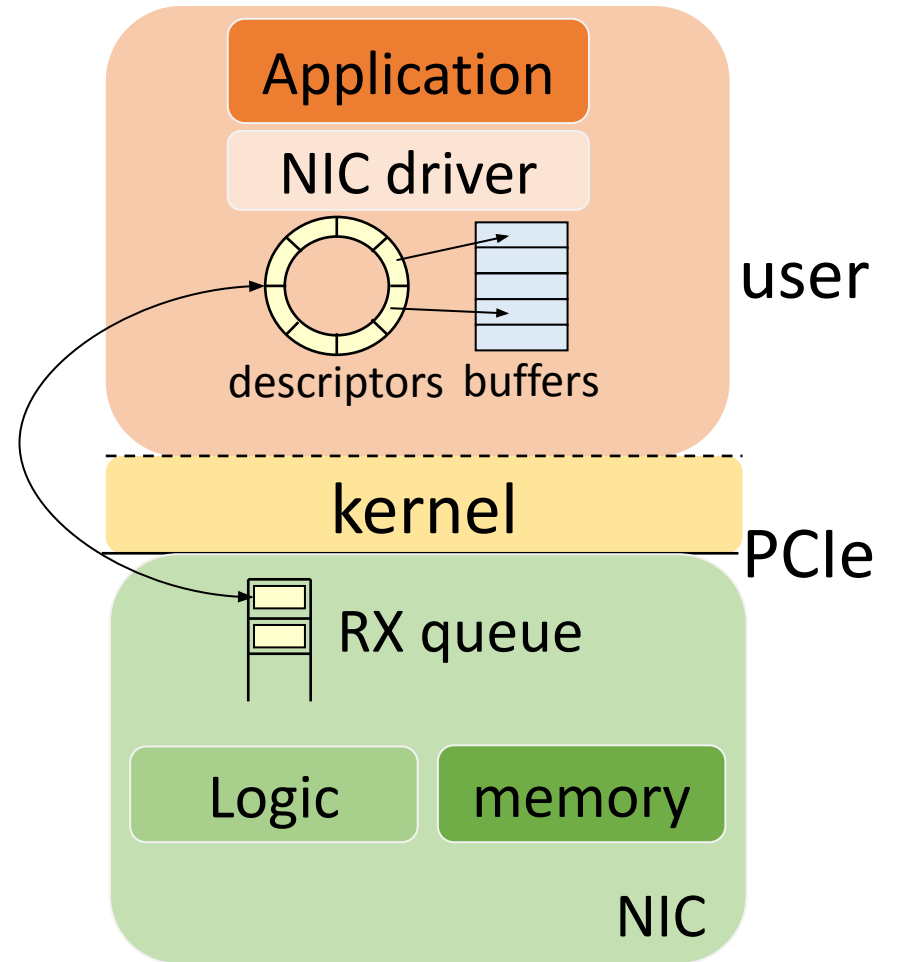
# Option #1: kernel bypass with DPDK

- Bypass the Kernel!
- Example: Data Plane Development Kit (DPDK)
- DPDK is a set of libraries and drivers that allows to bypass the Linux kernel stack and pass the packet directly at user-space



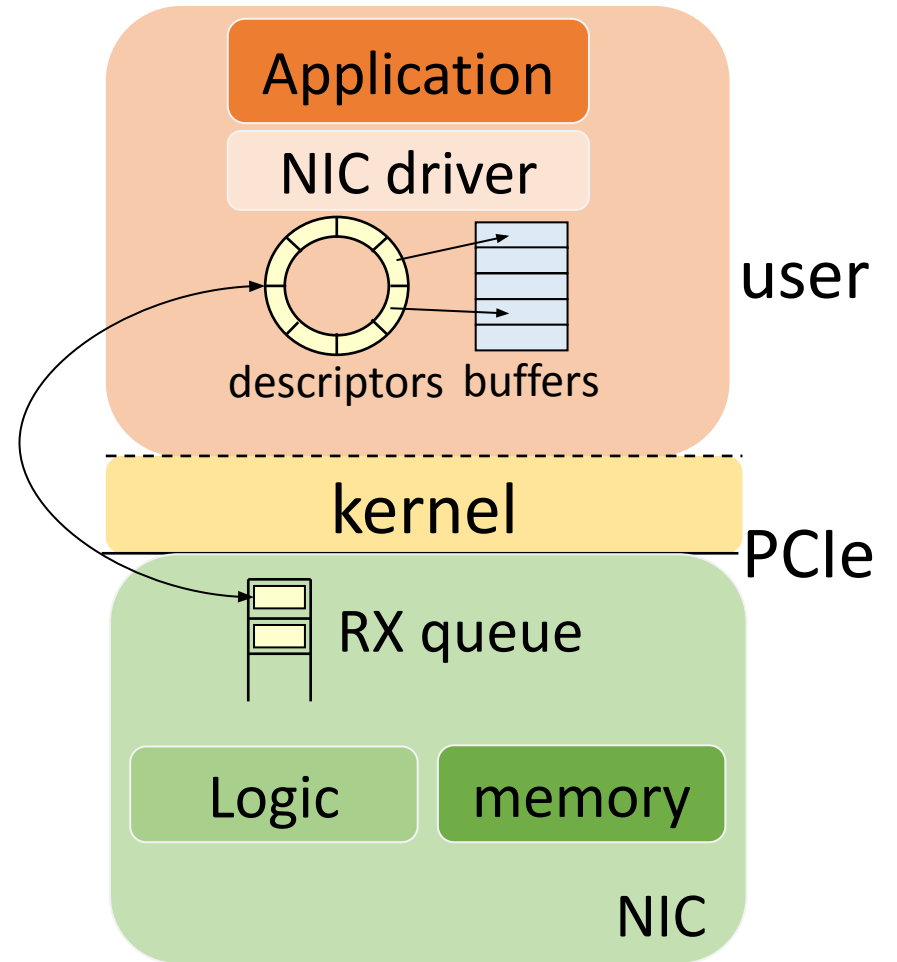
# Option #1: kernel bypass with DPDK

- DPDK enables NICs to DMA data directly in user-space memory
- The NIC driver is a user-space application that interface directly with the NIC updating its RX queue with available descriptors

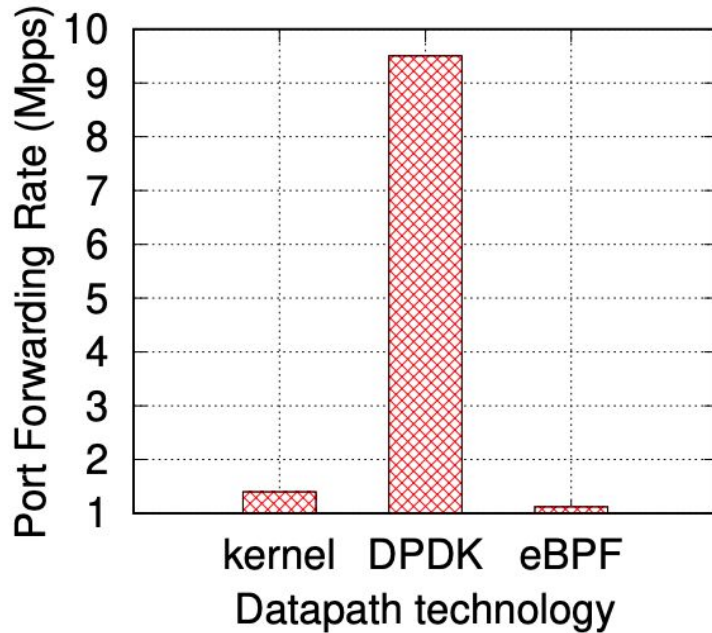


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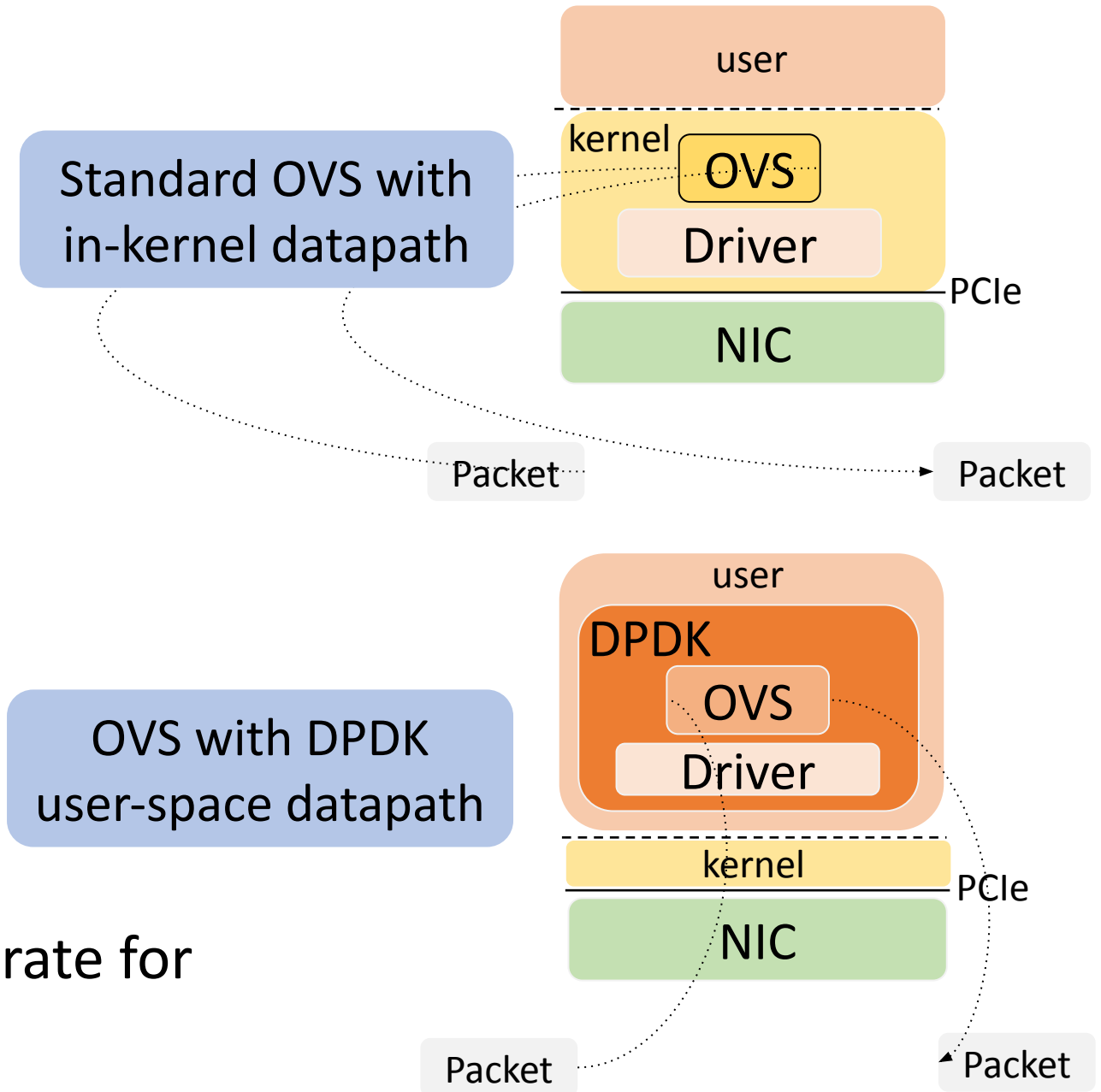
- DPDK drivers work in Poll mode
- Instead of the NIC raising an interrupt to the CPU when a packet is received, the CPU runs a **poll** mode driver (PMD) to constantly poll the NIC for new packets.
- As a consequence, a CPU core must be dedicated and assigned to running PMD.



# DPDK vs Kernel

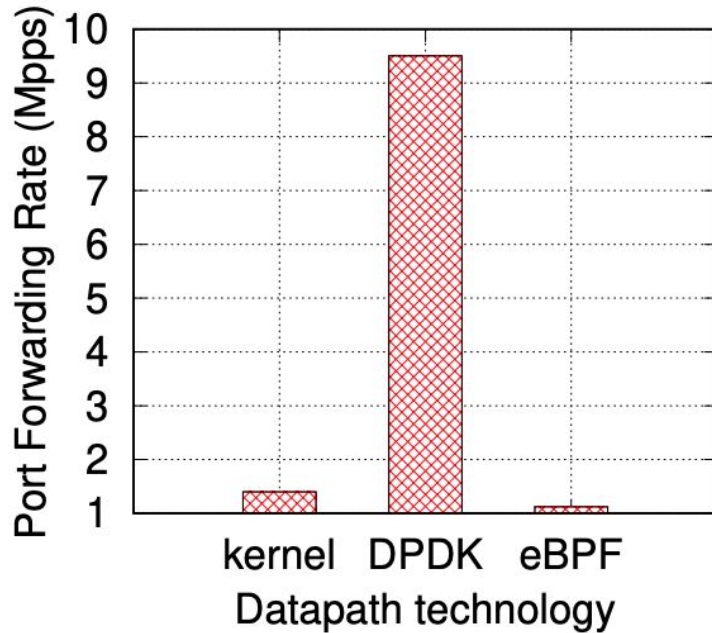


- This is OVS (single core) forwarding rate for 64B packets

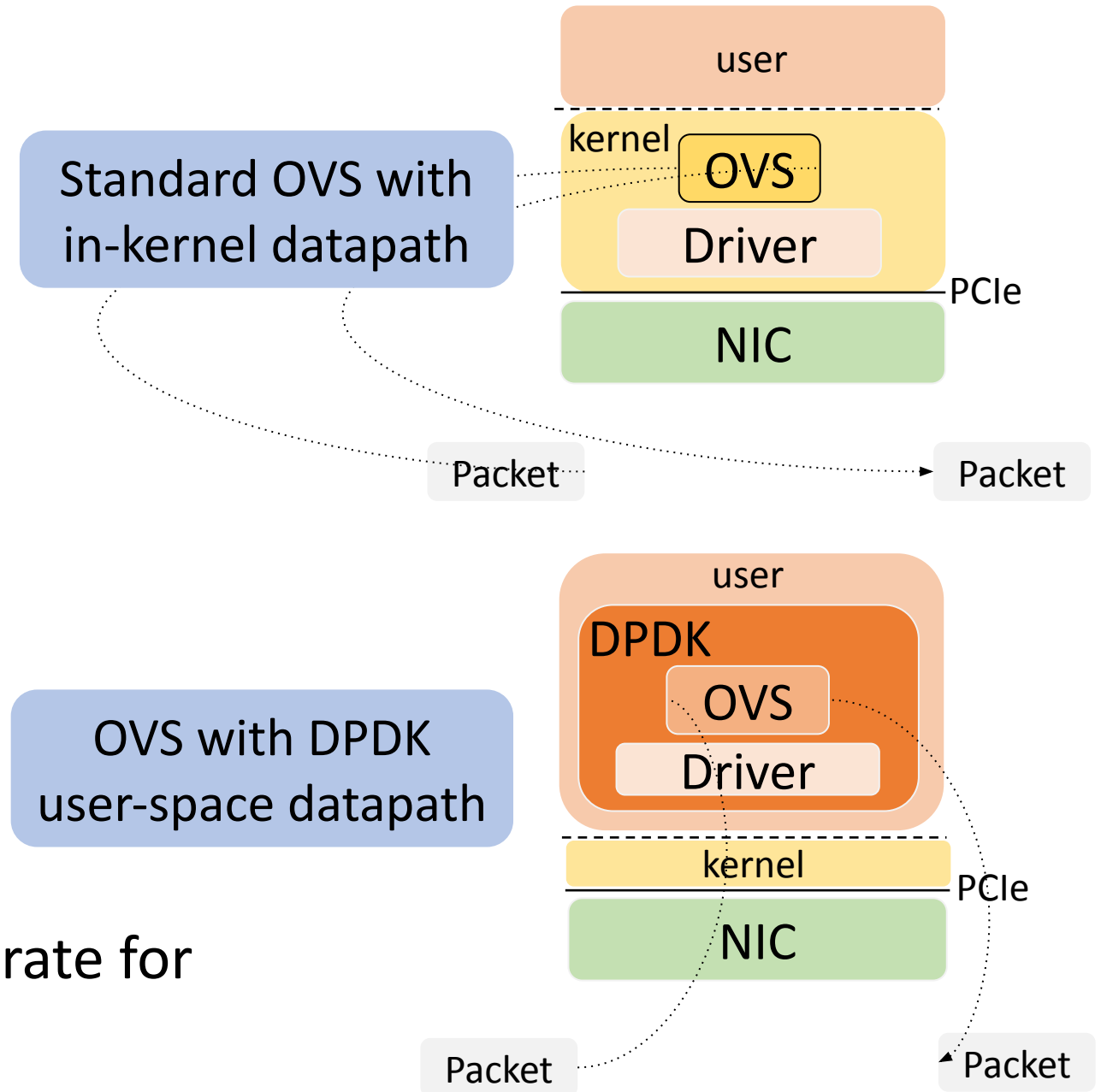


# DPDK vs Kernel

DPDK is fast 😊



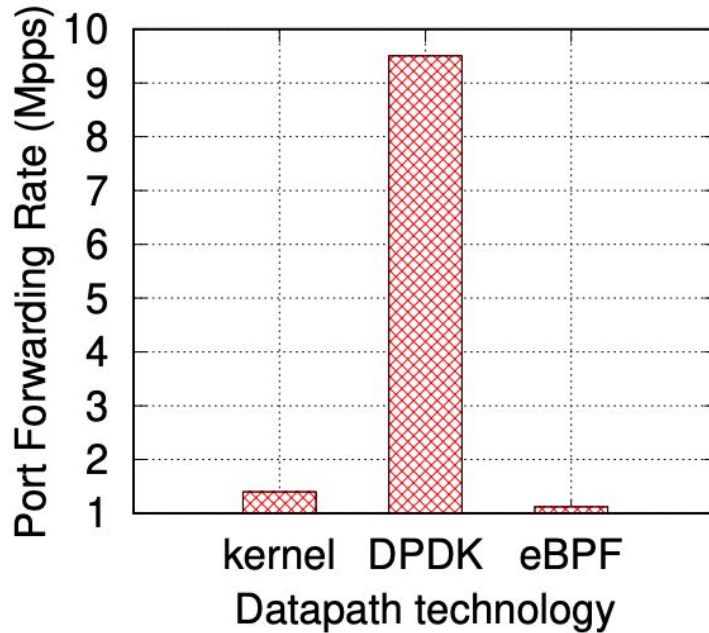
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# DPDK vs Kernel

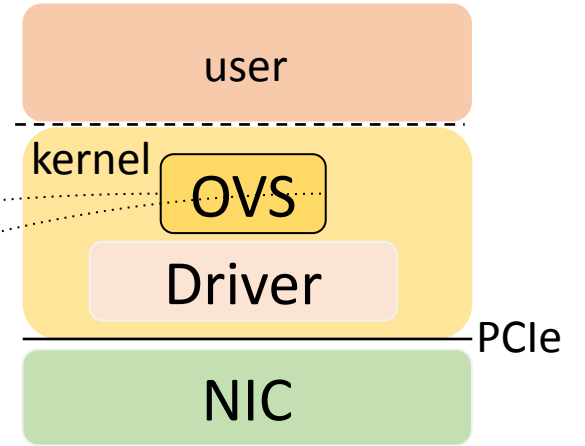
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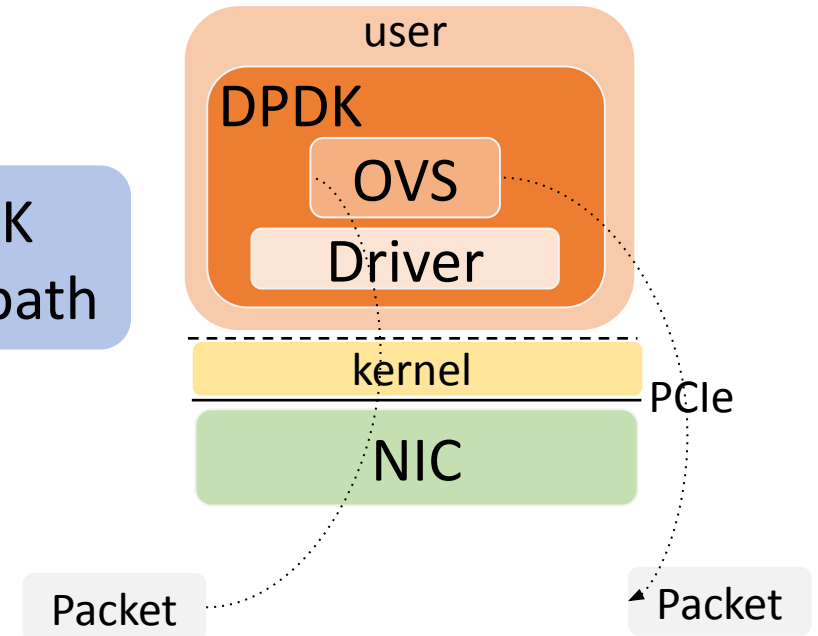
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What's the catch then?

Standard OVS with in-kernel datapath

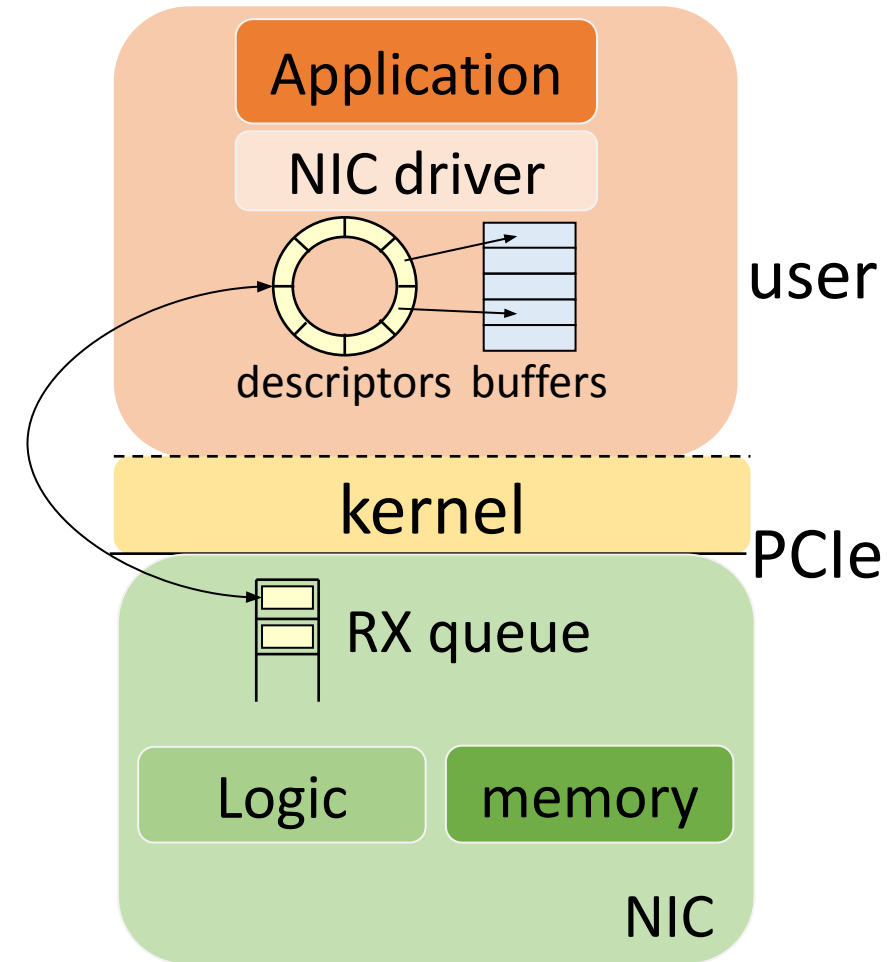


OVS with DPDK user-space datapath



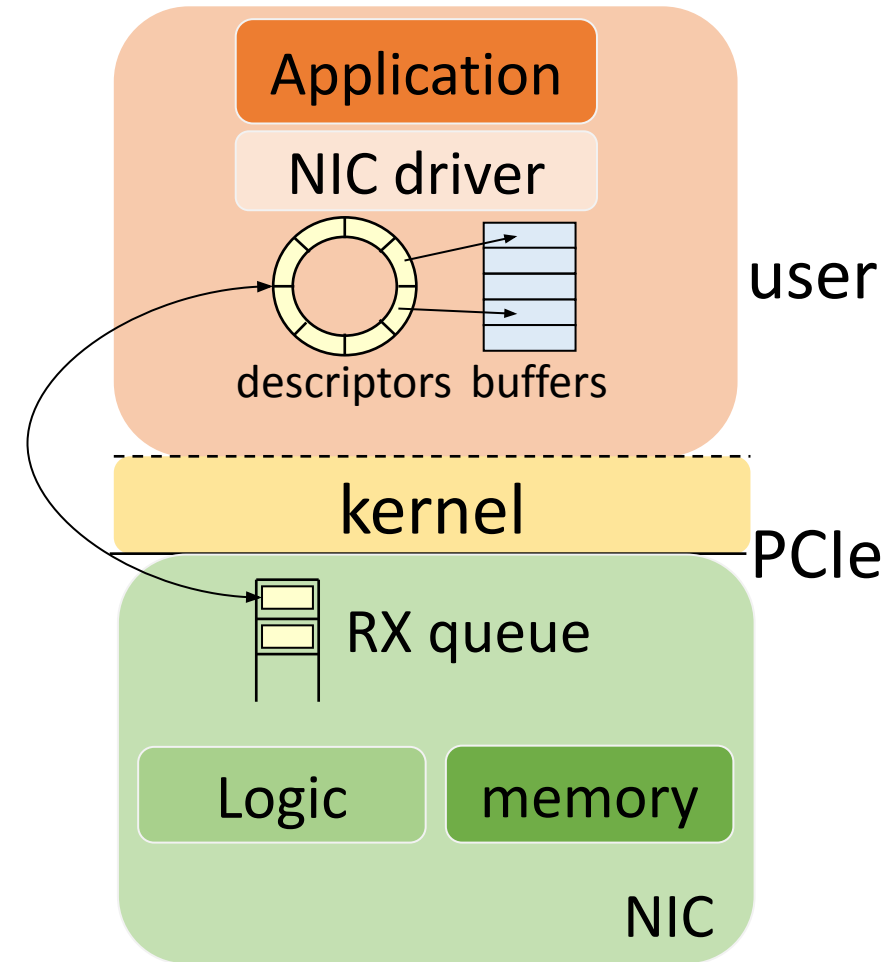
# Problems with DPDK

- If you bypass the kernel, you give up all the features the kernel provides to you.
  - TCP/IP processing
  - NATting/Firewalling
- *ping* does not work anymore 😞
- *tcpdump* does not work 😞
- *ip link* does not work 😞

