

A Novel Distributed Denial-of-Service Attack Detection Scheme for Software Defined Networking Environments

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Abstract—Software-Defined networking (SDN), as a new paradigm, fixes the shortage that traditional network does not support the dynamic, scalable computing and storage needs of more computing environments. SDN, however, also faces security problems such as vulnerable to DDoS attacks. DDoS attacks are well-known and powerful attacks. DDoS detection and DDoS traffic separation for SDN environments are still an open research issue. DDoS attacks in SDN environments will not only bring damage to target server, but also takes exact impact on SDN system. In this paper, we identify a new type DDoS attack, specifically aiming SDN environment, which is harder to be detected. We propose a novel real-time DDoS detection scheme for SDN environment, by using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) scheme to analyze the network status on traffic packets data. We separate the network into different parts, to reduce the total calculation burden. We compare our scheme with sample entropy, showed our scheme achieves better detecting ability for DDoS attacks.

I. INTRODUCTION

Software-Defined Networking (SDN) separates network's control logic plane from the data plane, simplifies network management. SDN solves the problem that the static architecture of traditional network does not support dynamic, scalable computing and storage needs of more computing environments such as data centers. SDN separates the control plane making decisions about how to send traffics from the bottom component forwarding traffics. SDN is an emerging architecture that is dynamic, manageable, cost-effective, and adaptable, makes it ideal for the high-bandwidth, dynamic nature of today's applications. These specific capabilities make SDN deployable in many network environments, from home and enterprise networks to data centers in cloud networks.

Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDoS) attacks are widely used to run out of the target's network bandwidth or process resources. DDoS attacks are not only effective in traditional networks but also active in SDN environments. And due to

the mechanism of SDN environments, the switches need to hold all uninstructed packets before it gets respond from the controller, DDoS attacks could easily flood this space and lead to packets drop. And the controller runs out of resources handling all uninstructed packets.

Many related works have been conducted to solve DDoS attacks on SDN environments. Kazemian, et al. [1] and Khurshid, et al. [2] investigated the SDN environment in real time, Shin and Porras, et al. [3] [4] focused on the flow table problem, Wang, et al. [5], Garg, et al. [6] studied the payload of SDN, Hong, et al. [7] solved the topology poisoned problem, and Dong, et al. [8] studied low-traffic flows DDoS on SDN. There are other studies about on-line Internet traffic monitoring [9] [10] using big data for the process, which use Spark Streaming monitoring the TCP performance.

Previous studies of quick DDoS detection [11], [12] and [8], have shown some treatment against DDoS attacks on SDN, but there are shortages in these works. For example, Mousavi, et al. [12] used the entropy to describe the traffics, which may cause a false alarm when traffic feature getting larger. Dong [8] only studied the flows with low traffic, which is powerful to solve the traffic pattern, which cannot handle other kinds of DDoS attacks.

Principal Component Analysis (PCA) is a traditional scheme which reduces data size, usually used for picture analysis. We use it on packet traffic data collected in SDN environments, to analyze whether a DDoS attack is inside this network. Along with traditional type of DDoS attack. Our detection scheme utilizes Principal Component Analysis, separate traffic into normal and abnormal traffic through each switch. We collect simulation data from the whole network traffic packets in our environment and test the entire network scheme, partition scheme, and sample entropy in different situations. Our results show that all three schemes could

handle traditional DDoS attacks, but the new type DDoS attack targeting at weak points of SDN cannot be detected by sample entropy.

In this paper, we identify a new type DDoS attack targeting at the SDN environment specifically. This DDoS attack is basically the same as conventional DDoS, using zombie computers to send packets. However, instead of sending to a common fixed target server, the DDoS attack send packets to random targets. This behavior change makes this new type DDoS attack harder to be detected, and bring more impact on SDN environments. The contributions of this paper are as follows.

- We adapt a scheme using principal component analysis to diagnose anomalies in SDN network.
- We partition the network to get a lighter burden.
- We identify a new type DDoS attack specifically aiming at SDN environment.
- We compare the result between using PCA and sample entropy under different settings including the new type DDoS attacks.

The organization of the rest of this paper is as follows. Section 2 describes the problem that DDoS attack occurs on SDN environment will make extra damages on SDN environment, and a novel DDoS attack aiming at SDN only, who amplifies those damages on SDN environment. Section 3 describes how to use Principal Component Analysis to analysis network. Section 4 describes the experiment and result. Section 5 concludes the paper.