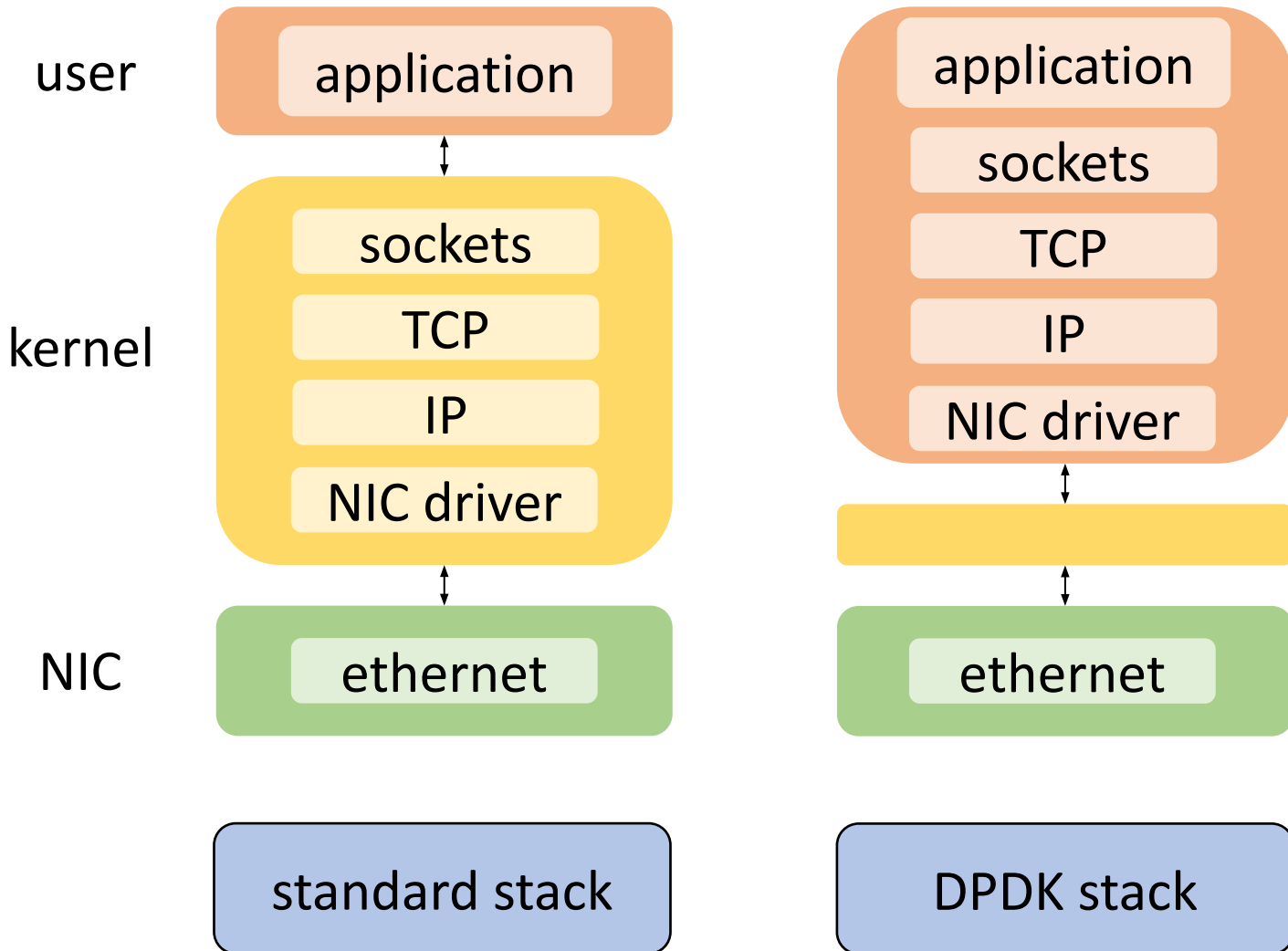


# Problems with DPDK

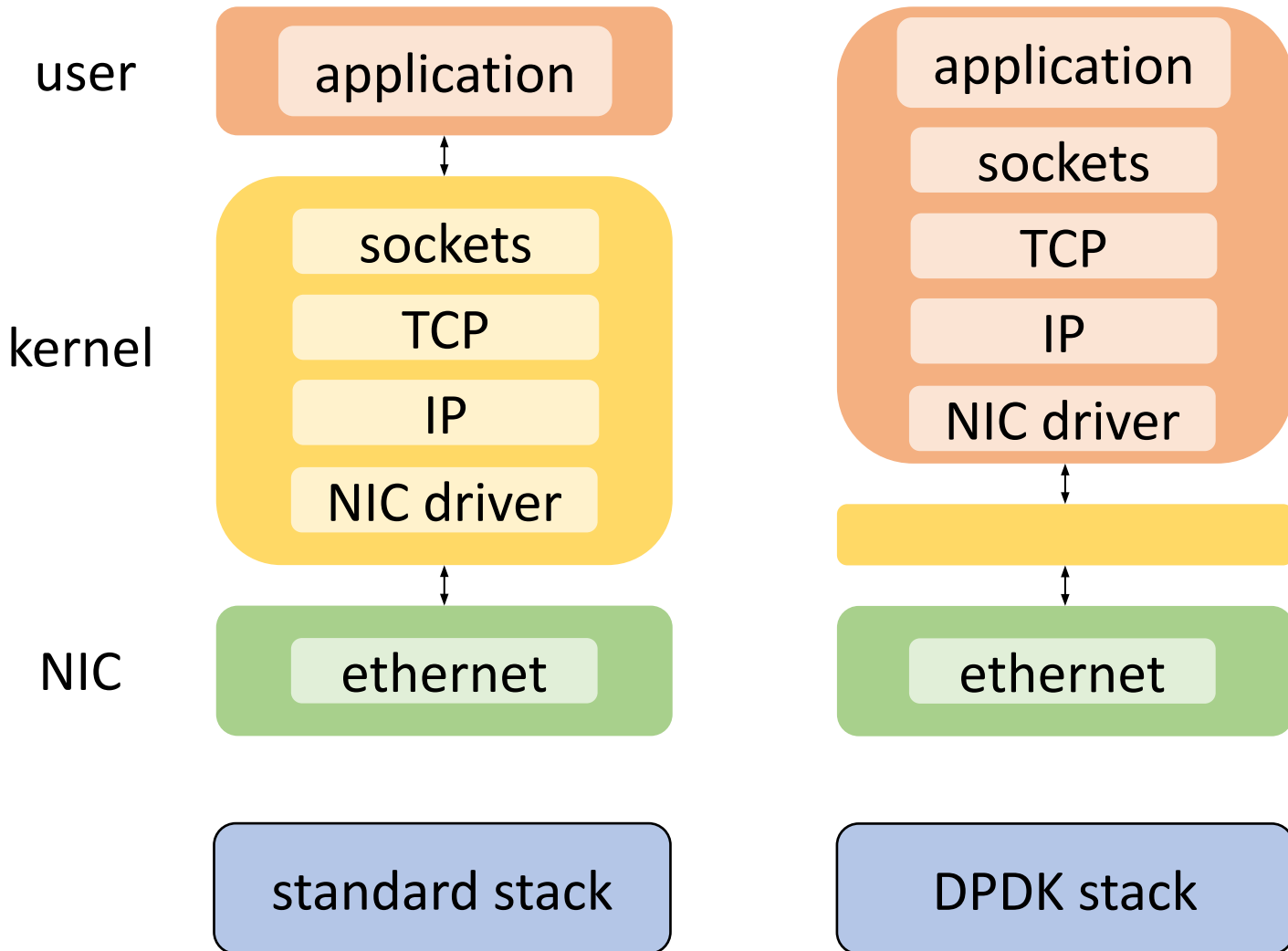
- No sharing of network resources
  - A single application take entire ownership of the DPDK port
- You can have different VMs sharing with Single Root Input/Output Virtualization (SR-IOV)
- SR-IOV is a specification that allows the isolation of PCIe addresses



# Option #2: kernel bypass with a twist

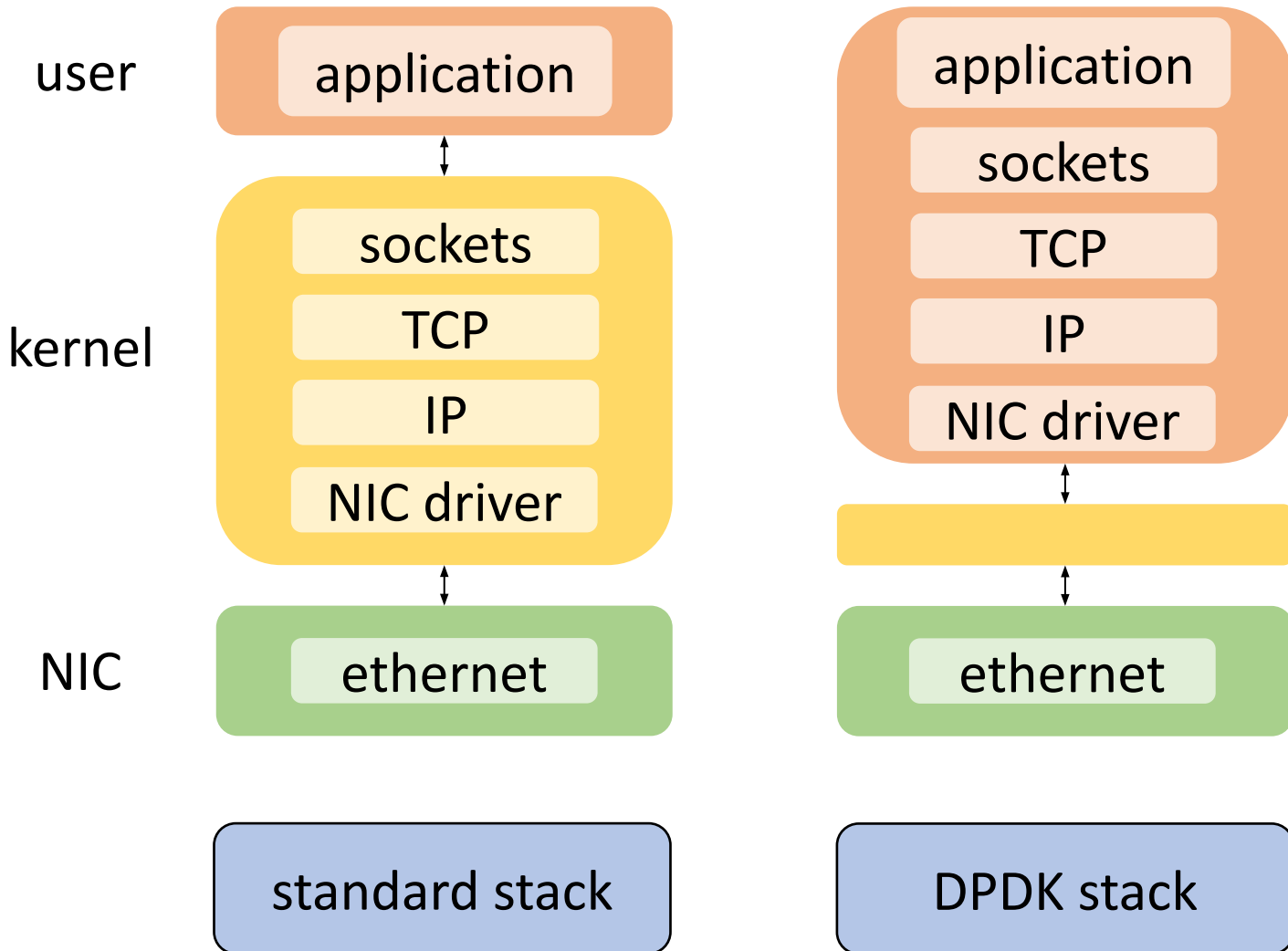


# Option #2: kernel bypass with a twist



- **The problem:** we want to sustain high throughput, but the end of Moore's law and Dennard scaling imposes limits on computational capabilities of CPU cores
- More packets, more CPU cores spent in processing them, less resources for applications 😞 (CPU = \$\$\$)

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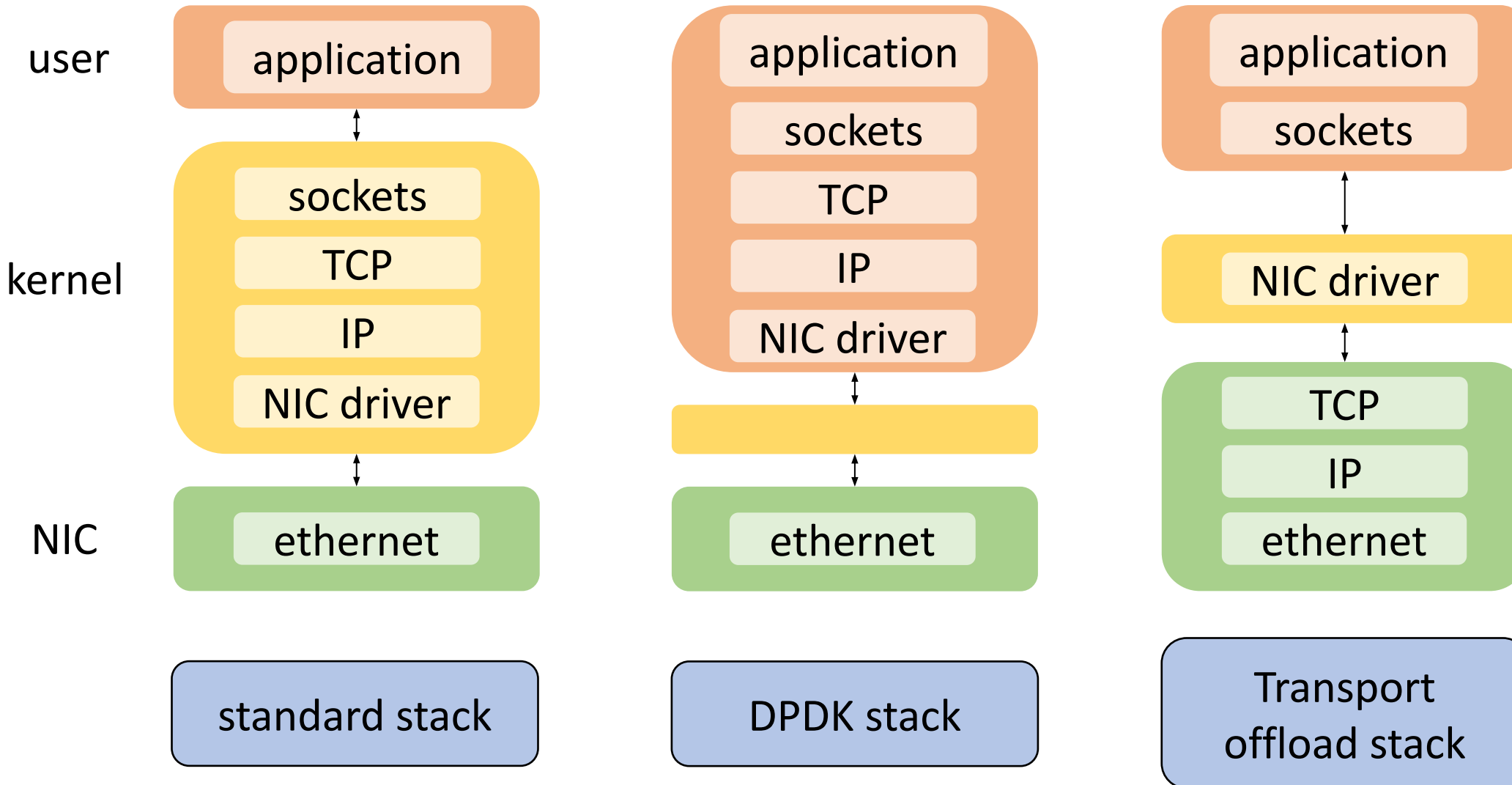


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How to fix this?

# Option #2: kernel bypass with a twist

Bring computation down to the NIC!

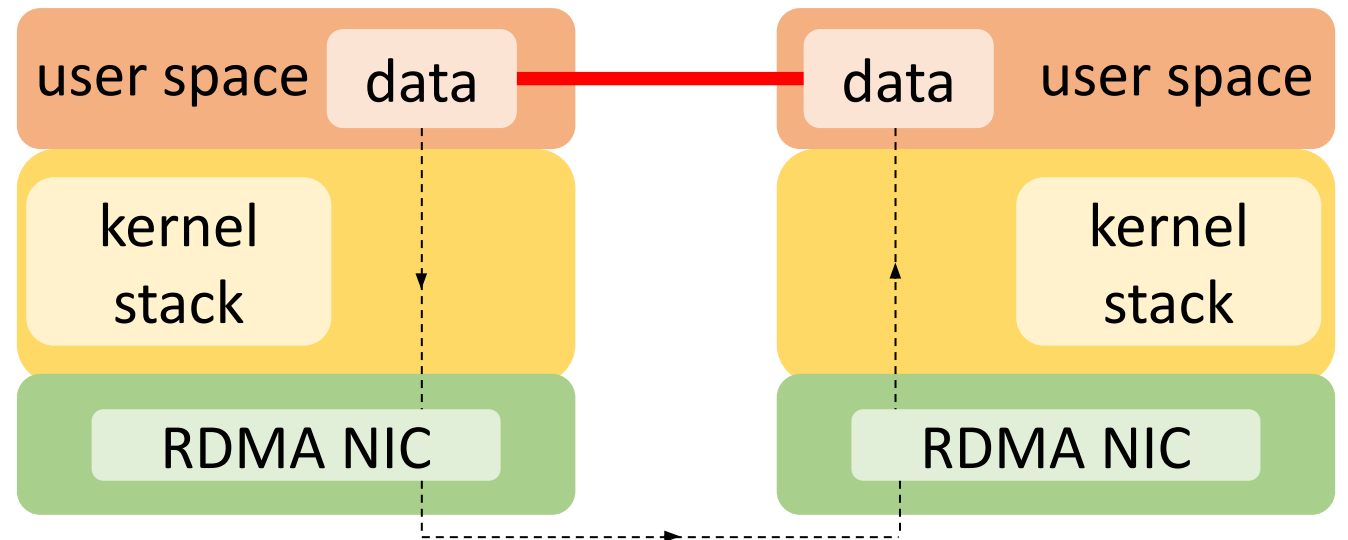


# Option #2: RDMA



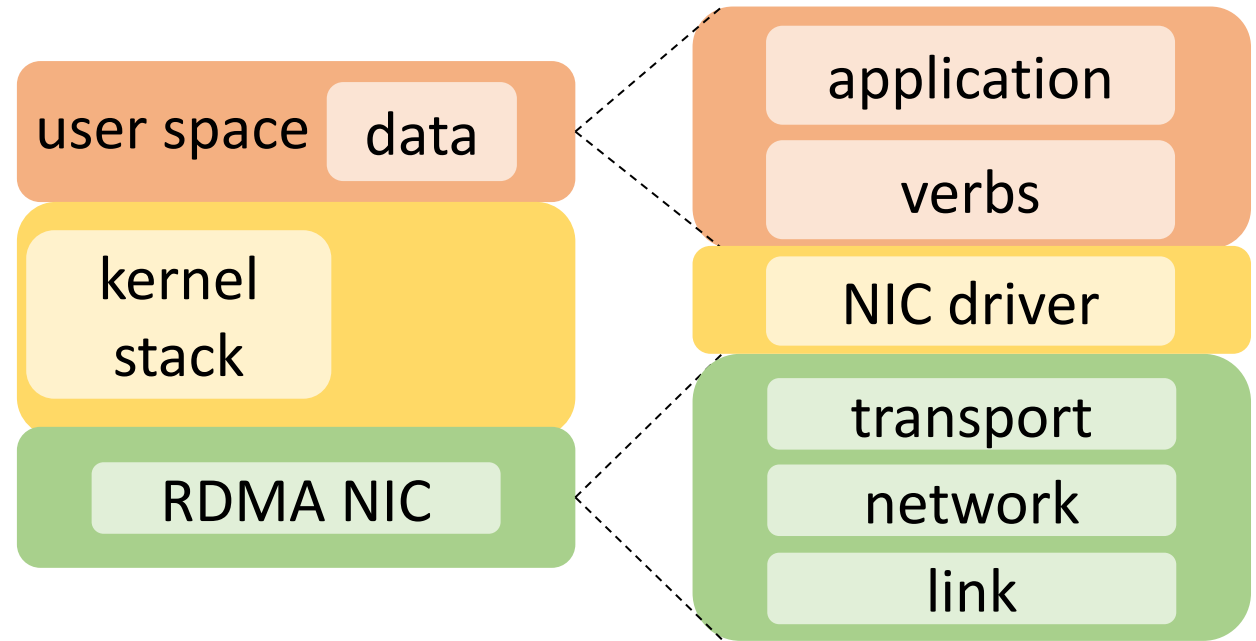
# Option #2: kernel bypass with RDMA!

- **RDMA** is a mechanism that allow to access memory on a remote system bypassing the kernel stack
- RDMA can run over ethernet (RoCE v2) and it is encapsulated over IP/UDP



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## Main characteristics:

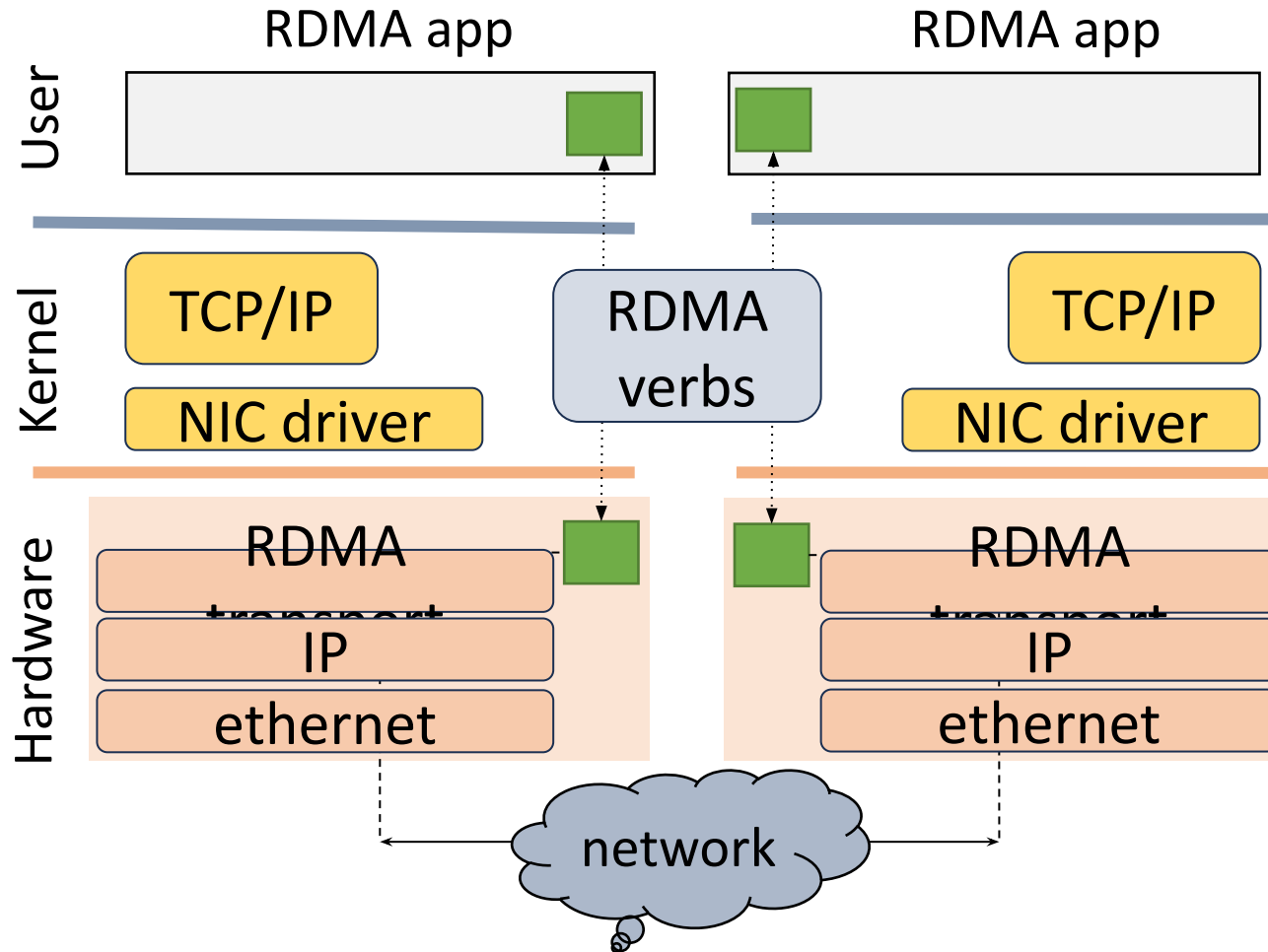
- Zero-copy data
- Bypasses the OS kernel

# Benefits of using RDMA

- High throughput
- Low end-to-end latencies
- Low CPU utilization
  - some RDMA operations do not involve the remote CPU at all
- Low memory bus contention
  - no data is copied between the user and kernel space



# RDMA overview



Applications bypass the kernel and interact directly with the RDMA NIC using the verbs API provided by the NIC driver

# RDMA verbs

RDMA networks support two types of memory access models

## One-sided

Examples: RDMA read, RDMA write, RDMA atomic

Those are memory verbs:

- They specify the remote memory address on which operations should be carried out
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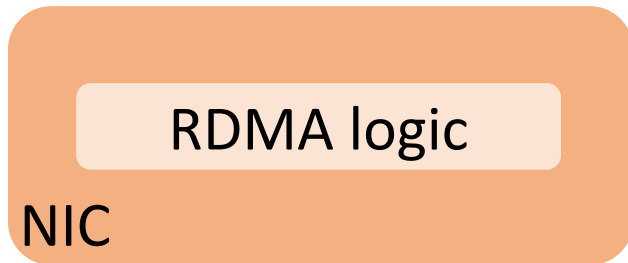
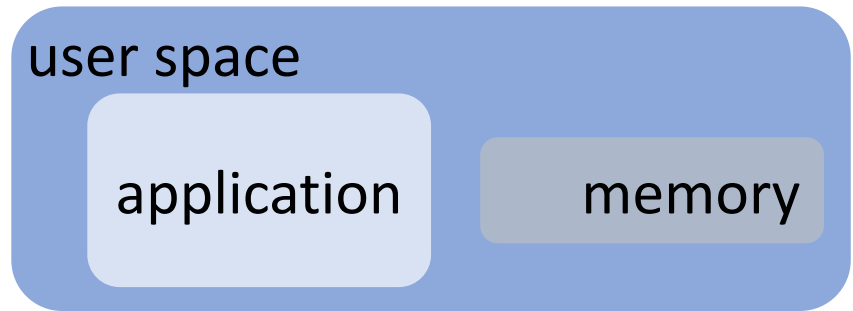
## Two-sided

Examples: RDMA send, RDMA receive

Those are messaging verbs:

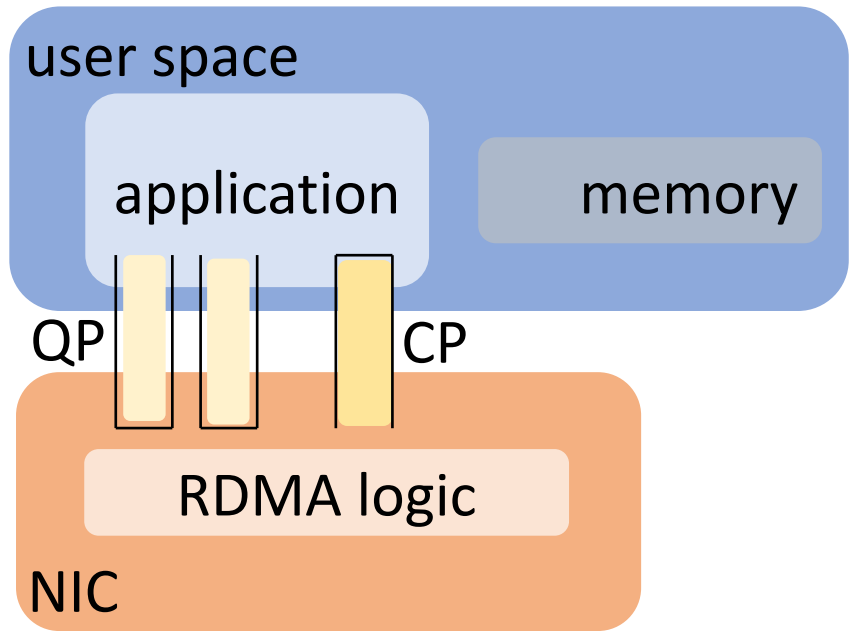
- This is similar to TCP sockets. Receiver must listen before sender issues messages
- Sender and receiver do not know each other virtual memory location

# Setting up RDMA data channels



- Applications register memory regions with the NIC
  - Those are where data to be sent or received will be stored
- During the registration process:
  - **Pin memory** so it cannot be swapped by the OS
  - Store the address translation information in the NIC (from virtual to physical)
  - Set permissions for the memory region

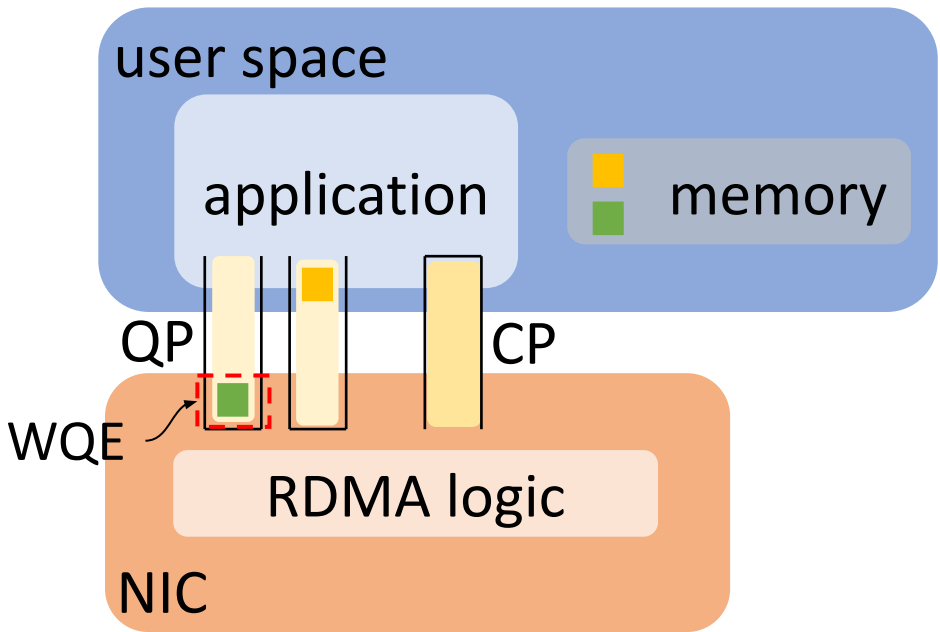
# Work Queues



- RDMA communication is based on a set of three queues
  - Send
  - Receive
  - Completion

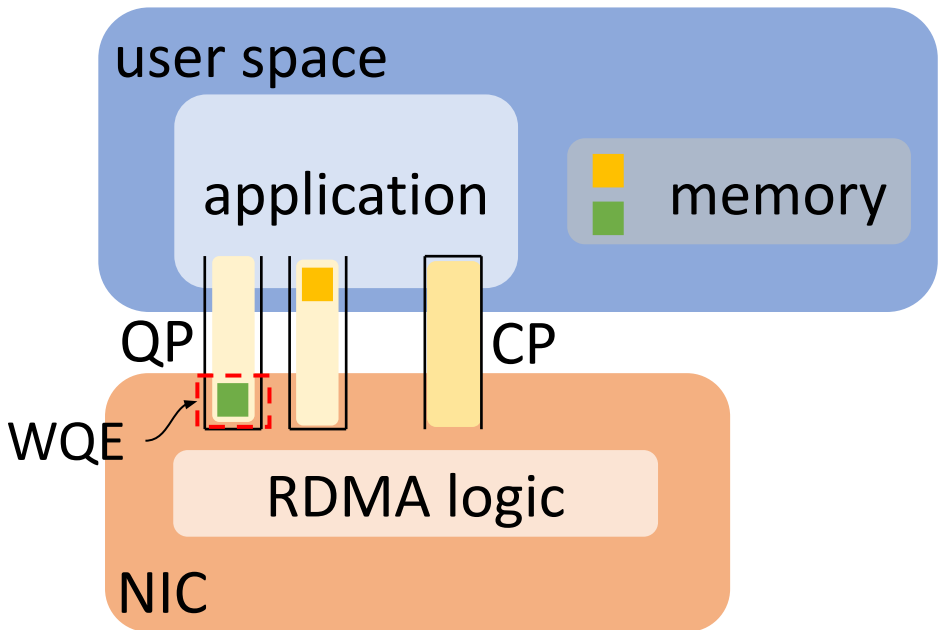
} work queues, always created as a Queue Pair (QP)
- The send and receive queues are there to schedule the work to be done
- A completion queue is used to **notify** when the work has been completed

# Queue elements



- Applications issue (post) a job using a Work Request Element (WQE)
- A **WQE** is a small struct with a pointer to a buffer
  - In a *send queue*: it is the pointer to a message to be sent
  - In a *receive queue*: it shows where an incoming message shall be placed
- Once a work request has been completed, the NIC creates a Completion Queue Element (**CQE**) and enqueues it in the *completion queue*

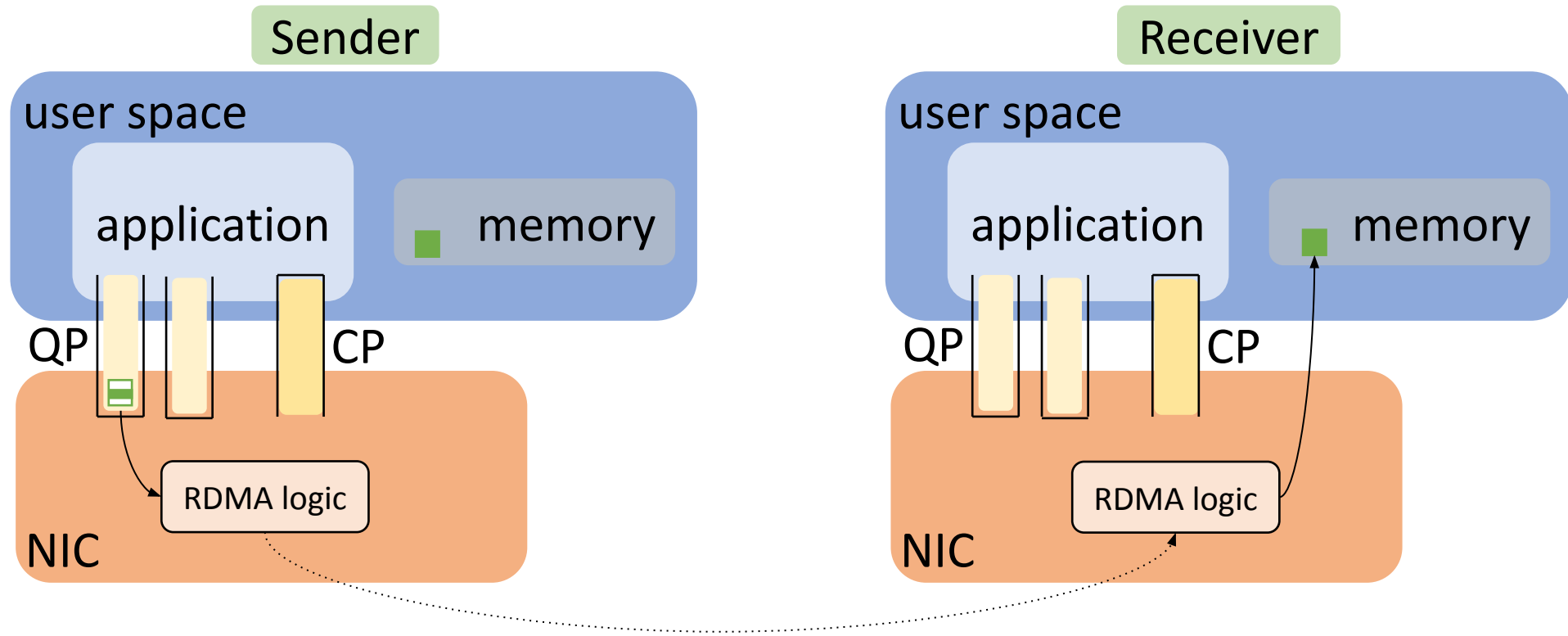
# Queue elements



Between posting and completion the state of the memory involved shall not be touched! 😊

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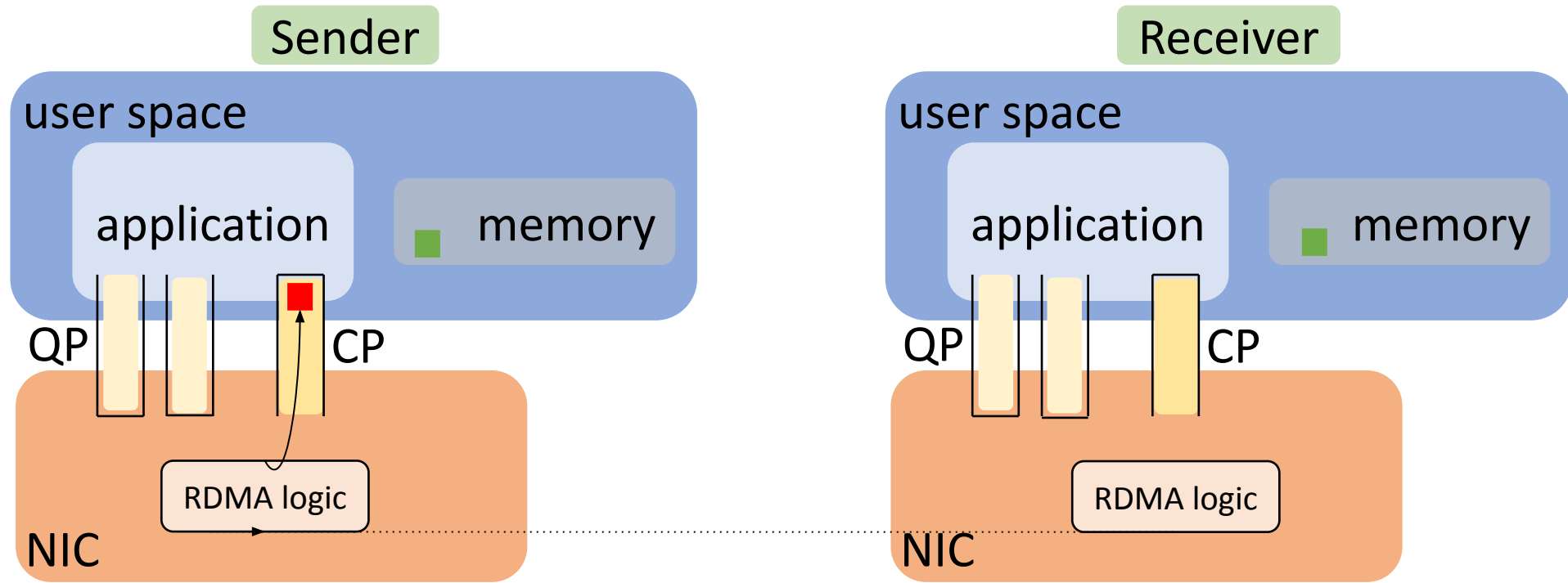
# RDMA Write



- Only the sender side is active, and the receiver is passive (no operations, no CPU cycles, no indication that a read or write has happened)
- The sender needs to specify the remote side's virtual memory address

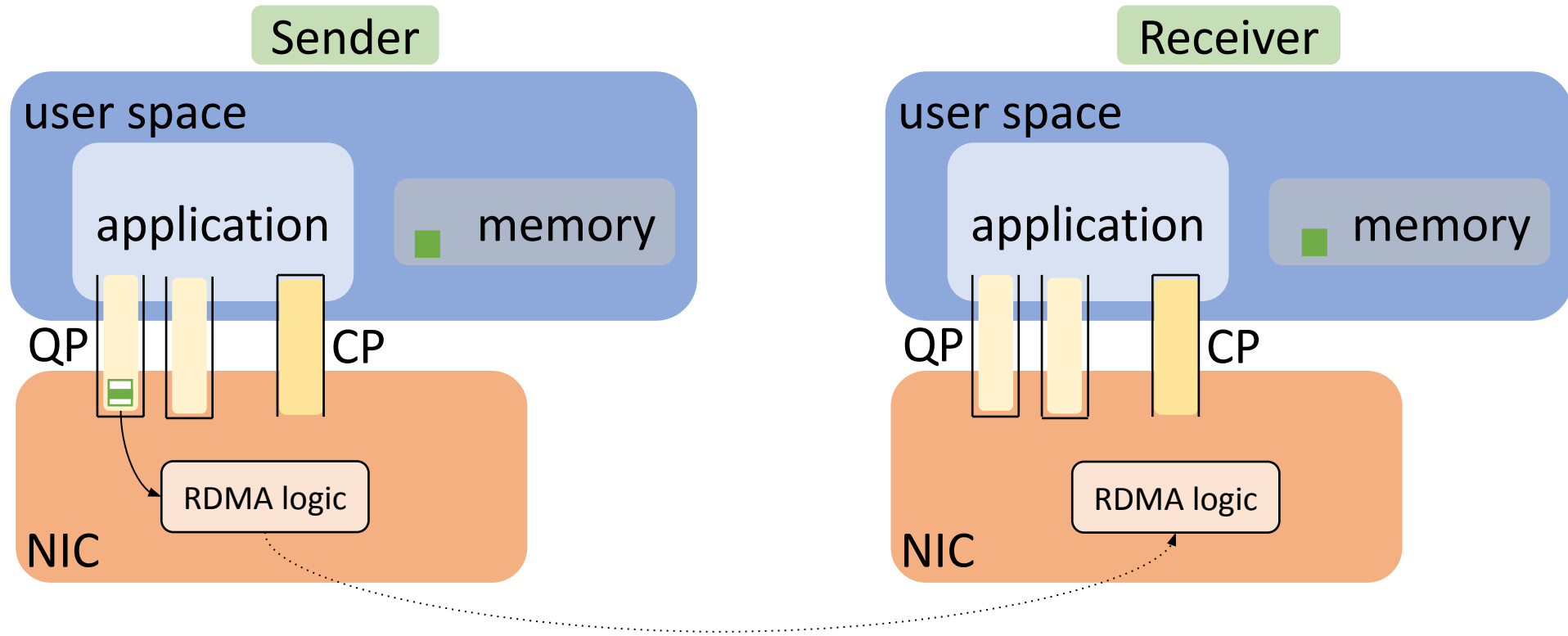


# RDMA Write



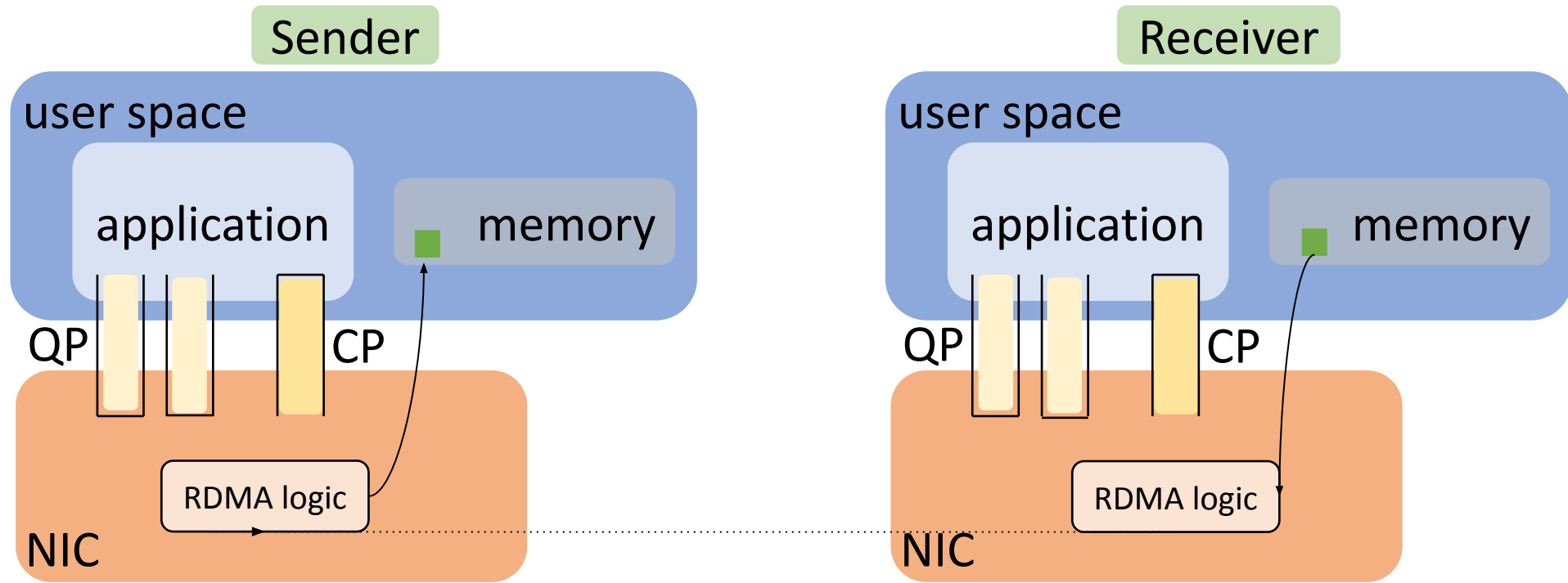
- Upon reception of an ACK, the NIC sender enqueue a completion message in the CP queue

# RDMA Read



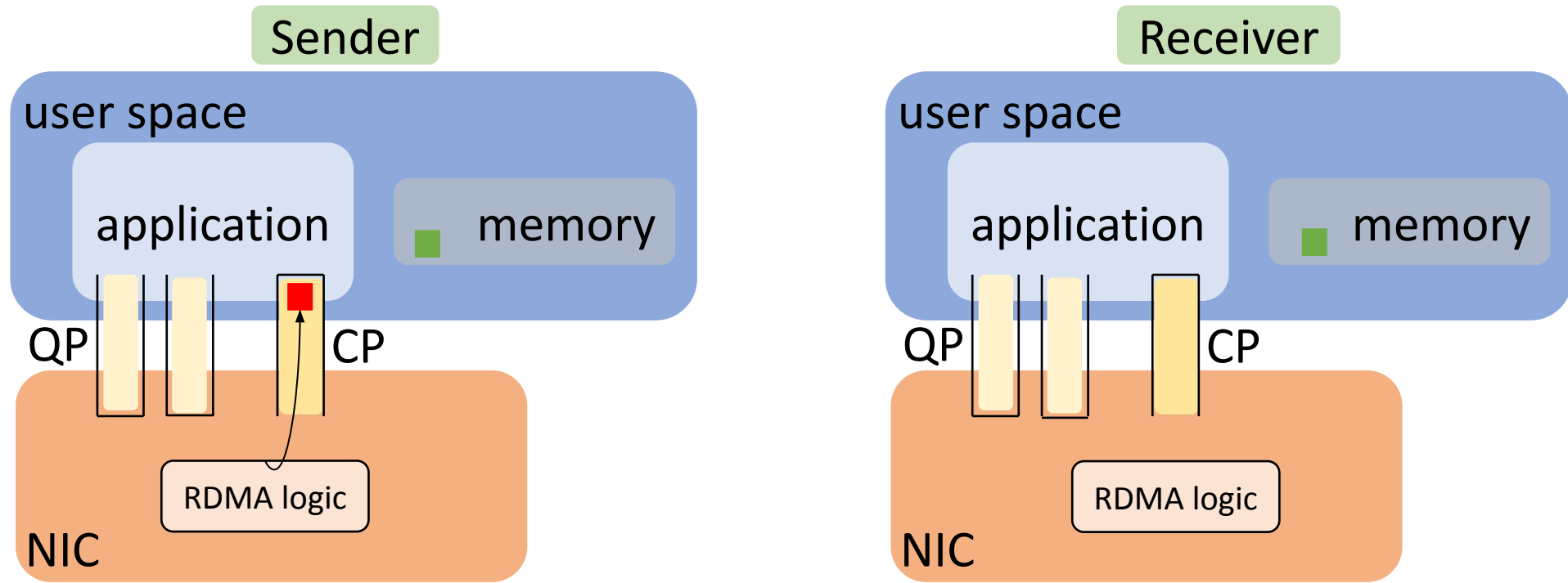
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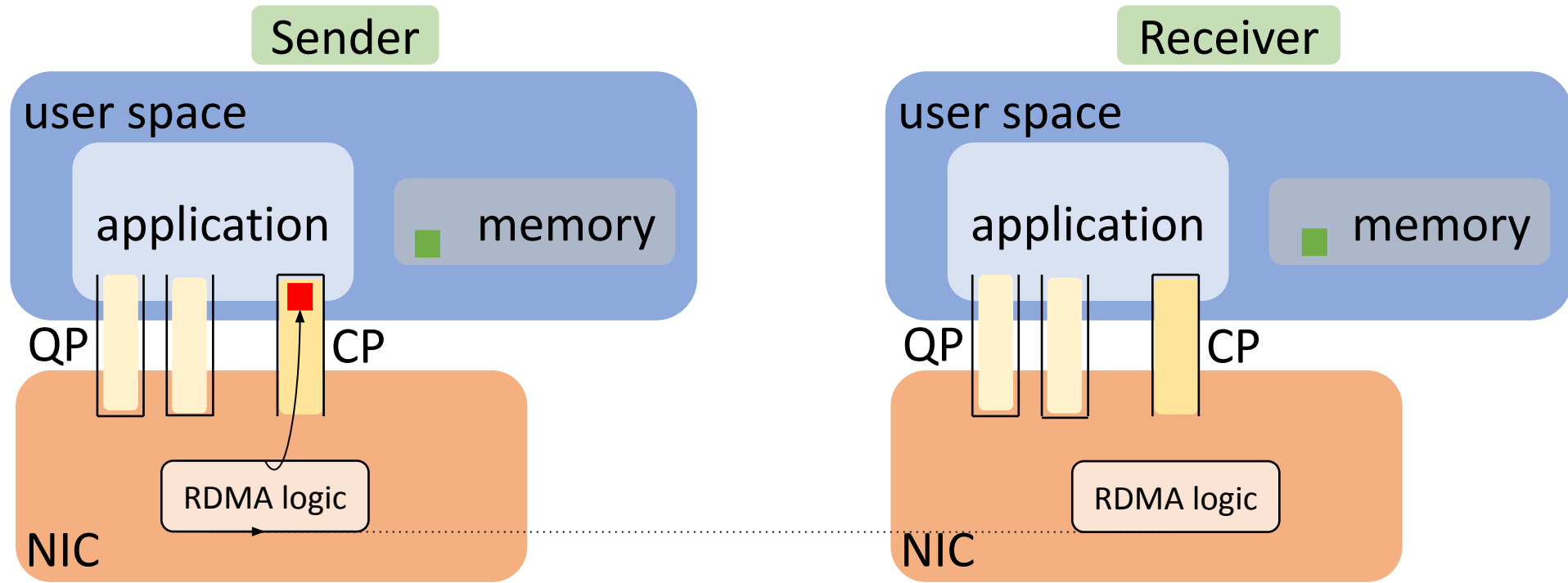
- Data are read from the remote memory and written in the initiator memory