II. PRELIMINARIES

A. PCA on traditional networks

We followed Lakhina's research result [13]–[15], which introduced a method on detecting anomalies for traditional networks, using principal component analysis (PCA) to analyze data traffic of the network. PCA is a transform the data into a new data sets. The new data sets are called the principal components, which contains the property that it points in the direction of maximum variation or energy left in the data. So i -th principal component captures the total energy of the data to maximal residual energy beside former $i - 1$.

First of all, we assume that the network administrator are able to collect traffic data through the network, which could be easily done via using flow table to collect packet data in SDN environment. We use the following to describe the traffic:

- *OD Pair*. OD-pair presents a pair of node describe the origin node and the destination node of one packet.
- *OD Flow p* . An OD flow consists of all traffic for this OD-pair. If the network has k entrance, there will be k^2 PoP-pairs maximum, and hence k^2 OD pairs. For short, we set the number of OD flows as p .
- *Time intervals t* . We collect successive network's traffic for total $w \times t$ seconds, and separate the time period into t pieces. Therefore each time period last for w seconds. And we could adjust the number of time period t to t_1 , meanwhile adjust the length of time of each time period

to w_1 , so that $t \times w = t_1 \times w_1$. Therefore we could get a fit t , that $t > p$.

- *Matrix X* . X is the combination of t and p , forms $t \times p$ matrix. Column i is the time-series of i -th OD flow, while row j presents time period j 's OD flows.

For matrix $X^T X$, it could calculates

$$X^T X v_i = \lambda_i v_i, \quad (1)$$

where $\{v_i, i = 1, \dots, p\}$ are the eigenvector, $\{\lambda_i, i = 1, \dots, p\}$ are the eigenvalues corresponding to each v_i . Finding the first r non-negligible principal component, could approximate the original matrix. Detecting anomalies relies on the separation of x (Matrix X 's i -th row, a vector of all flows at i -th interval) into normal and anomalous components. And could separate x into:

$$x = \hat{x} + \tilde{x}, \quad (2)$$

in which \hat{x} is modeled part and \tilde{x} is the residual traffic part. To accomplish this, it needs to get the principal components of normal subspace (v_1, v_2, \dots, v_r) P . We can write \hat{x} and \tilde{x} as:

$$\hat{x} = PP^T x = Cx, \text{ and } \tilde{x} = (I - PP^T)x = \tilde{C}x, \quad (3)$$

where the matrix C represents the linear operator that performs projection onto normal subspace, and \tilde{C} projects onto the anomaly subspace. The occurrence of a volume abnormal will tend to result in a large change to \tilde{x} . A useful statistic for detecting abnormal changes in \tilde{x} is the squared prediction error (SPE):

$$SPE \equiv \|\tilde{x}\|^2 \equiv \|\tilde{C}x\|^2, \quad (4)$$

and consider network traffic to be normal if $SPE \leq \delta_\alpha^2$ where δ_α^2 denotes the threshold for the SPE at the $1 - \alpha$ confidence level. A statistical test for the residual vector known as the Q -statistic was developed by Jackson and Mudholkar and is given in [16] as:

$$\delta_\alpha^2 = \phi_1 \left[\frac{c_\alpha \sqrt{2\phi_2 h_0^2}}{\phi_1} + 1 + \frac{\phi_2 h_0 (h_0 - 1)}{\phi_1^2} \right]^{\frac{1}{h_0}}, \quad (5)$$

where

$$h_0 = 1 - \frac{2\phi_1 \phi_3}{3\phi_2^2}, \text{ and } \phi_i = \sum_{j=r+1}^m \lambda_j^i, i = 1, 2, 3, \quad (6)$$

and where λ_j is the variance captured by projecting the data on the j -th principal component ($\|Xv_j\|^2$), and c_α is the $1 - \alpha$ percentile in a standard normal distribution.