# RDMA Read



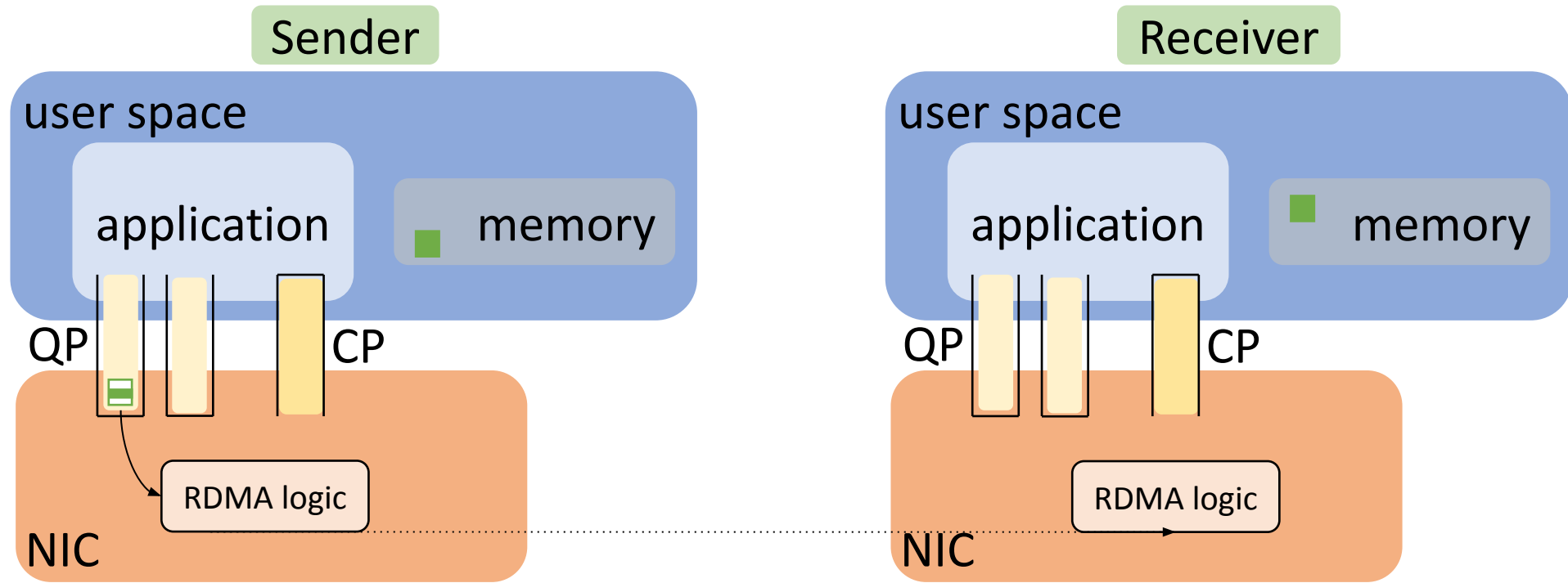
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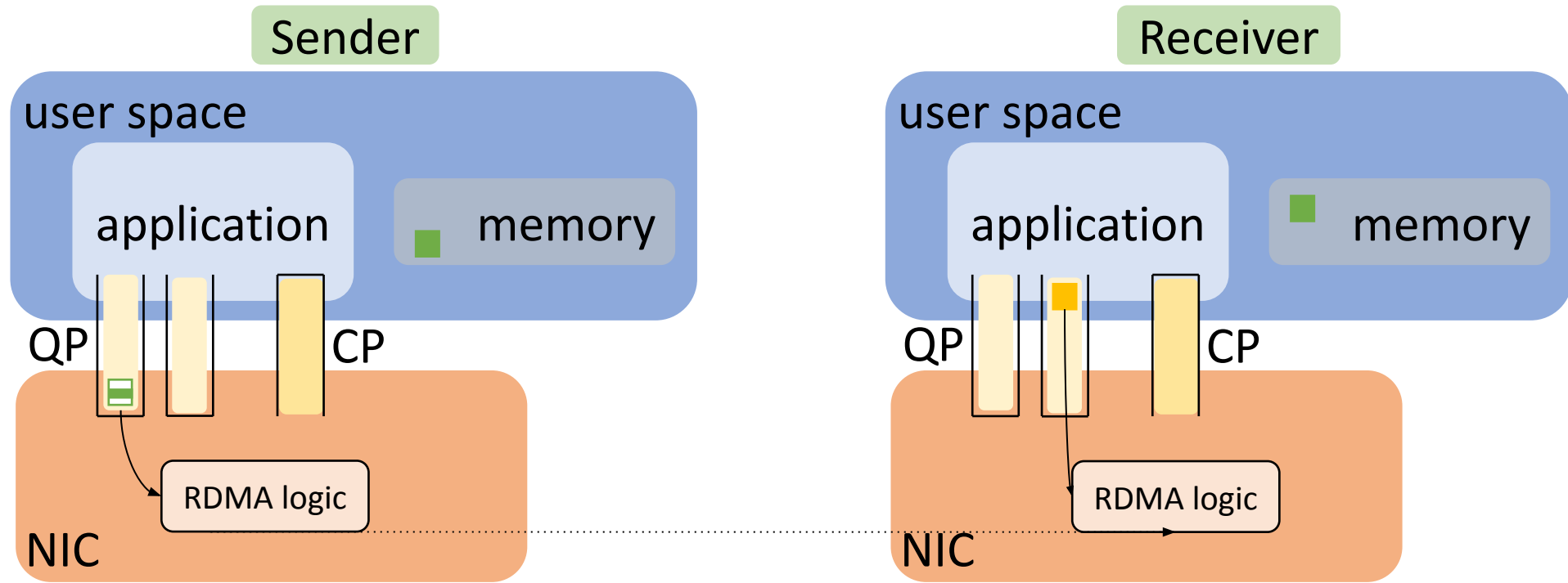
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# RDMA Send/Receive



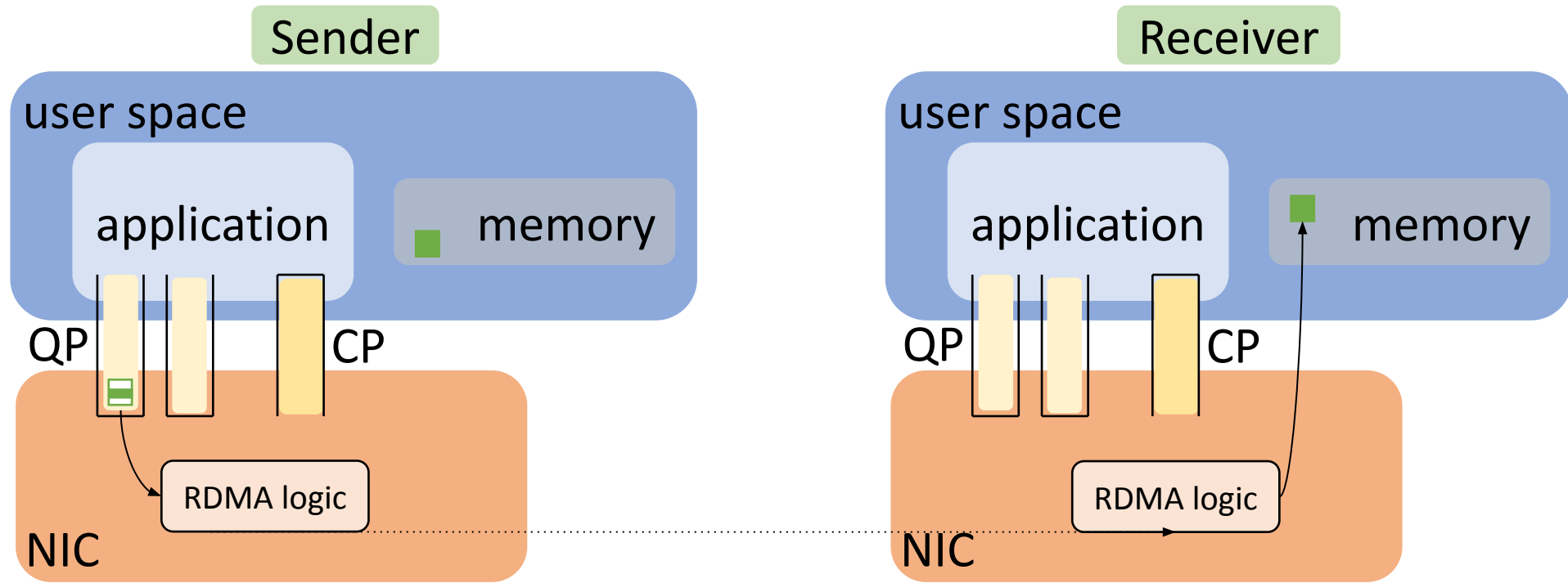
- Sender enqueues a new WQE in the send queue. In this request there is a pointer to a buffer in the memory

# RDMA Send/Receive



- Sender enqueues a new WQE in the send queue. In this request there is a pointer to a buffer in the memory
- Receiver's queue has a pointer to an empty buffer for receiving the message

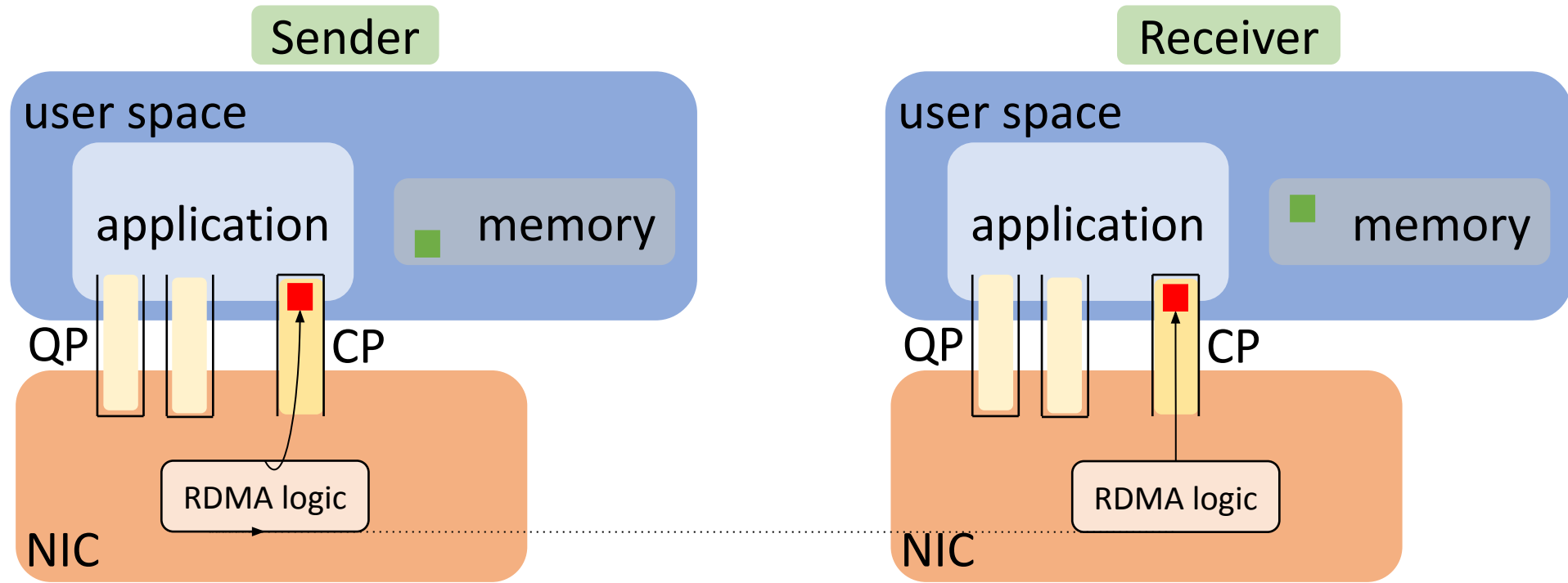
# RDMA Send/Receive



- The receiver NIC uses that pointer in the memory to know where to store the data



# RDMA Send/Receive



- The NIC receiver then notifies the local application about the presence of new data in the CP queue and ack back the completion to the sender

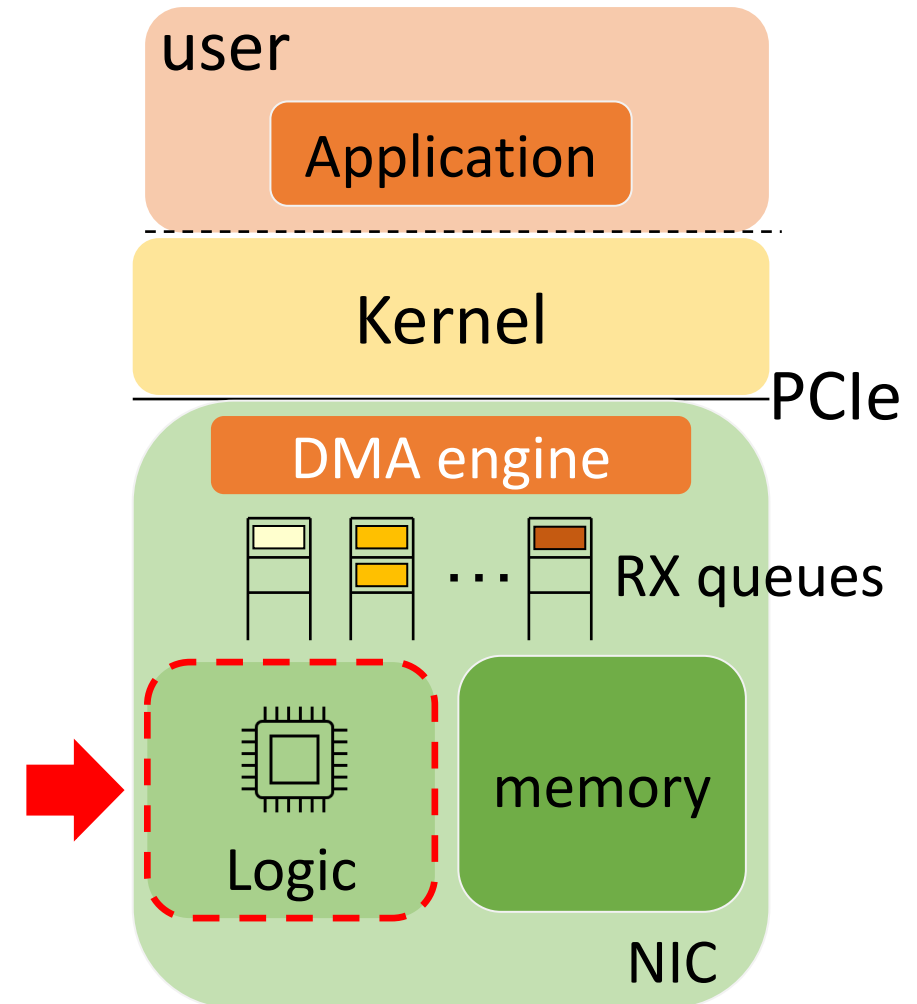
# Few final notes on RDMA

- With RDMA, NICs take control of the transport protocol
  - When the receiver receives an **out-of-order packet**, it simply discards it and sends a negative acknowledgement (NACK) to the sender
  - When the sender sees a NACK, it retransmits all packets that were sent after the last acknowledged packet (i.e., it performs a **go-back-N** retransmission)
- There is an extensive area of research in designing congestion control algorithms for RDMA
- There is also the opportunity to have unreliable RDMA but in this case, normal NICs do not support all the verbs mentioned before

# Option #3: SmartNIC

# Option #3: offloading (more) compute on the NIC

- With RDMA we have seen a way to delegate transport-level processing to the NIC

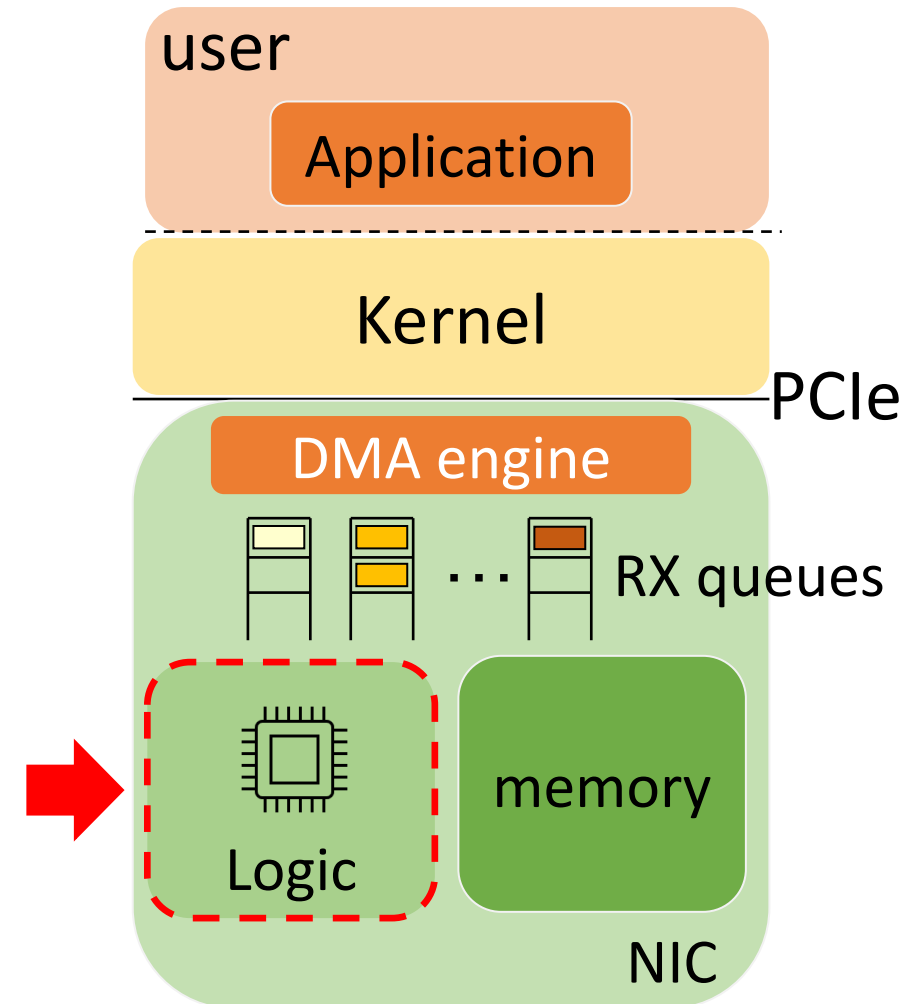


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What if we could do more?

What if this more can be achieved programmatically?



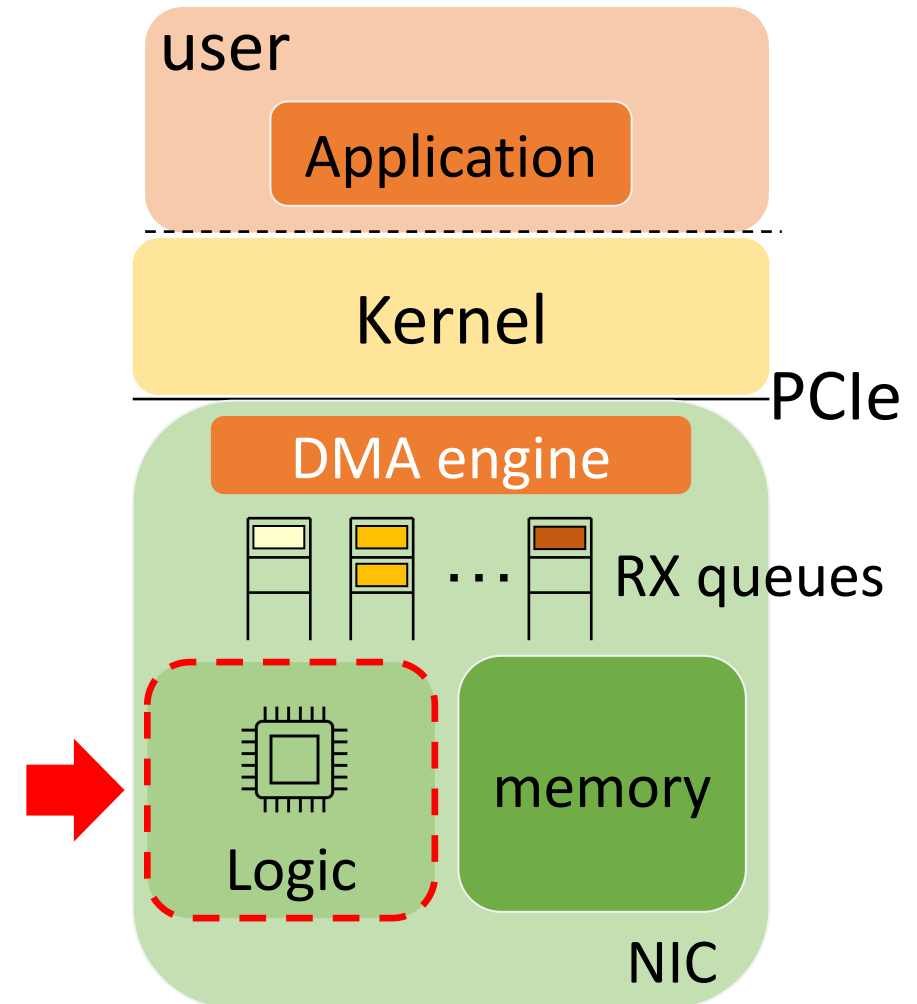
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What if we could do more?

What if this more can be achieved programmatically?

- This is possible now with what are called Programmable NICs or SmartNICs
- Many manufacturers are building those devices



# Programmable NICs



## SMART ADAPTER CARDS PRODUCT BRIEF



### NVIDIA® Mellanox® BlueField® SmartNIC for Ethernet

#### High Performance Ethernet Network Adapter Cards

Combining Arm® processing power with advanced network and storage offloads to accelerate a multitude of security, networking and storage applications with world-leading performance, flexibility and efficiency.

BlueField SmartNIC features the BlueField Data Processing Unit (DPU) — an innovative and high-



#### HIGHLIGHTS

- Intelligent programmable network adapter



### Alveo™ U50 Data Center Accelerator Card

AMD-Xilinx's Alveo U50 data center accelerator card for custom solutions provide the framework for developers to bring differentiated applications to market

AMD-Xilinx's Alveo U50 data center accelerator cards provide acceleration for workloads in financial computing, machine learning, computational storage, data search, and analytics. Built on AMD-Xilinx UltraScale+ architecture and packaged in a 75 watt, small form factor and fitted with 100 Gbps networking I/O, PCIe® Gen4, and HBM, Alveo U50 is designed for deployment in any server.

Enabling Alveo accelerator cards is an ecosystem of AMD-Xilinx and partner applications for common data center workloads. For custom solutions, AMD-Xilinx's application developer tool suite (Vitis™ environment) and machine learning suite provide the frameworks for developers to bring differentiated applications to market.