For matrix X of size $t \times p$, calculating the principal components is equivalent to solving the symmetric eigenvalue problem for the matrix $X^T X$, which is a measure of the covariance between flows. Take the rows of X as points in Euclidean space, so that we have a dataset of t points in \mathbb{R}^p . Each principal component v_i is the i -th eigenvector computed from the spectral decomposition of $X^T X$:

$$X^T X v_i = \lambda_i v_i, \quad (7)$$

where λ_i is the eigenvalue corresponding to v_i . Since $X^T X$ is symmetric positive definite, its eigenvectors are orthogonal and the corresponding eigenvalues are nonnegative real. By convention, the eigenvectors have unit norm and the eigenvalues are arranged decendingly, so that $\lambda_1 \geq \lambda_2 \geq \dots \geq \lambda_p$. It can be shown that the eigenvector corresponding to the maximum energy of the residual by using the Rayleigh Quotient of $X^T X$. We can write the k -th principal component v_k as:

$$v_k = \arg \max_{\|v\|=1} \|X - \sum_{i=1}^{k-1} (X v_i v_i^T) v\|. \quad (8)$$

Thus, computing the set of all principal components, $\{v_i\}_{i=1}^p$ is equivalent to computing the eigenvectors of $X^T X$. The principal component space can be used to examine the transformed data. The contribution of principal axis i as a function of time is given by $X v_i$, and can be normalized to unit length via dividing $\sigma_i = \sqrt{\lambda_i}$. Thus, we have each principal axis i ,

$$u_i = \frac{X v_i}{\sigma_i}, \quad i = 1, \dots, p. \quad (9)$$

The u_i are orthogonal by construction. The equation above shows that all the OD pairs, when weighed by v_i , produce one dimension of the transformed data. u_i captures the i -th strongest temporal trend common the all OD pairs, and the set of $\{u_i\}_{i=1}^p$ captures the time-varying trends common to the OD pairs, refer to them as the *eigenflow* of X . The set of principal components $\{v_i\}_{i=1}^p$ can be arranged in order as columns of a principal matrix V , which has size $p \times p$. Likewise, we can form the $t \times p$ matrix U in which column i is u_i , that V , U and σ_i can be arranged to write each OD flow X_i as:

$$\frac{X_i}{\sigma_i} = U (V^T)_i \quad i = 1, \dots, p. \quad (10)$$

The elements of $\{\sigma_i\}_{i=1}^p$ are called the singular values, and $\|X v_i\| = v_i^T X^T X v_i = \lambda_i v_i^T v_i = \lambda_i$.

III. SYSTEM STATEMENT AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

A. SDN Matching Process

Packet matching process in SDN has limited storage spaces and process resources. These resources could be easily run out when DDoS attacks occur in SDN. Details of matching process in SDN is as following.

According to OpenFlow switch specification [17], through the pipeline processing is able to lookup through different flow table in a switch, we could simply consider that there is one flow table in a switch.

In each switch in SDN, there contains at least one flow table recording rules describing how should the switch deals with incoming traffic packets. The rules include registering information (e.g., *IP address*, *MAC address*, *Port*) of both original and destination host, and record actions should be processed for this packet (e.g., forwarding, or drop) with priority. In one flow table, one packet may match multiple rules. With priority, only the rule with the highest priority will process. If there exists multiple flow tables, the switch

could executes a different rule from another flow table after the original rule been executed.

For those packets with no rules matched in the flow table, it will temporally store in a buffer area when the switch requests and be instructed by the controller. The switch stores the packets in this area, and send necessary part, usually the header of the packet, to the controller and waiting for an instruction. If this area fills with packets and has no space for a new packet, the switch will have to drop some packets. The dropping method depends on the configuration, usually FIFO (first in first out), or LIFO (last in first out). When the controller receives the message, it searches its flow table for a match, if there exists a match, the controller will instruct the switch to install a rule on the flow table, so that the switch knows how to handle the packet. If there is no match, the controller sends PACKET-OUT to all connected switches, request for the target host, if one switch get a match, it will return a message to controller, and the controller will record the rule on its own flow table, and instruct the original switch. If there is no match, it will need to wait till timeout.

When DDoS occurs, there is packet burst occurs in the network. However, for those packets there are two patterns that only contains in DDoS packets. One is there are lot of packets be sent from different sources to one destination, and the other is they start in short time. Unlike other occasion like a burst hot topic, the topic requires time for separation, therefore they usually has exponential growth rate. DDoS attack usually grows like a spark. Another different between those hot topics with DDoS is that one people usually view this topic once, but DDoS requires those bots continually access to destination to increase its effectiveness and strength. There will be two extra side effect on SDN environments.

1. Impact on switches. We assume that the DDoS attack occurs among all this network, and bots of the “botnet” controlled by the attacker separated in each switch. There is no matching flow table rule exists, all DDoS packets will be stored in the buffer area. The space of buffer area will easily exhausted, and have to drop old or new packet (depending on the policy) when a new uninstructed packet comes in. Another problem is that, if the controller manage the flow table poorly, that each separate packet with different source and destination, usually called OD (origin-destination) pair, needs an individual rule in flow table, the flow table will also run out of space quickly.