#### Features

- Performance and efficiency
  - 8 GB HBM memory and PCIe for faster application performance
  - 100G networking with support for 4 x 10 GbE, 4 x 15 GbE, or 1 x 40 GbE/1 x 100 GbE for low latency network capability
- Adaptable for acceleration of any workload
  - Accelerates computing, network, and storage workloads
  - Maximized application performance as workloads and algorithms evolve through the reconfigurable fabric, unlike fixed-architecture alternatives
- Accessible on cloud or on-premises mobility
  - Built for scale-out architectures for deployment solutions on the cloud or on-premises interchangeably



### Intel® IPU Platform F2000X-PL



- 2 x 100 GbE connectivity
- Intel® Agilex-F FPGA
- Intel® Xeon D-1736 Processor
- 32GB DRAM

- Packet processing
- OVS
- NVMe-oF
- Security/Isolation
- Crypto
- RDMA/RoCEV2



**Pensando DSC-200 PCIe Card**  
(shown with heatsink removed)

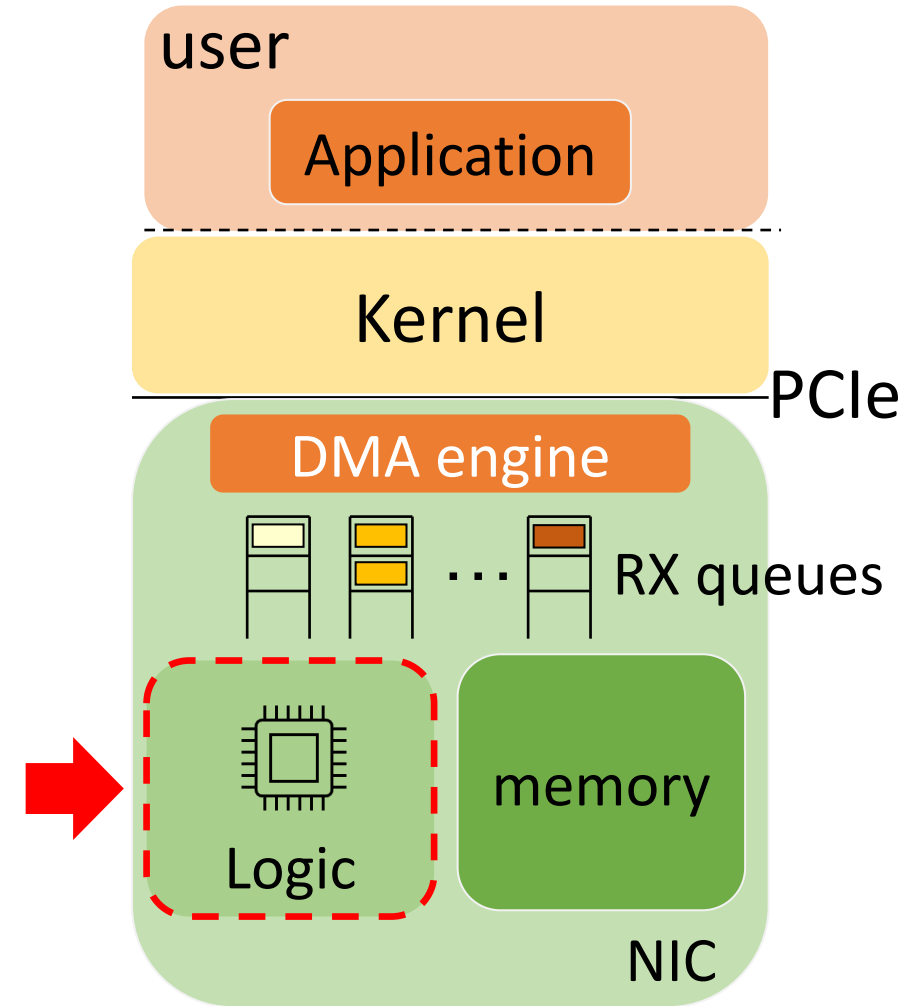
#### HIGHLIGHTS

##### FEATURES

- Integrated security, networking, observability and storage services in a single card
- Incorporates both software-defined data plane and control plane, eliminating host agents
- Customizable control and data plane: customers can develop their own software, and integrate with existing management applications
- Pre-built services packages for a variety of functions, tested for scale
- Supports cloud-scale networks with 100k+ flow table entries and 1M+ routes

# Programmable NICs

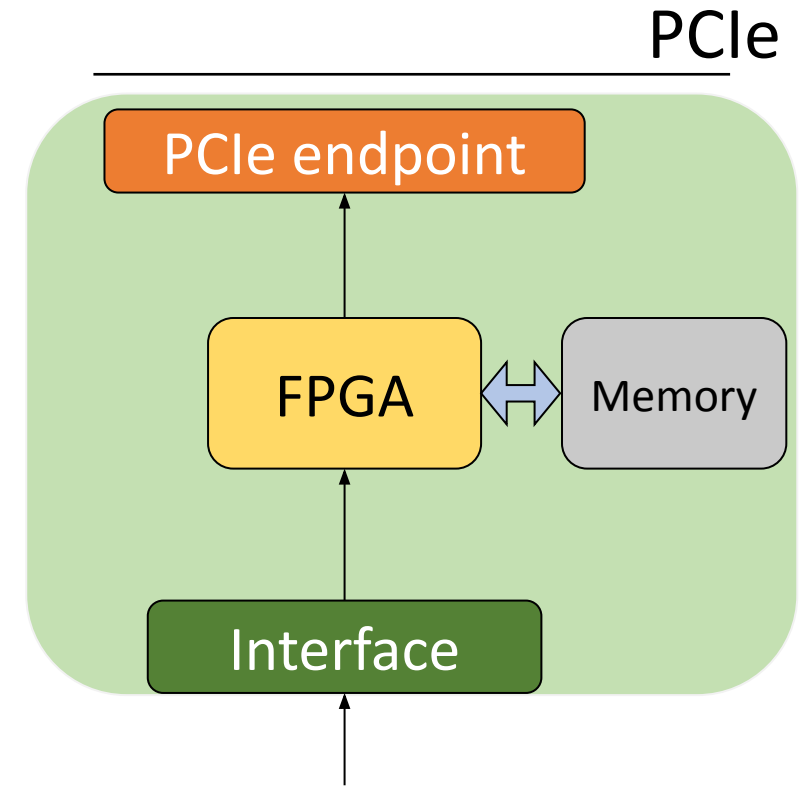
- There are many types of Programmable NICs with different
  - processing units (crypto, compression, CPU)
  - architectures (FPGA, SoC, ASIC)
  - programming models (Verilog/VHDL, C, P4, DOCA)
  - trade-offs (performance vs costs vs programmability)
- They can also be coupled with fast I/O frameworks such as DPDK





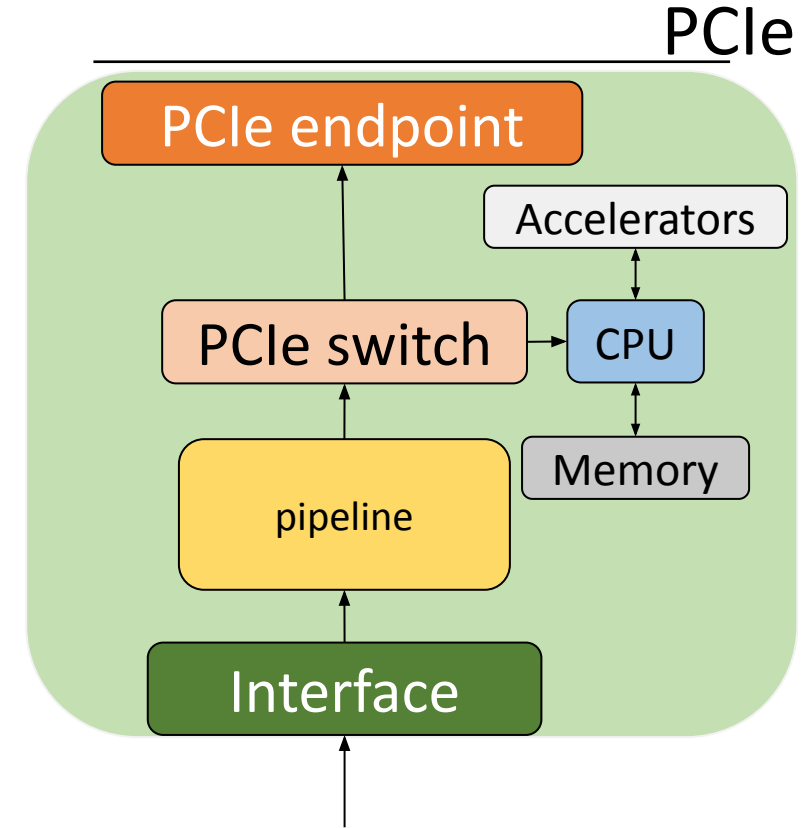
# FPGA-based Programmable NICs

- Field Programmable Gate Arrays (FPGAs) are semiconductor devices can be reprogrammed to desired application or functionality requirements after manufacturing.
- FPGAs provide a flexible alternative with near-ASIC performance.
- They can be expensive and power-hungry, and programming them requires expert knowledge of the hardware.



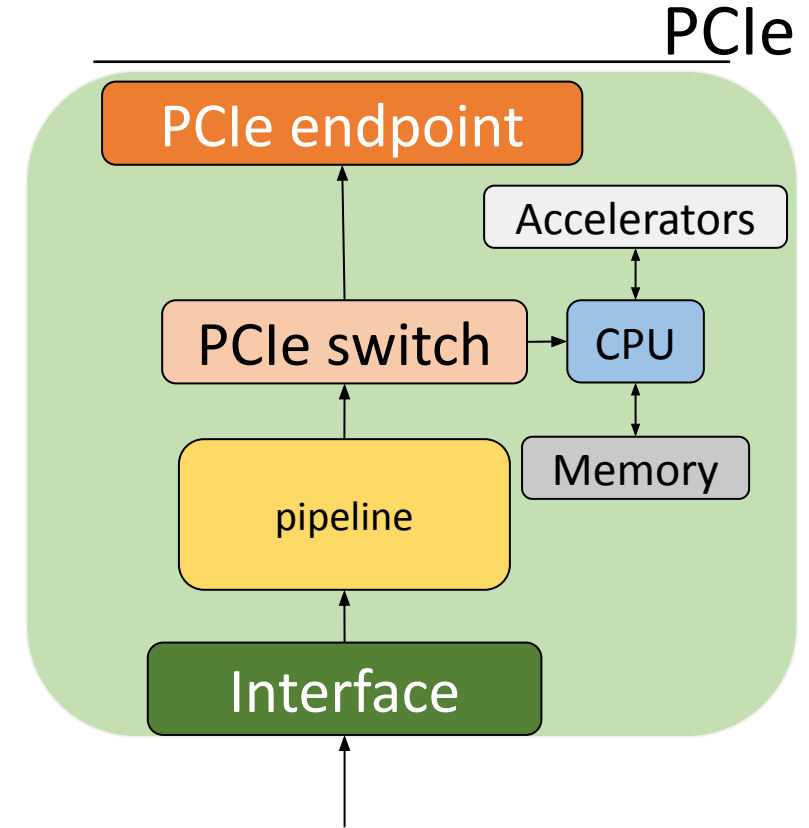
# SoC based Programmable NICs

- System-on-a-chip (SoC) SmartNICs combines traditional ASICs with a modest number of general-purpose cores for much easier programming and fixed-function co-processors for custom workload acceleration.



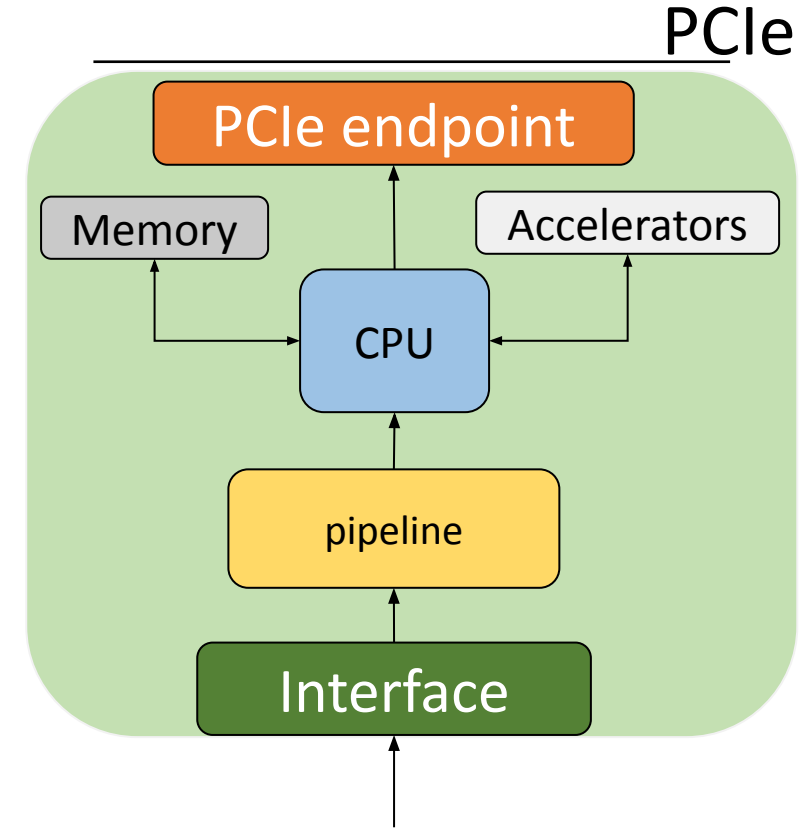
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- **Off-path** design pattern uses an on-NIC switch to route traffic between the network and NIC and host cores



# SoC based Programmable NICs

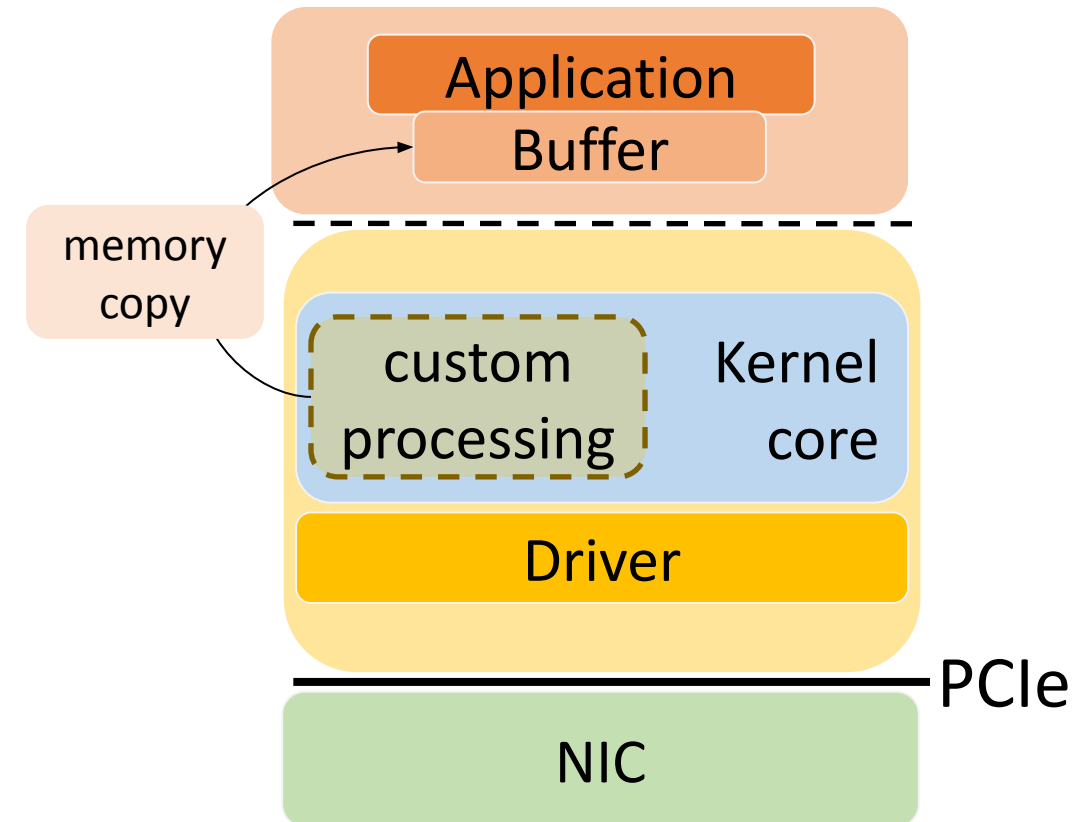
- System-on-a-chip (SoC) SmartNICs combines traditional ASICs with a modest number of general-purpose cores for much easier programming and fixed-function co-processors for custom workload acceleration.
- **Off-path** design pattern uses an on-NIC switch to route traffic between the network and NIC and host cores
- **On-path** approach passes all packets through (a subset of) cores on the NIC on the way to or from the network.



# Option #4: eBPF

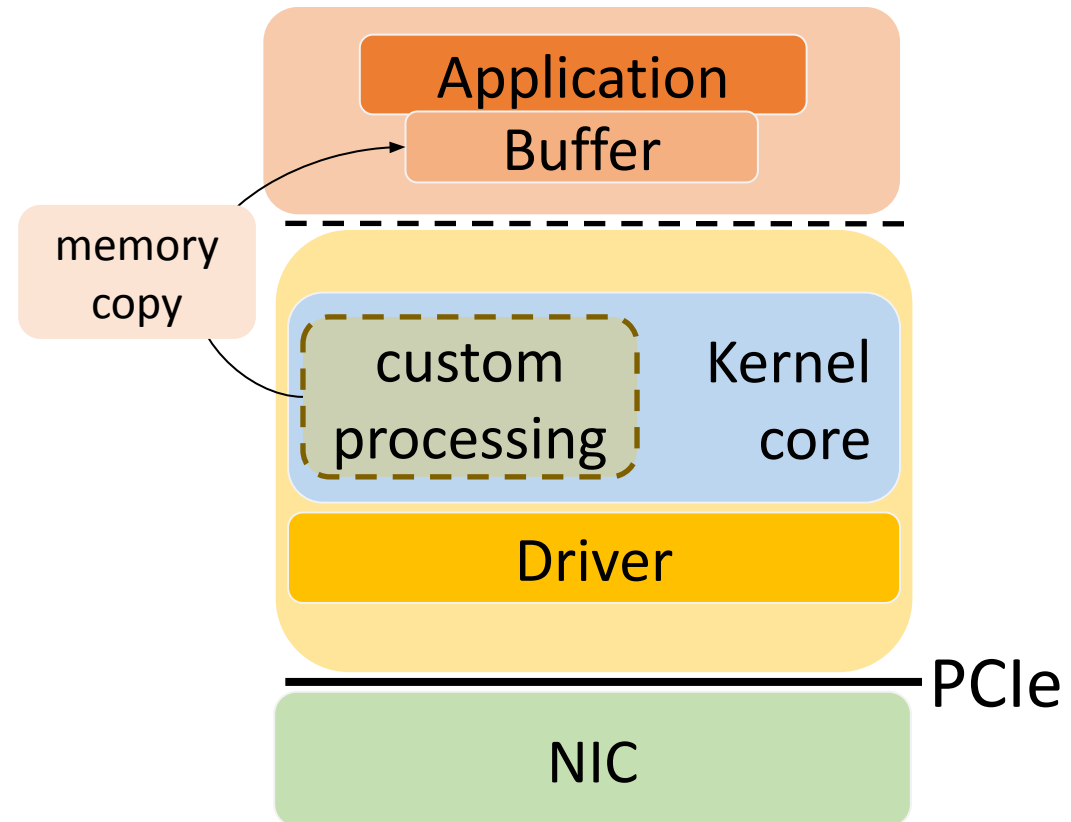
# Option #4: Change kernel behavior

- You can improve system performance and reduce CPU utilization by rethinking the way kernel process packets
- You can add new functionalities that help in
  - reducing kernel to user-space data movement
  - creating fast-path in the kernel



# Ad-Hoc Kernel module

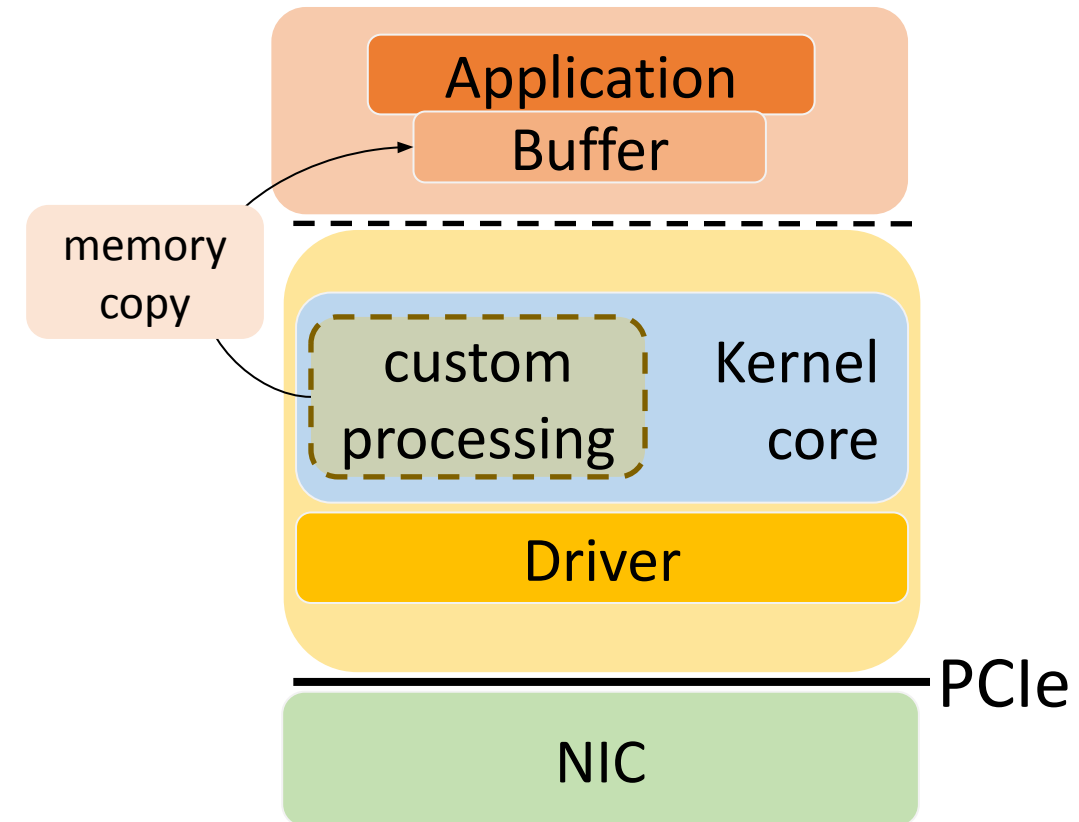
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Problems?

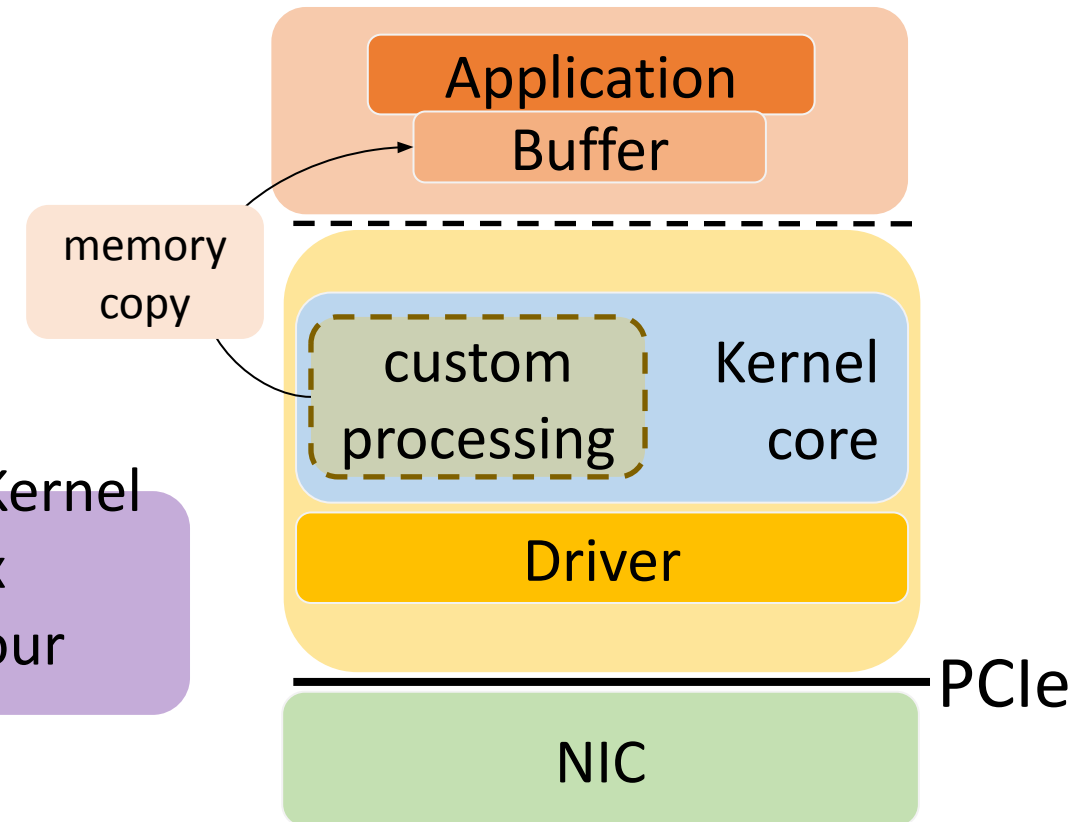




# Ad-Hoc Kernel module

- The Linux Kernel is open source 😊
- You can change its code if you want

Problems?  
either you keep a custom Kernel  
or you need the Linux  
community to accept your  
changes 😞

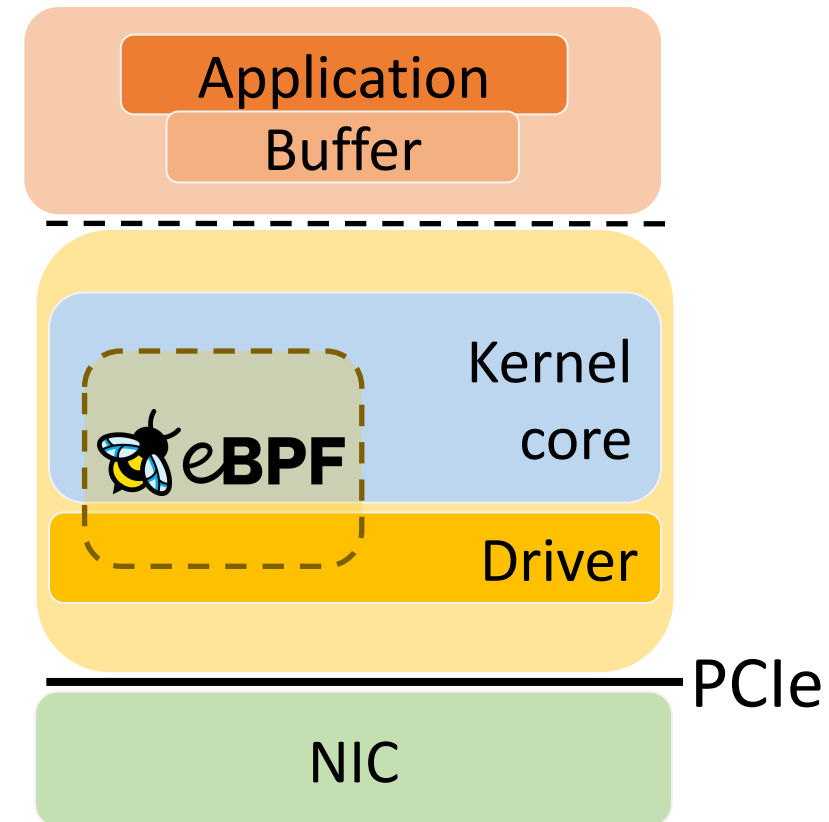


# eBPF

- eBPF is a programming language and runtime to extend operating systems
- Was born as an extension of the Berkeley Packet filter:
  - a generic in-kernel, event-based virtual CPU
  - Ad-hoc execution environment for packet filtering
  - Specific memory for packets (separated from the main RAM)
  - Specific vCPU interpreter
- Now is used to provide kernel programmability for:
  - Kernel tracing
  - System observability: profiling, debugging, etc
  - Packet-processing
  - CPU scheduling

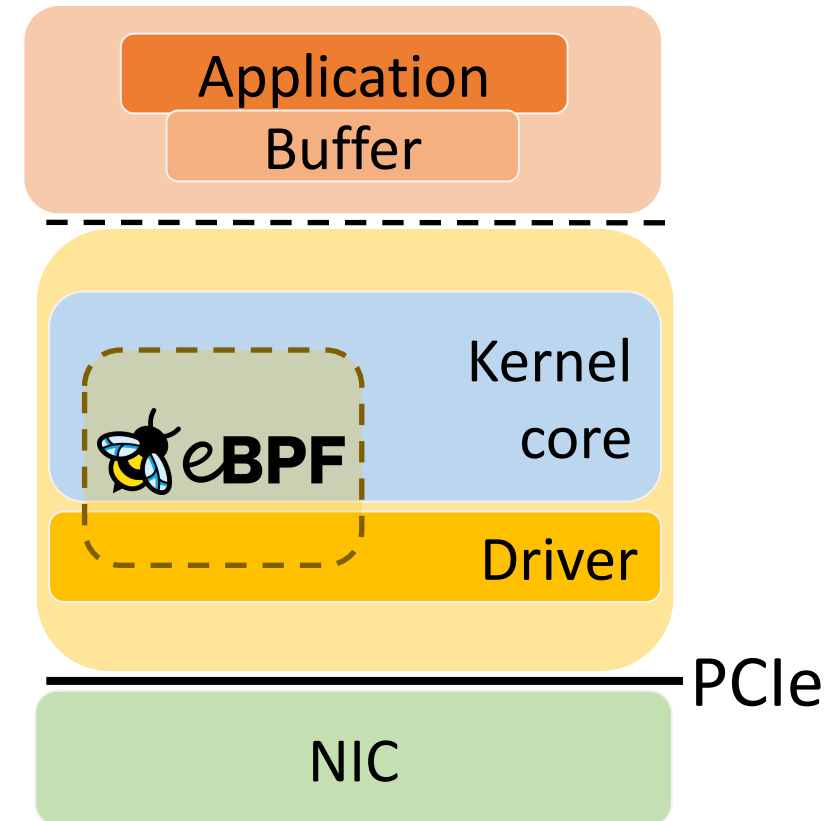
# eBPF key features

- **Feature 1:** Runtime bytecode injection
- eBPF programs can be dynamically created and injected in the kernel at run-time
  - Vanilla Linux kernel
  - No need for additional kernel modules
  - No need to recompile the kernel