2. Impact on controller. When DDoS attack occurs, huge amount of uninstructed packets passing through different switches waiting for the controller’s instruction, this will run out the controller’s process ability quickly, and cause the latency of instruction and cause time out, leading to packet lost, or the controller down totally and the network is unable to work.

With higher specification device of switch and controller, that has larger space and faster process spend, allows SDN environment to handle more packets, but this can’t fix the problem. There are also other methods to amplify these side effect.

TABLE I: Main components of a flow entry in a flow table [17].

| Match Fields | Priority | Counters | Instructions | Timeouts | Cookie |
|--------------|----------|----------|--------------|----------|--------|
|--------------|----------|----------|--------------|----------|--------|

1. Low-traffic flow. The work [8] introduced that, no matter how heavy the traffic of a new flow is, only the first few packets of the flow will be encapsulated in the packet-in messages and sent to the controller. Thus, the attackers will prefer to use low-traffic flows to gain more impact to trigger attack on controller.

2. Heavy-traffic flow. On the contrary, we could use heavy-traffic that each packet filled with meaningless data to achieve maximum size to consume the space of switches.

B. The New Type DDoS Attack in SDN

In this paper, we identify a new type DDoS could amplify the impact on SDN environment. This new type DDoS attack is different from traditional DDoS attack, that the destination of packet is randomly chosen. This attack is not aiming at one fixed target server, but the SDN network system. Thus, there will be no server detecting been attacked, therefore no server will alarm the attack, therefore harder to be detected and reported.

(1). Extend Buffer. Buffer store all packets waiting for controller's instruction. However, once this controller was instructed, until the controller give another instruction to remove this instruction, the switch has table flow recording how to deliver the packets. It means that only the first packet of a new flow, and if this flow occurs before, the first packet may even don't need to be buffered and wait.

With new type DDoS, due to the randomness of destination IP, there is only small chance this flow has been instructed and recorded in the switch. Thus, almost every packet at any time need to be buffered, and wait for controller's instruction, while the traditional DDoS attack usually has same target, that once instructed no packet would need to be buffered.

(2). Extend Flow Table. As we mentioned above, once the controller instructs using a table flow with fixed target IP, following packets will all match this table flow.

However, with new type DDoS, the following packets have different origin and destination, so that need a new table flow for every packet. Since there are no pattern between the packets, it is very hard to classify table flows, which means it will cost a lot of flow table space. Further more, when each packet consumes a table flow, the table could be easily filled with attack flow.

With randomly OD pairs, it is difficult for controller to classify the flow table, cost more flow table space, running out flow table space. Since the destination is randomly chosen, instead of the original attack only affect the switch in the beginning, there is no matching flow table all the time, there will be uninstructed packets all the time, and exhaust the space storing uninstructed packets. On controller side, with randomly destination, which would not exist in high possibility, without reply from other switches, the controller has to wait time out, it will be much easier to exhaust the controller's resource.

Therefore, automatically real time DDoS attack detection is one urgent problem in SDN environment.

IV. PROPOSED SCHEME

In a typical SDN, all the extra work (data collection, matrix calculation, result comparisons) need to be done at the controller side in each time interval. Consider of the bandwidth between controller and switches, and controller's computational capabilities, this could put the controller into a risky position.

Inspired by [18] [19] [20] [21], in which OpenFlow assumes a logically centralized controller, which ideally can be physically distributed, and Onix is a network-wide control platform running on one or more servers in the network handling switches by partition and aggregation, we are interested in partitioning the network using several sub-controllers, to get separated data, and report it to the controller.

We assume that we partition one network into s subnets, we can get a set of OD flows $\{p_1, p_2, \dots, p_s\}$. For each OD flow p_i of the i -th subnet, it contains the OD pairs that origin or destination is in this subnet (or both). Therefore we get a set of Matrices $\{X'_1, X'_2, \dots, X'_s\}$. Each X' have same time interval amounts as X .