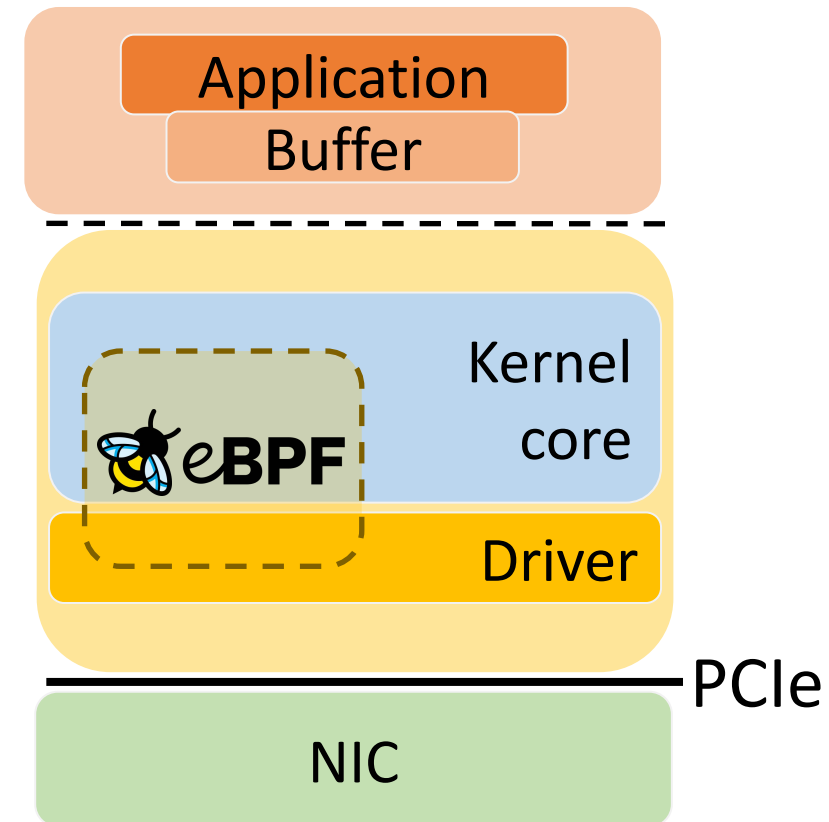
# eBPF key features

- **Feature 2:** Safetiness
- Linux kernel must be protected from erroneous or malicious injected programs
  - Achieved with a **sandbox** that prevents critical conditions at **run-time**
- A verifier checks the code before it gets sandboxed to ensure
  - No invalid memory accesses
  - Bounded program size
  - Bounded max number of instructions



# eBPF key features

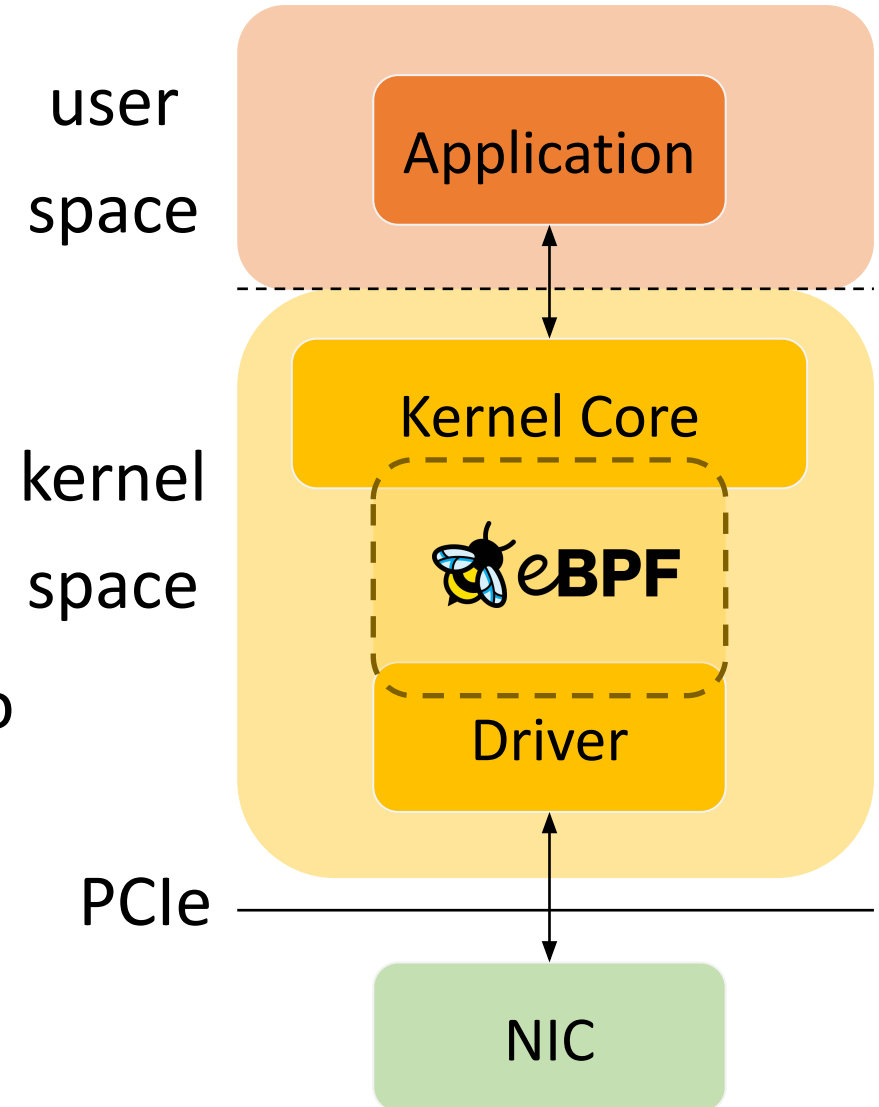
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Consequence: we cannot push arbitrary programs in the kernel!

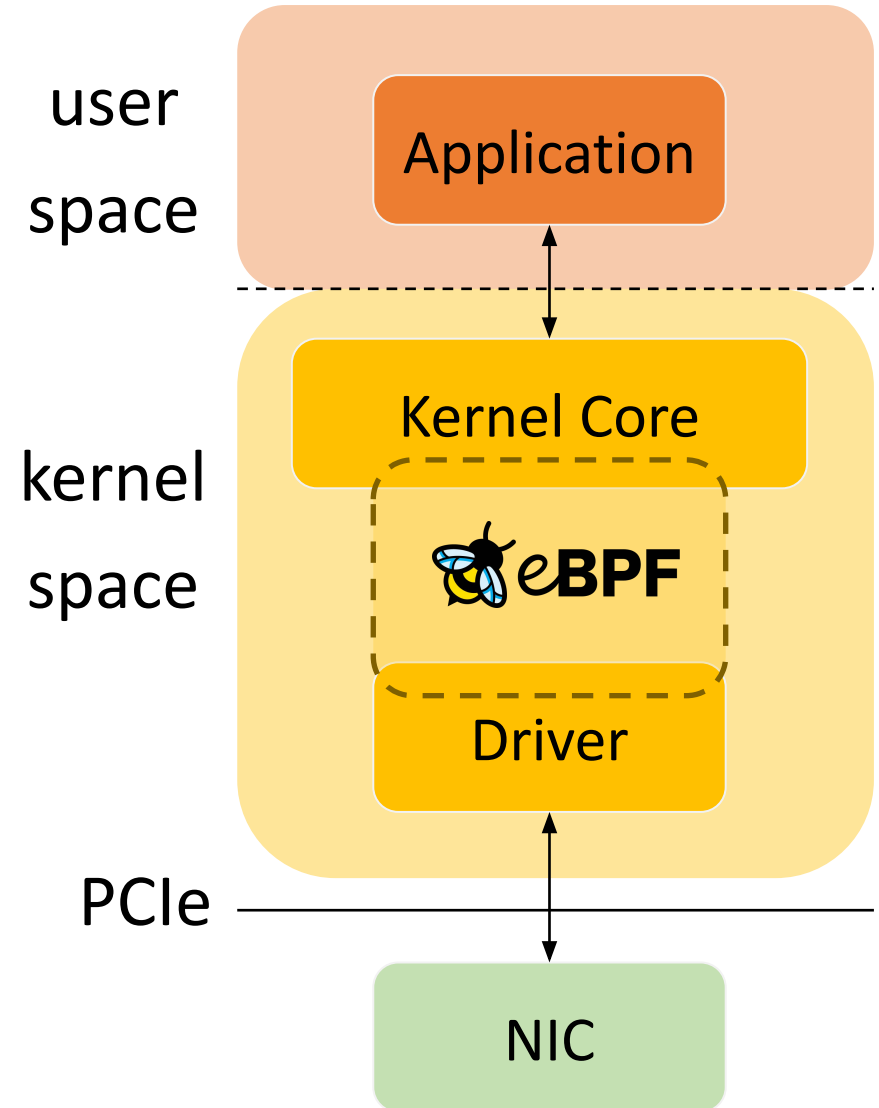
# eBPF features

- **Feature 3:** Efficiency
- eBPF programs consumes a little amount of resources
- They executes in kernel space, potentially close to when packets are received (no need to copy packets as when we move them from kernel to user)



# eBPF features

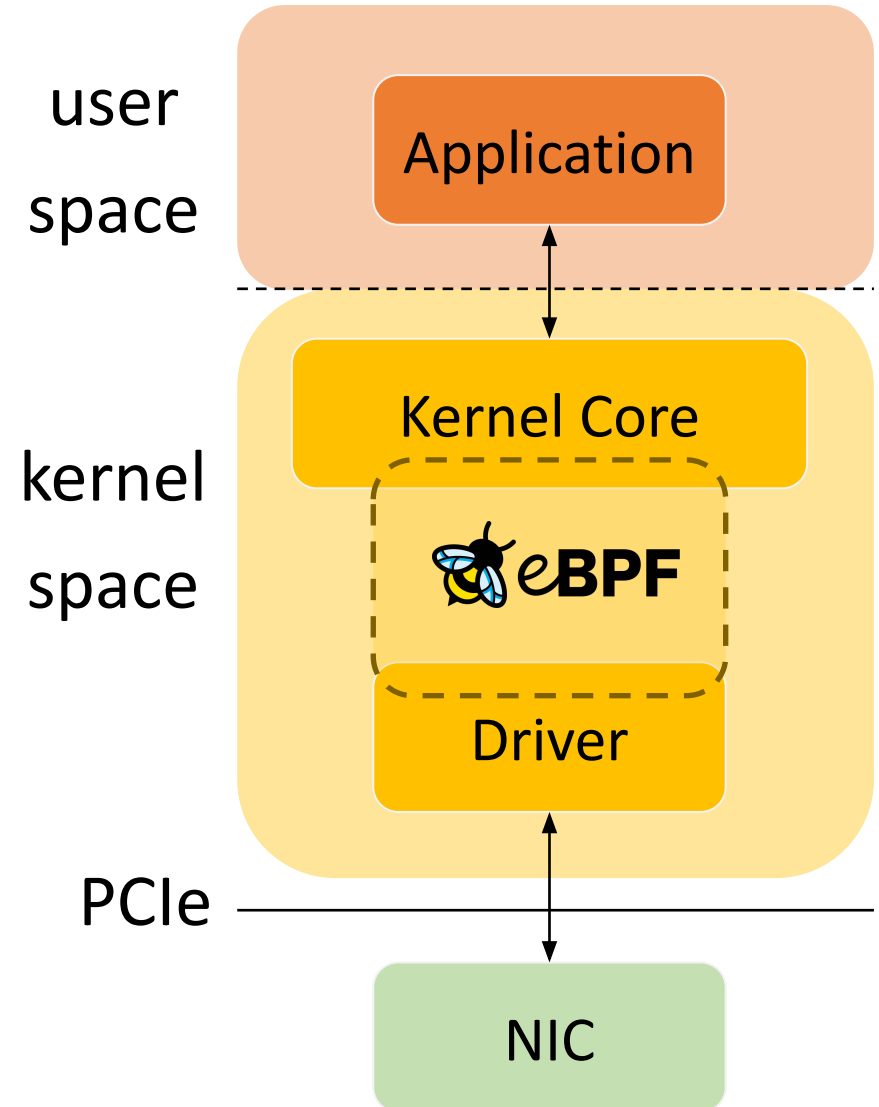
- **Feature 4:** Kernel events reaction
- eBPF code is hooked to a kernel event
  - When fired, your code (associated to an event handler) is executed
- Examples of possible events:
  - Network packet received
  - Message (socket-layer) received
  - Data written to disk
  - Page fault in memory
  - File in /etc folder being modified



# eBPF features

- In general, any event can be potentially intercepted
- Depending on the event where the program is attached to, the context change

Example 1: a program attached to the TCP/IP stack is executed when a packet is received, and the context is the packet buffer



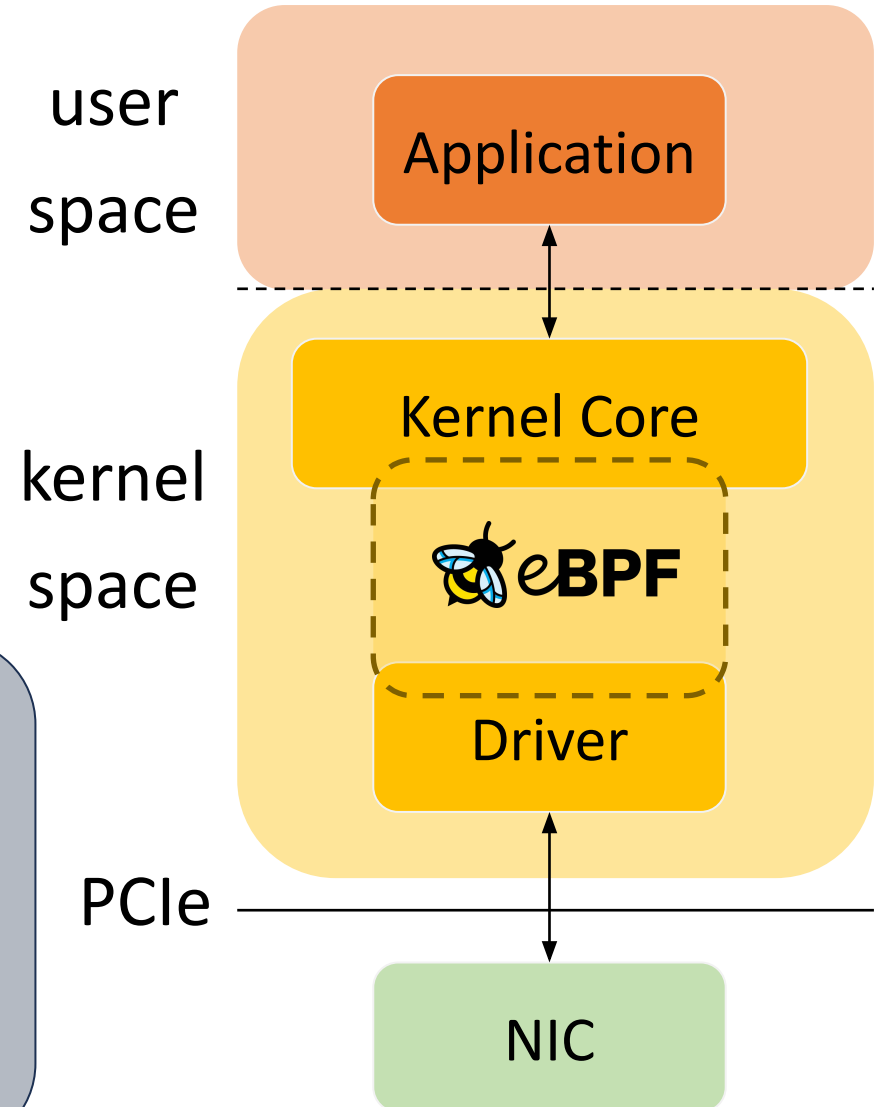


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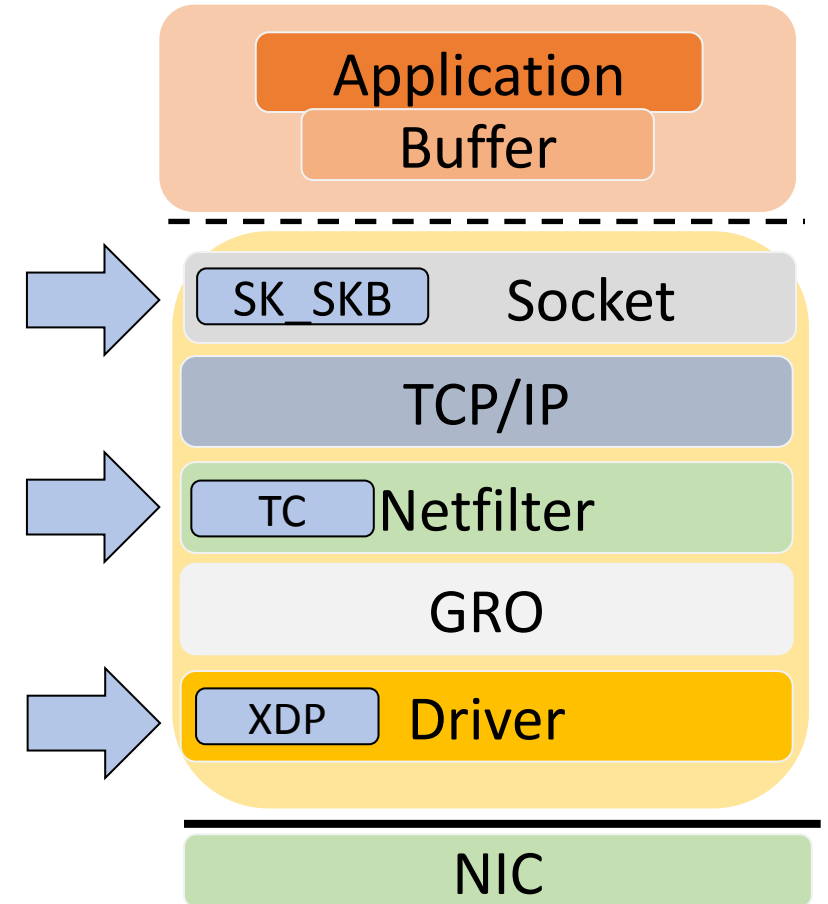
Example 1: a program attached to the TCP/IP stack is executed when a packet is received, and the context is the packet buffer

Example 2: a program attached to a syscall can be executed before or after the syscall execution and the context is the list of parameters of the syscall



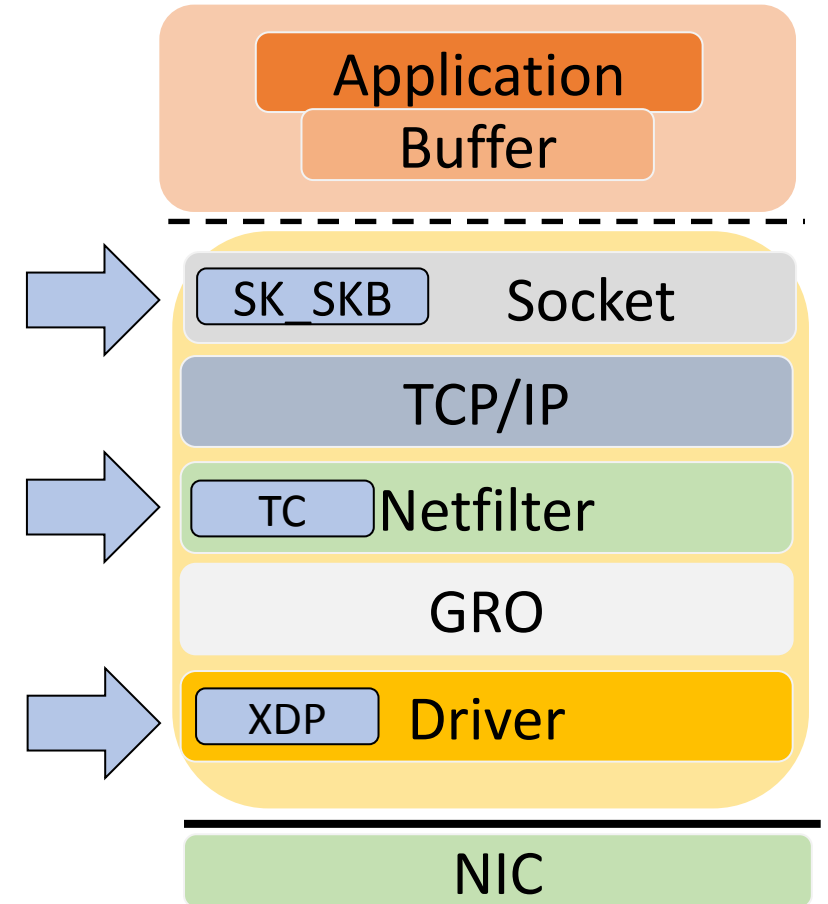
# Hook points

- Several hook points (kernel events) for networking
  - Located at different levels of the stack
  - Opens up the possibility to implement packet-processing programs at different layers of the stack
- Some of interest:
  - eXpress Data Path (XDP)
  - Traffic Control (TC)
  - Socket SKB (SK\_SKB)
  - There are more...



# Hook points

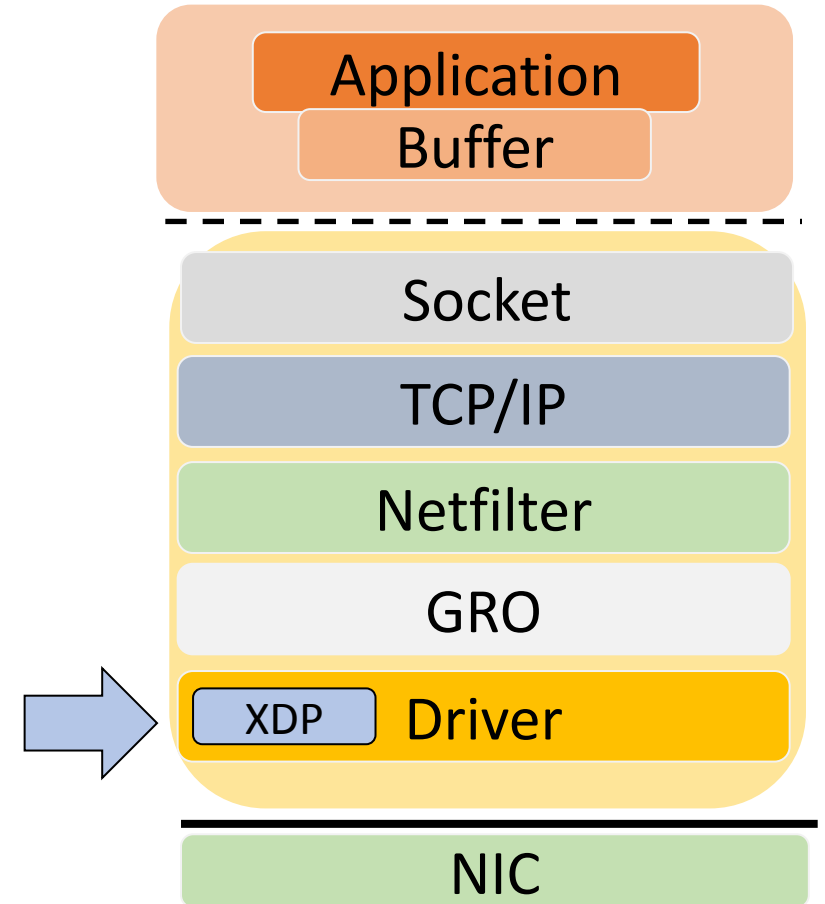
- The eBPF program returns a verdict to tell the OS how to process the packet next
  - **Redirect** (redirect the packet to another net device of index ifindex)
  - **Pass** (continue the path of the packet in the stack)
  - **Drop** (drop the packet)



# XDP Hook

- XDP allows to run eBPF programs at the driver level, before skb allocation
- This is the earliest hook-point, suitable for high-performance processing

why?

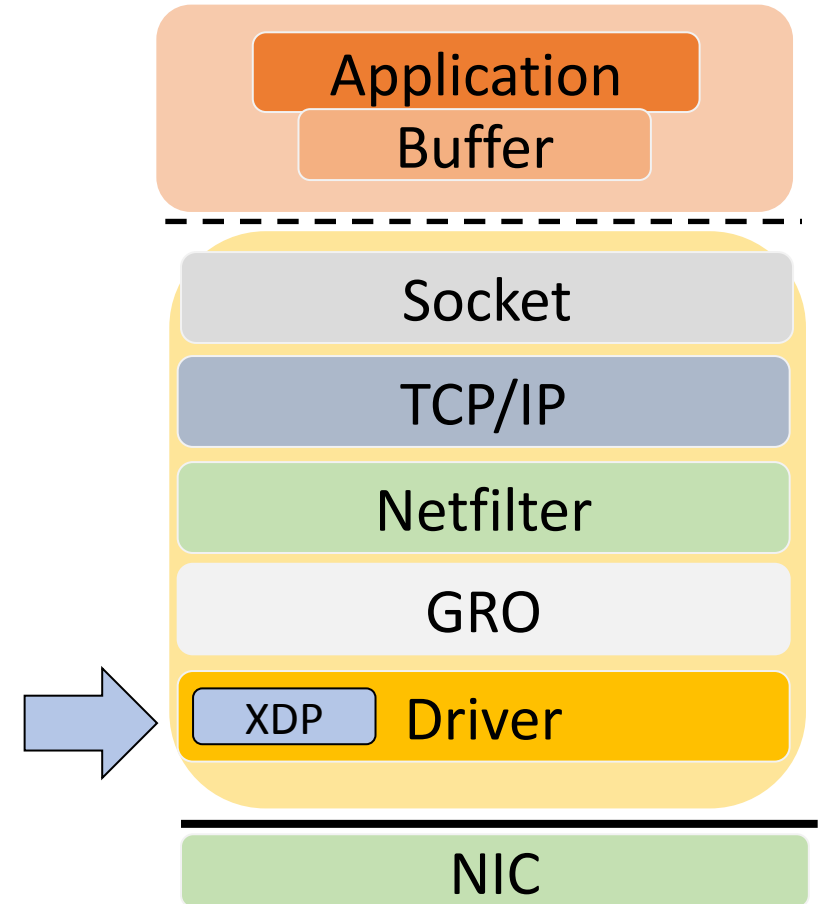


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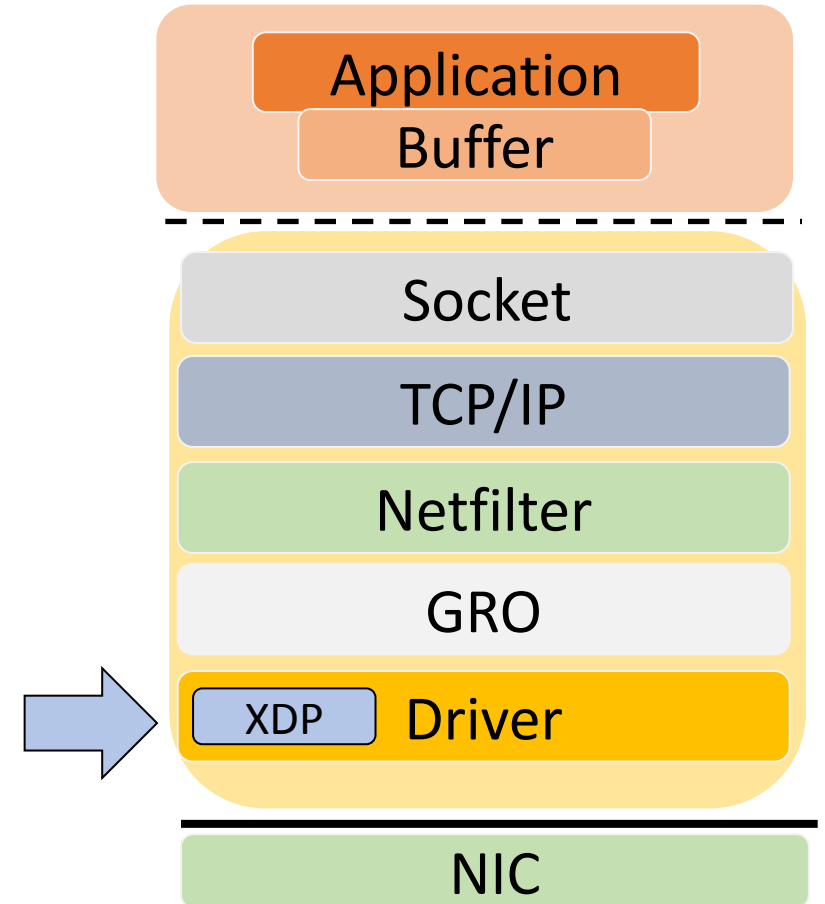
skb allocation is expensive and kernel processing too



# XDP Hook

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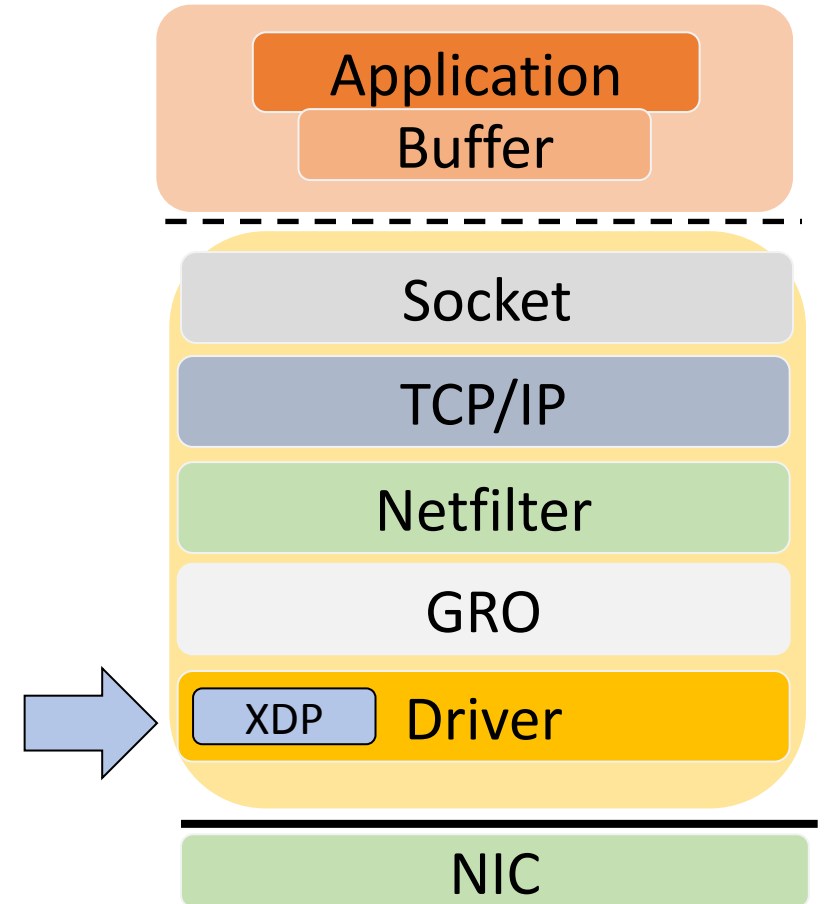


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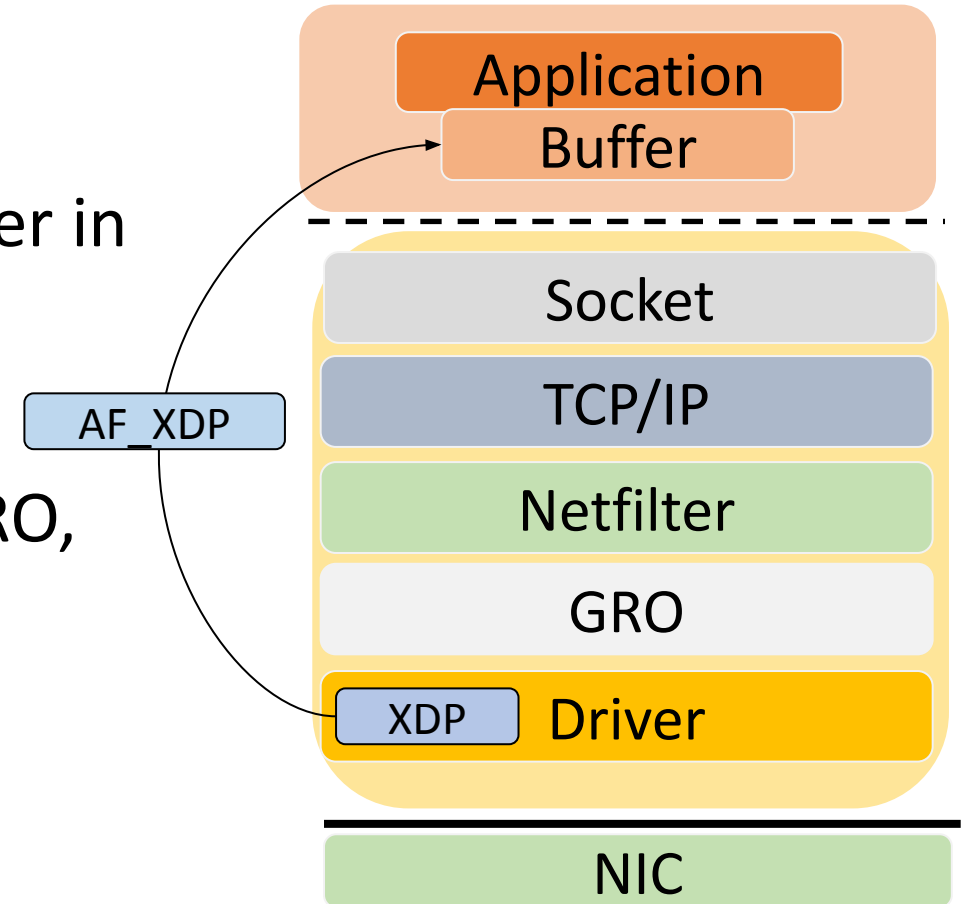
why?

dropping or modifying  
TCP packets can corrupt  
the connection state



# AF\_XDP

- AF\_XDP sockets enable the possibility for XDP programs to redirect frames to a memory buffer in user-space
- Consequence: with AF\_XDP you can bypass GRO, Netfilter and TCP/IP
- This is basically the Linux's answer to kernel bypass (such as DPDK)

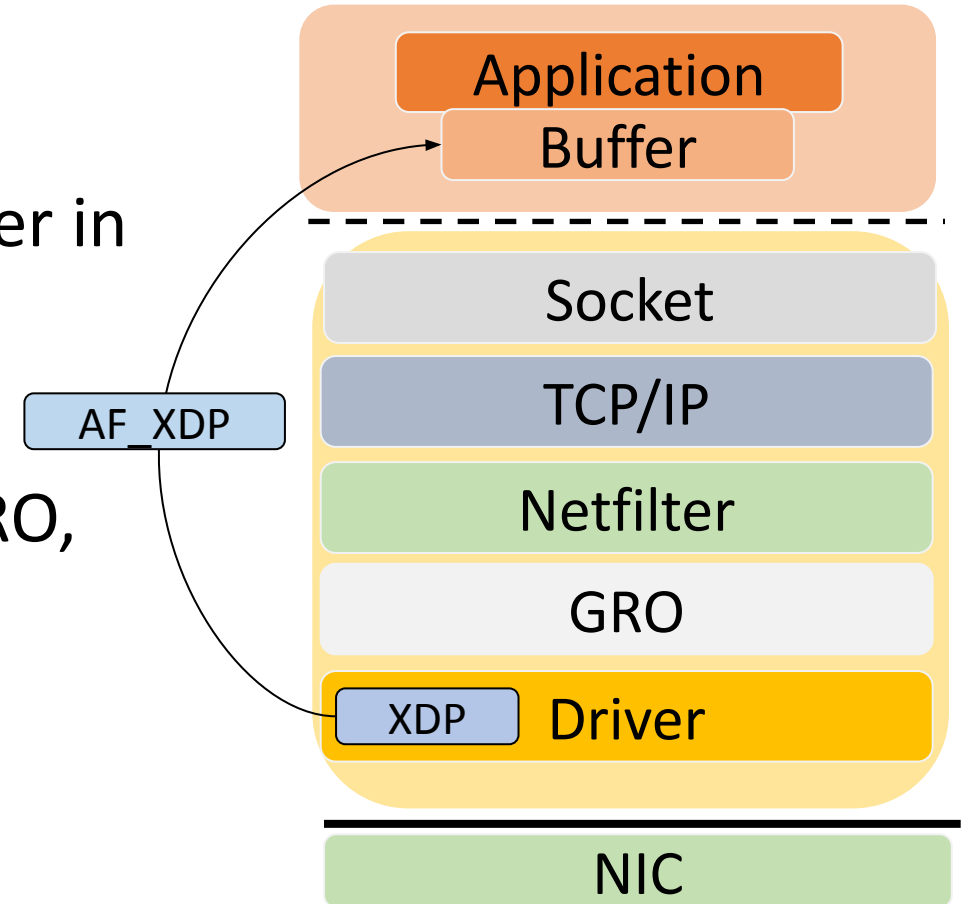




# AF\_XDP

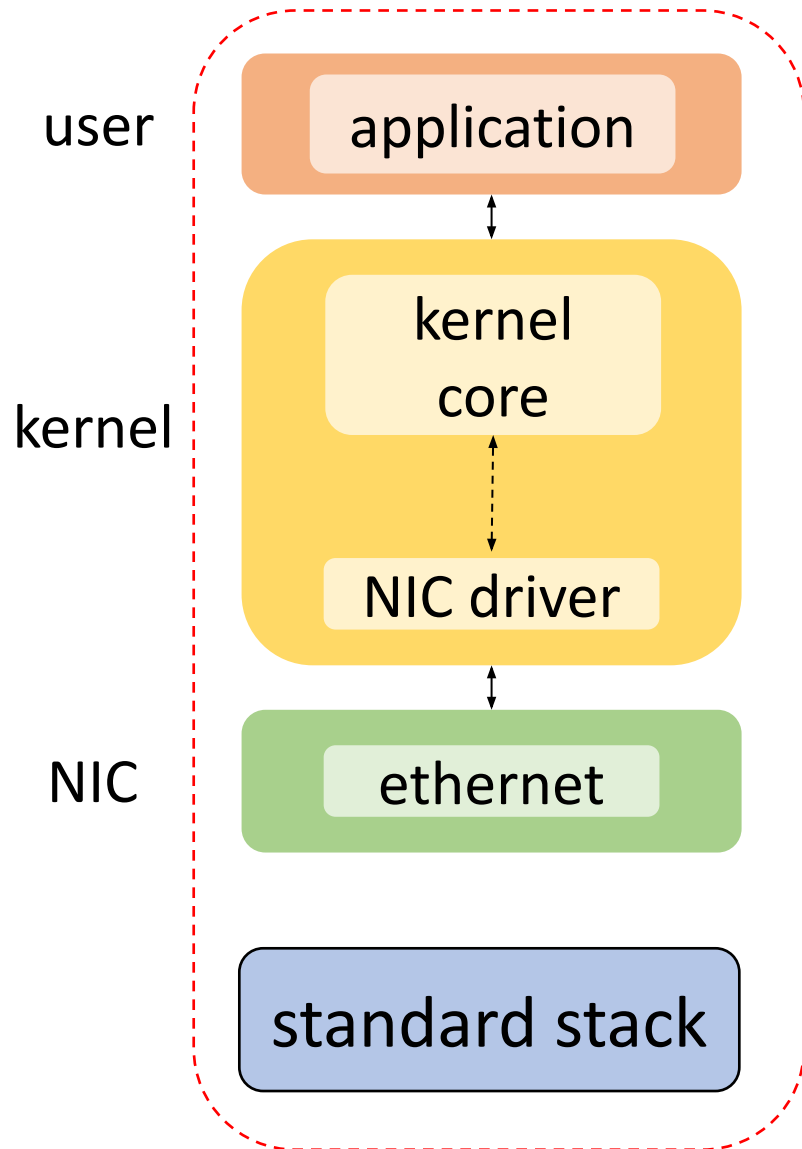
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with DPDK we saw that we give up all the kernel features, is this the same with AF\_XDP?



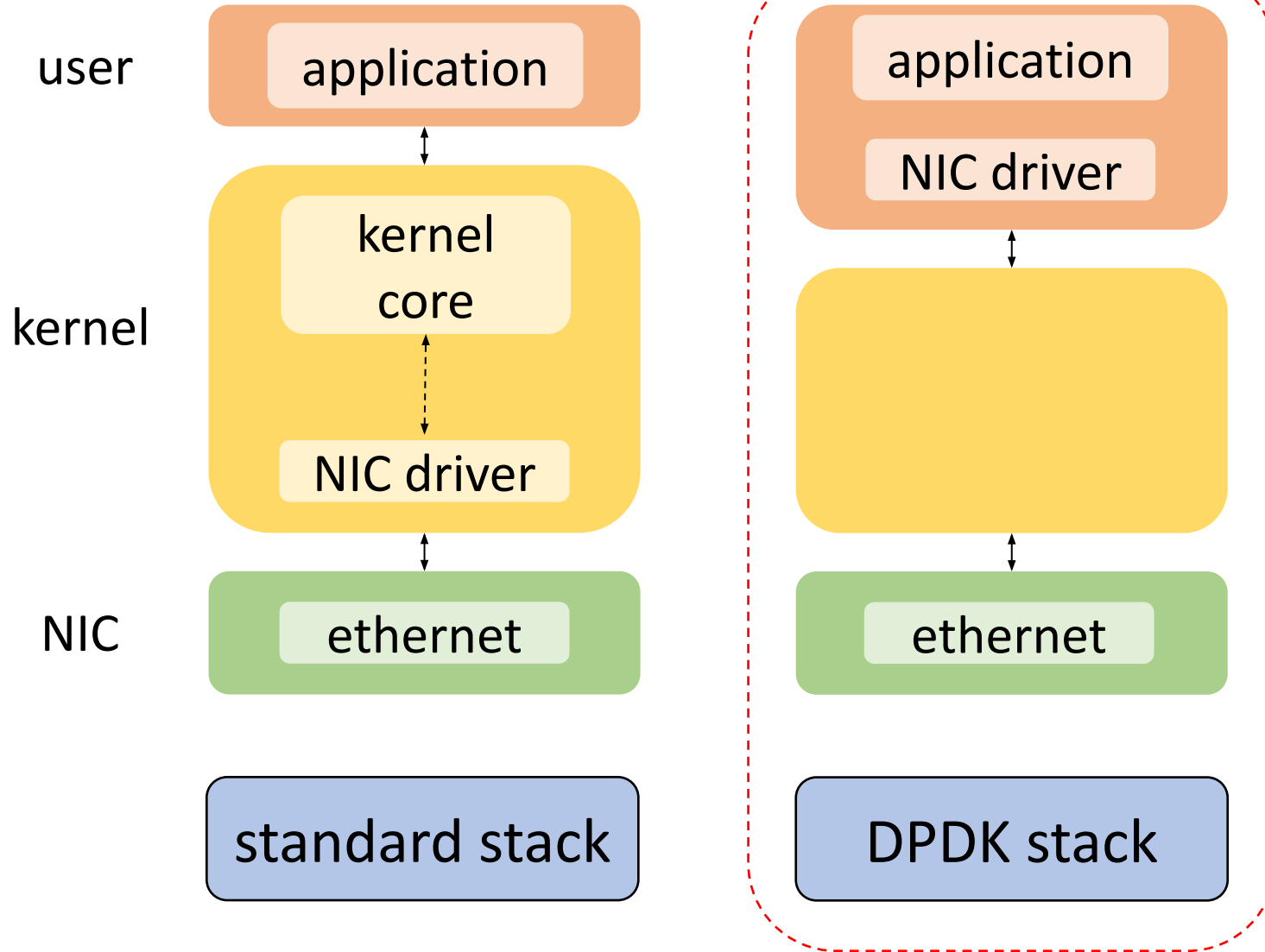
# DPDK vs AF\_XDP

All traffic goes through the kernel



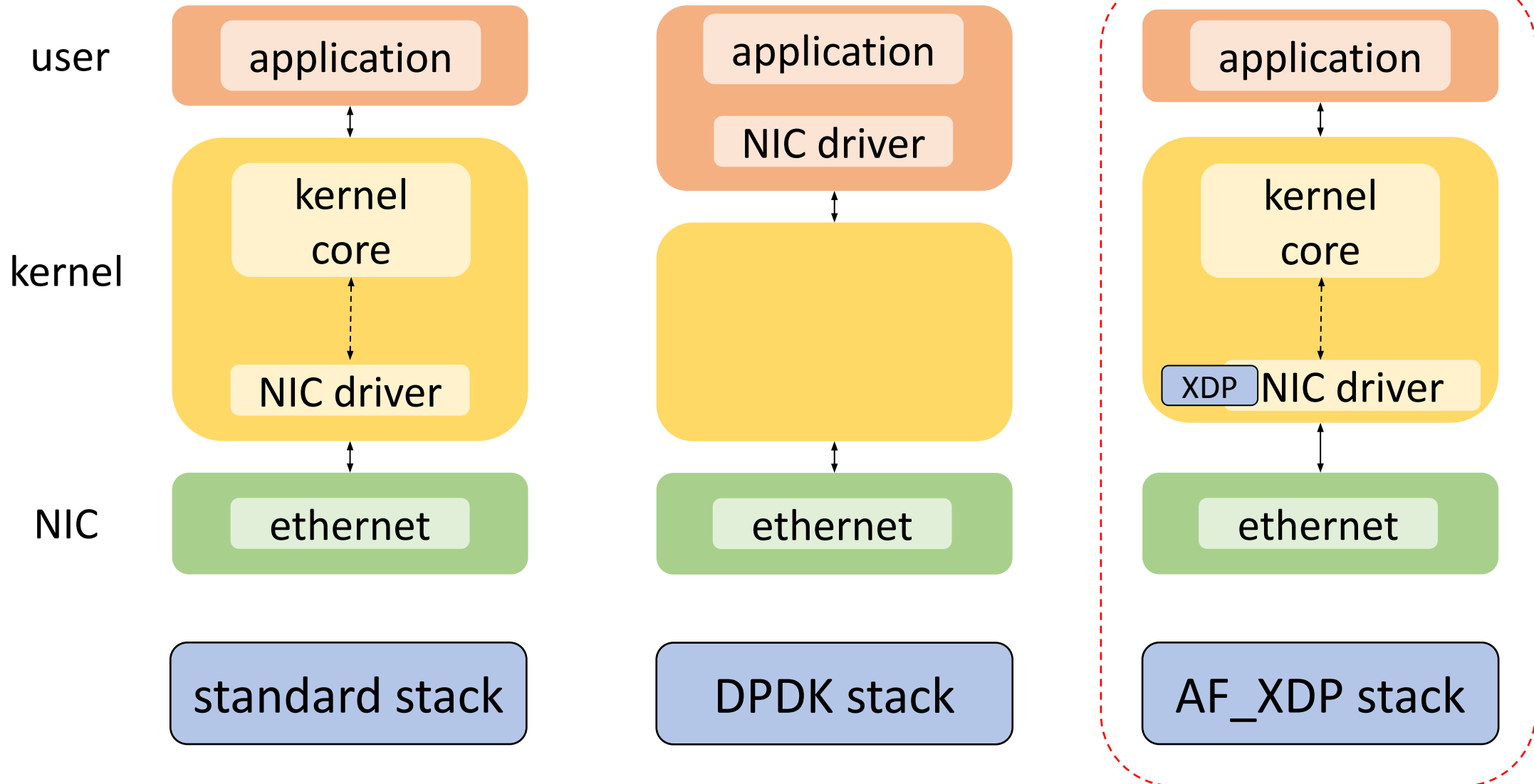
# DPDK vs AF\_XDP

All traffic is directly sent to user-space

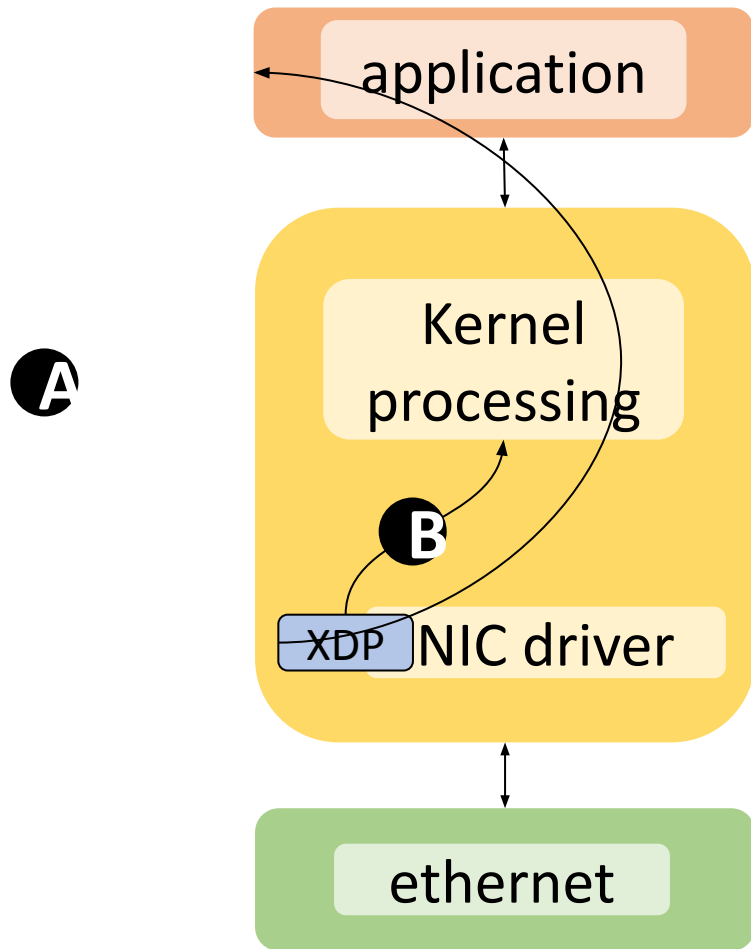


# DPDK vs AF\_XDP

Depending on the XDP program, traffic can go either through the kernel or directly sent to userspace

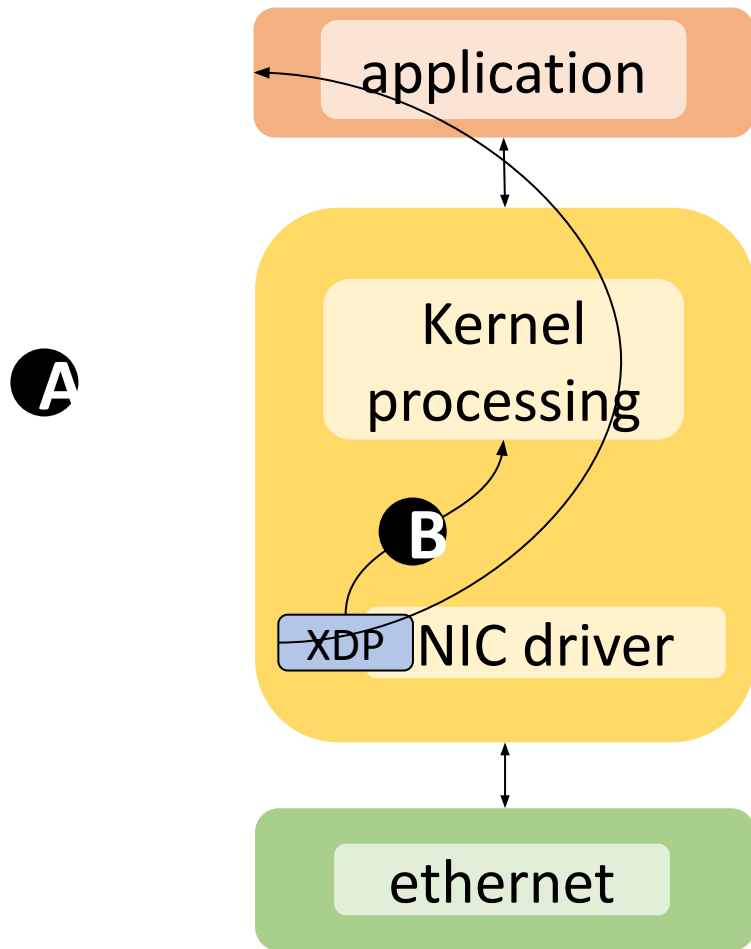


# AF\_XDP split processing



- The XDP program can steer packets through two different paths
- **Path A:** packets bypass the kernel and show at the application through the AF\_XDP socket interface
- **Path B:** packets will go through the kernel
- Consequence: I can get kernel features for some packets and high-speed processing for others

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- Consequence: I can get kernel features for some packets and high-speed processing for others  
Example: I can steer ICMP packets through the kernel and get ping working 😊

# eBPF helpers

- eBPF assembly instructions are limited for safety reasons
  - We may need to perform some tasks not natively allowed in eBPF
- Solution: helpers!
  - Functions that are implemented natively in the Linux kernel, which are available as an assembly call
  - <https://github.com/iovisor/bcc/blob/master/src/cc/export/helpers.h>
- Examples: hash, longest-prefix-match tries, printk

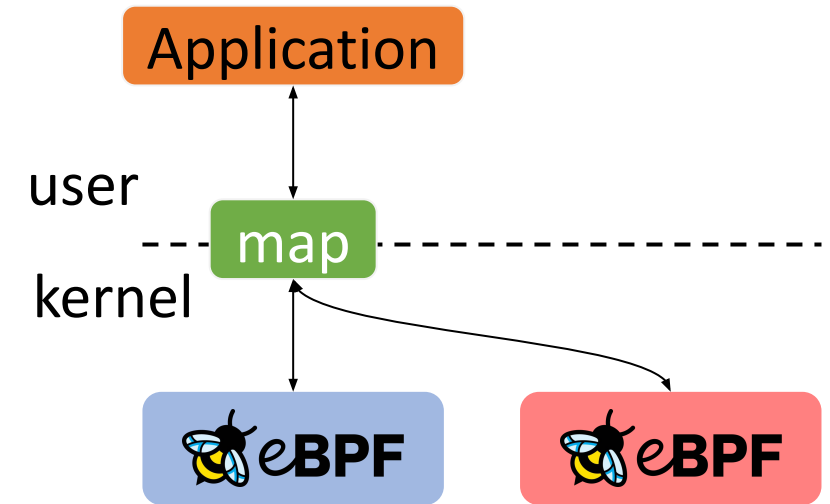
# Storing data in eBPF

- eBPF adopts preformatted memory, instead of unstructured vanilla memory pages
- Data access arbitrated by structures called *maps*
  - Key/value storage of different types
  - Array, HashMap, LRUMap..
- Interaction with maps is possible through helpers, such as
  - *bpf\_map\_lookup\_elem()*
  - *bpf\_map\_update\_elem()*
  - *bpf\_map\_delete\_elem()*



# Storing data in eBPF

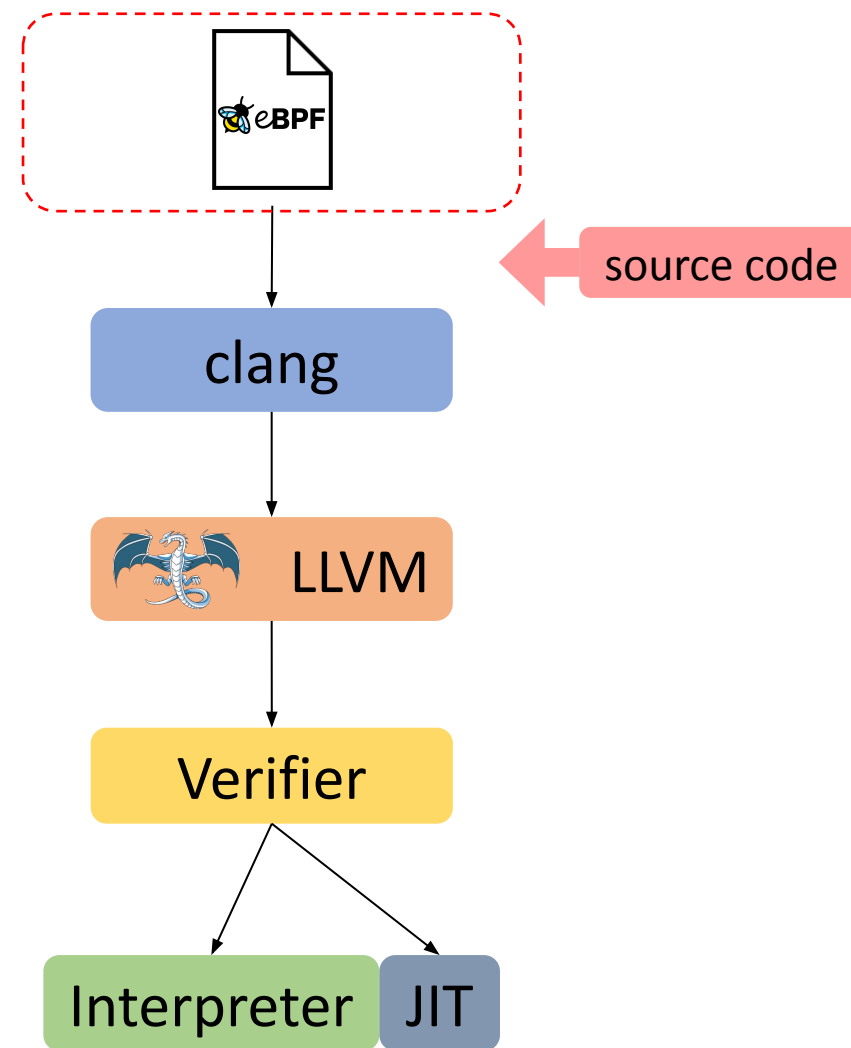
- Maps can be used to:
  - Export data from kernel to user space (e.g., kernel updates statistics about network traffic)
  - Data pushed by user space to kernel (e.g., user application configures and eBPF program behavior, for example a routing table)
  - Data shared between different eBPF programs (e.g., packet parser, sharing pointers to relevant protocol fields to all following module)
- Note: there are other shared memory communication channels (i.e., ring buffers, perf buffers)



# eBPF toolchain

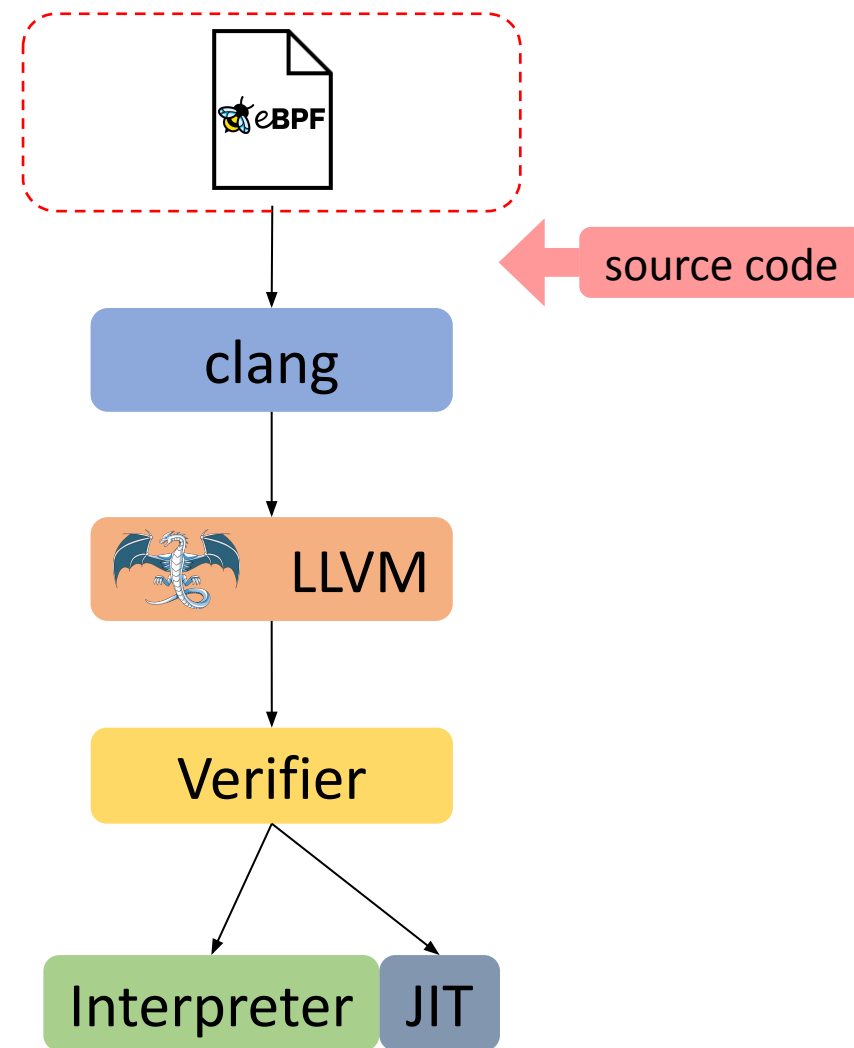
- eBPF code is natively written in restricted C

```
1 static __always_inline int parse_ethhdr(void *data, void *data_end,  
2                                         __u16 *nh_off,  
3                                         struct ethhdr **ethhdr) {  
4     struct ethhdr *eth = (struct ethhdr *)data;  
5     int hdr_size = sizeof(*eth);  
6  
7     /* Byte-count bounds check; check if current pointer + size of header  
8      * is after data_end.  
9      */  
10    if ((void *)eth + hdr_size > data_end)  
11        return -1;  
12  
13    *nh_off += hdr_size  
14    *ethhdr = eth;  
15  
16    return eth->h_proto; /* network-byte-order */  
17 }
```



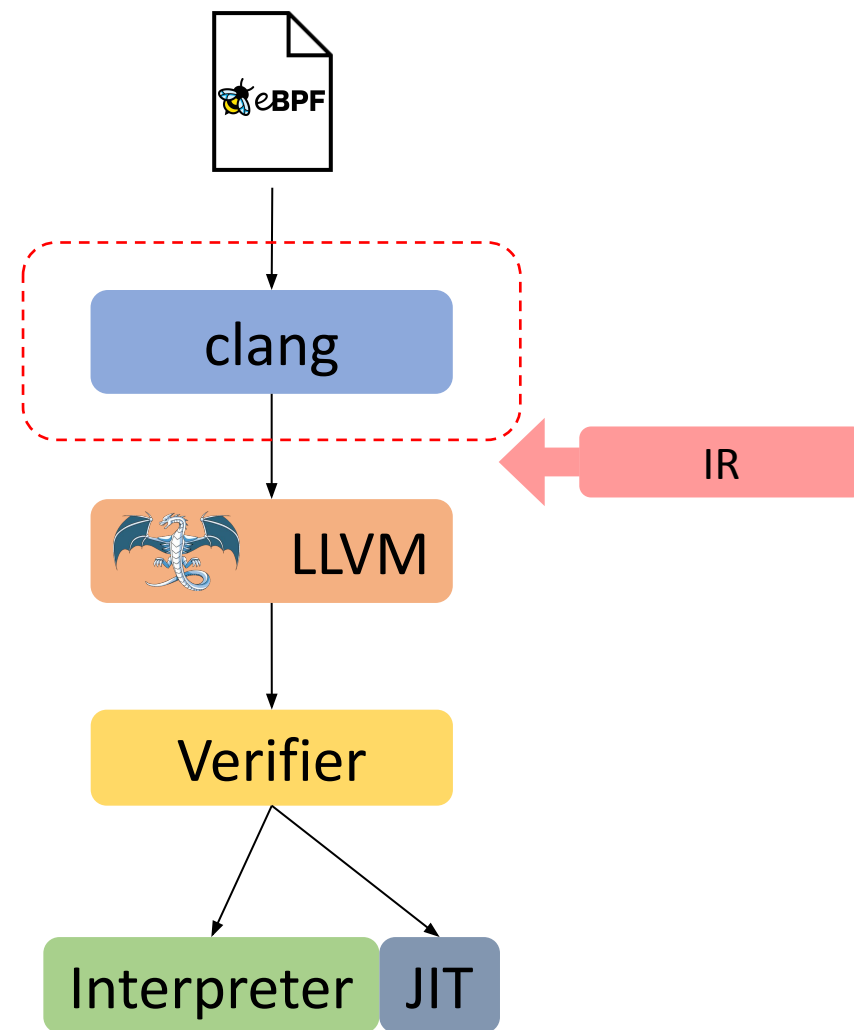
# eBPF toolchain

- eBPF code is natively written in restricted C
- Compilers for other languages exists
  - To generate eBPF bytecode
  - To interact with the running eBPF program



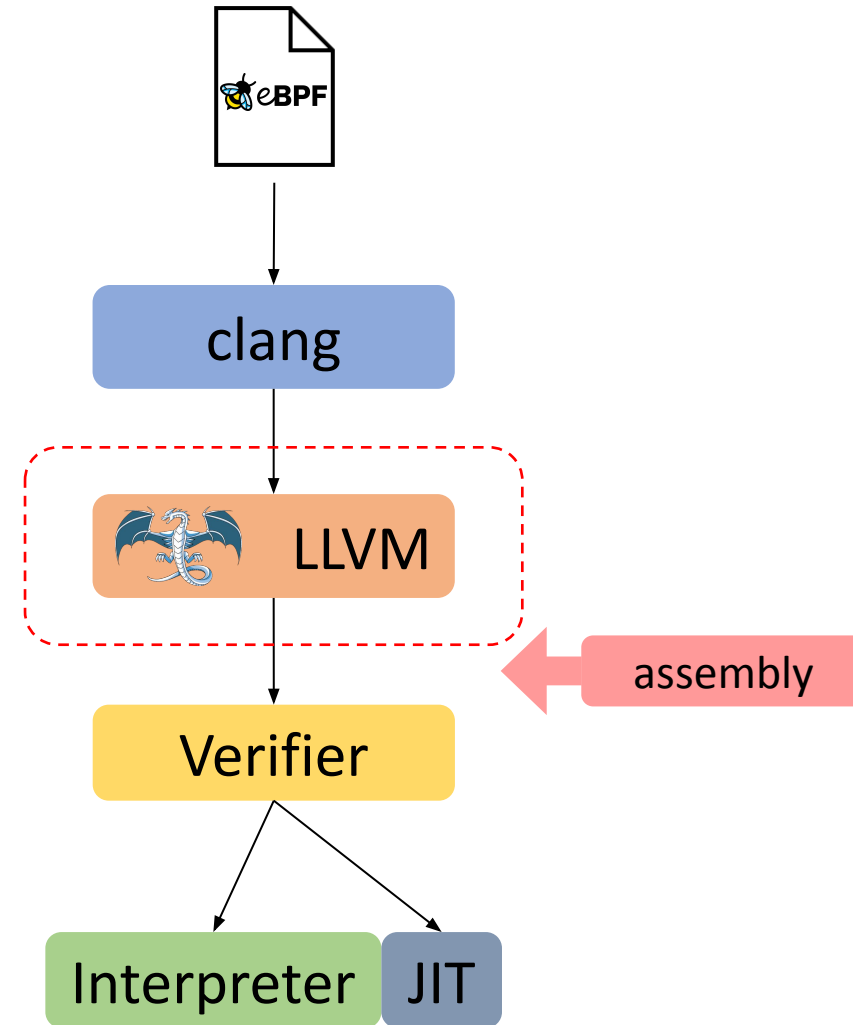
# eBPF toolchain

- The code gets processed by Clang, a compiler front end for C-style programming languages
  - clang is a drop-in replacement of GCC
  - eBPF is also supported by GCC, but clang is the most commonly used



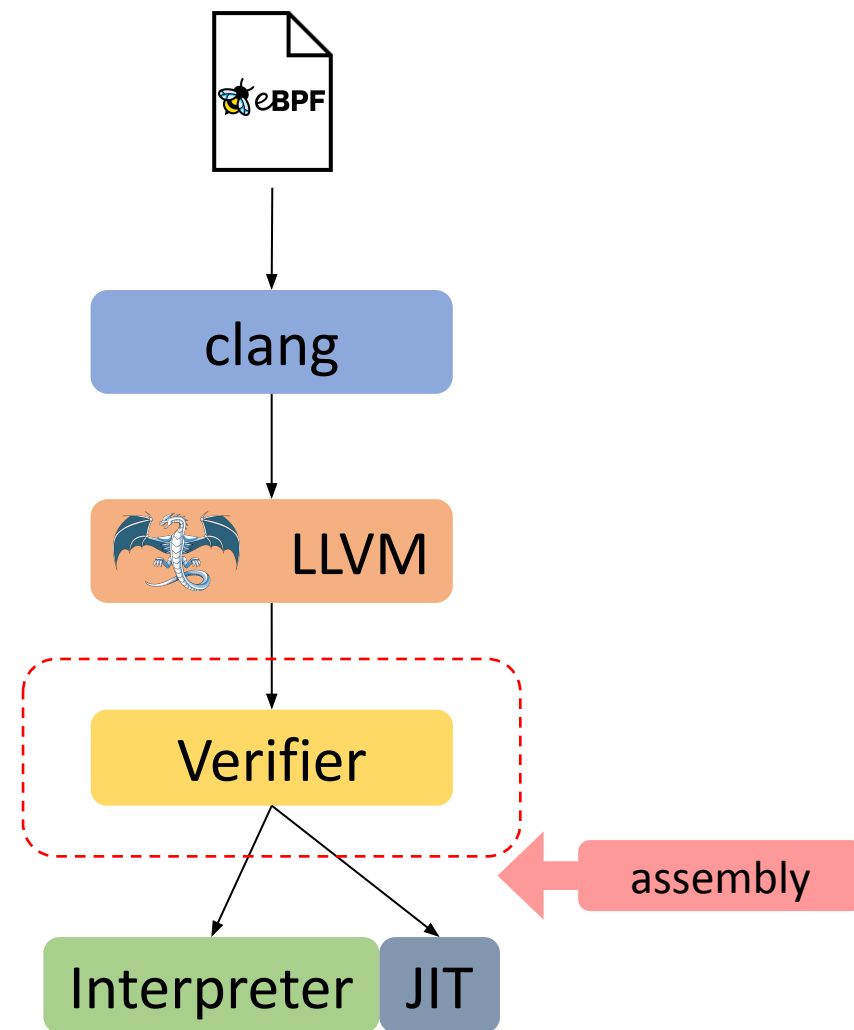
# eBPF toolchain

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  - clang is a drop-in replacement of GCC
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- The Intermediate Representation (IR) generated by Clang goes to the Low Level Virtual Machine (LLVM), a backend for assembly code generation and optimization



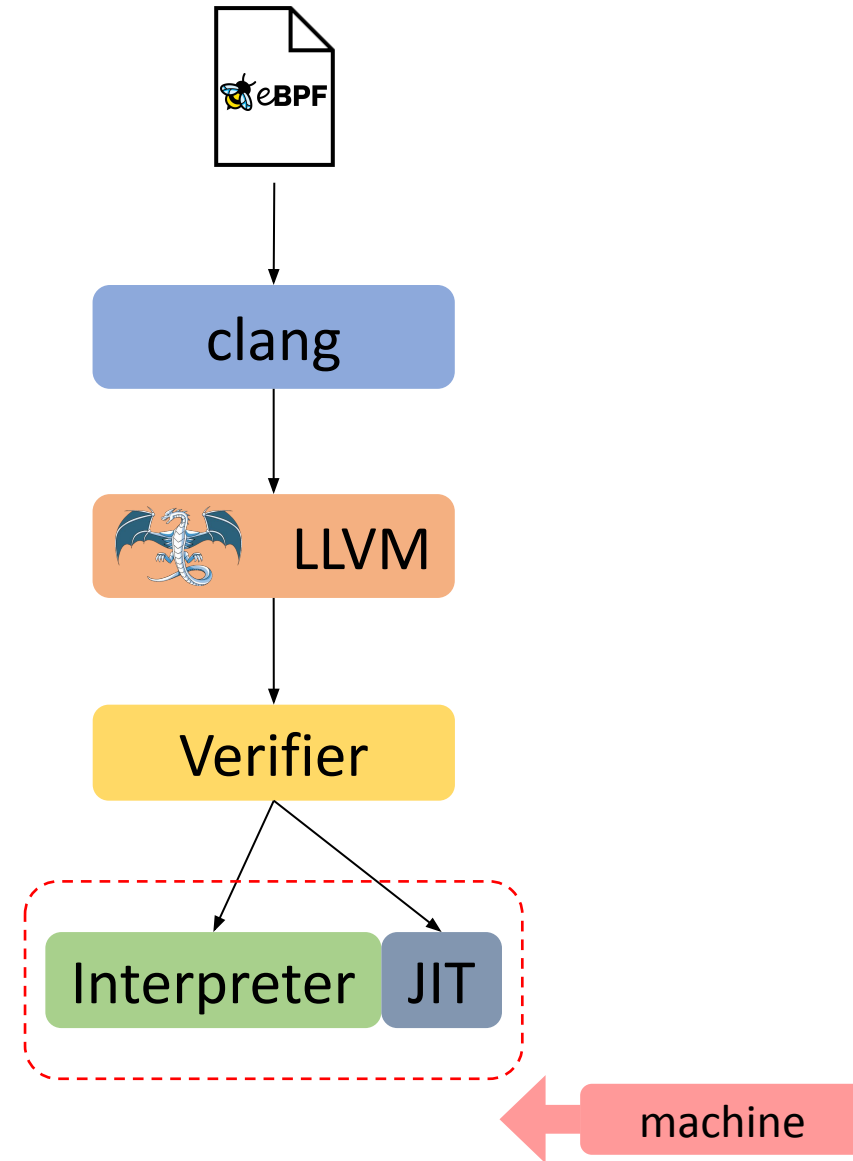
# eBPF toolchain

- The assembly code is then checked for safety (we do not want the code to harm kernel behavior)

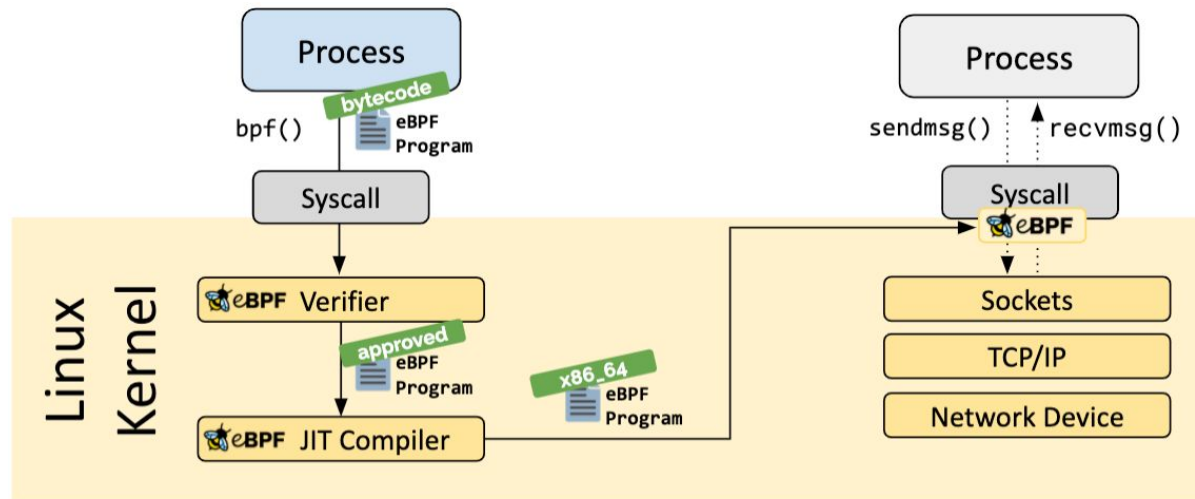


# eBPF toolchain

- The assembly code is then checked for safety (we do not want the code to harm kernel behavior)
- As a final step, the verified assembly code goes through either an interpreter or a Just-In-Time compiler for machine code generation



# eBPF toolchain



The runtime accepts the bytecode, verifies it, just-in-time compiles it, and runs it at the requested hook point



# Facts for the most curious ones

- The eBPF foundation is the entity that control eBPF

## Members

### Platinum

 Meta ISOVALENT Red Hat HUAWEI CROWDSTRIKE

### Silver

 FUTUREWEI DATADOG

# Facts for the most curious ones

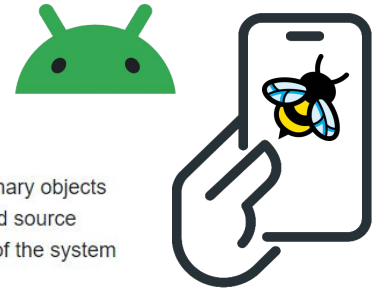
- The eBPF foundation is the entity that control eBPF
- There is also an Android BPF loader

## Android BPF loader

During Android boot, all eBPF programs located at `/system/etc/bpf/` are loaded. These programs are binary objects built by the Android build system from C programs and are accompanied by `Android.bp` files in the Android source tree. The build system stores the generated objects at `/system/etc/bpf`, and those objects become part of the system image.

<https://source.android.com/docs/core/architecture/kernel/bpf>

Android



# Facts for the most curious ones

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- BPF is not just a Linux thing



<https://github.com/microsoft/ebpf-for-windows>

# Facts for the most curious ones

- The eBPF foundation is the entity that control eBPF
- There is also an Android BPF loader
- BPF is not just a Linux thing
- You can also build Tetris in BPF!



<https://github.com/mmisono/bpftrace-tetris>