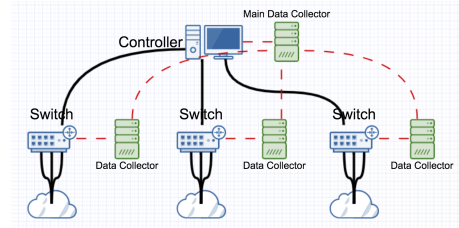


Fig. 1: System Model

As in figure 1, our system basically needs extra computer(s) to collect packet flows through every switches. It would be easier if every switch has a computer connected closely, only collecting this switch's data. These computers could be used to do the calculation of this switch, therefore we could get a quick result. A simpler system could be only one main data collector unit in the middle of the network (smallest connecting lag with all switches).

We have noticed that original scheme and our scheme have a same problem that such a scheme needs to recalculate the SPE threshold δ_α^2 using full period data. This will also cause a heavy overload. As the data become larger and larger, the calculation period would become longer and longer, and finally it could not be done in one time interval. For example, if we continue calculating the data of time interval of one second, and last for one week, and then we will get a matrix that the number of row is 604,800, about 600 kilo-bits(Kb), then $X^T X$ is about 360 Giga-bits (Gb), and each item is stored as

type of Double of size 8 bits, so it will need 360Gbs to store matrix $X^T X$, without needs of mentioning PCA calculation and spaces.

Therefore, we consider using the threshold and normal subspace calculated in the former period, and directly use in next intervals.

V. EXPERIMENT AND RESULT

In order to test the performance of our scheme, we do the following experiments to see how PCA, partition PCA and sample entropy perform under different situations.

A. Experiment Setting

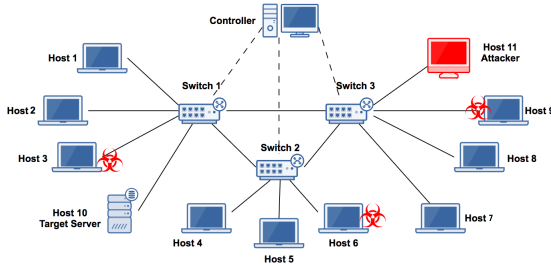


Fig. 2: The Topology In Our Experiment

We set up a test environment by using Mininet creating a small scale of network of ring topology of three switches and 11 nodes (which could be a terminal or another network) directly connected to switch. There are 11 host in this network, so that there could be 11 original node, and 11 destination node, although the original node can not be the same with destination node. For each OD-pair (o, d) we could represent that:

$$(o, d), o = 1, 2, \dots, 11, d = 1, 2, \dots, 11, \text{ and } o \neq d. \quad (11)$$

We choose such a kind of network since it is one kind of the most popular topologies, and switches could connect with each other directly.

We generating dummy traffic by using Scapy, simulate normal traffic since time 0 and launch a DDoS attack at 180 second, and collect all data in 200 seconds (DDoS attack last for 20 seconds). Since these are 11 nodes, the OD flows number is 121 maximum, to get enough number of time interval, the time interval is set to “1 second”, so that the number of time interval will be 200, and the $1 - \alpha$ confidence level is set to 99%.

The topology is shown in Fig.2, each switch connected to another switches, and linked to 3 to 4 nodes. “Node 10” is set to be the victim server, and “node 3,6,9” are three zombie computers who will execute DDoS attack.

B. Comparison Between PCA and Sample Entropy

1) *Sample Entropy*: A general way for DDoS detection in SDN is conducted by collecting the flow statistics or traffic feature from the switches, and calculate the entropy measure randomness in the packets that are coming to a network. The

higher randomness the higher is the entropy and vice versa. By setting a threshold, if the entropy passes it or below it, depending on the scheme, an attack is detected.

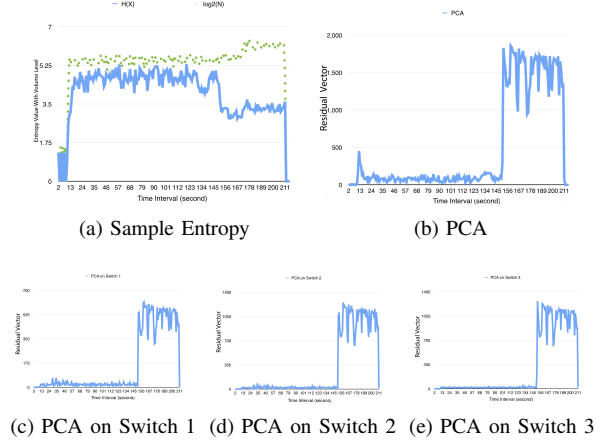


Fig. 3: Comparison Between Sample Entropy, PCA, and partition PCA with normal traffic doubled since time interval 173

One metric that captures the degree of dispersal or concentration is sample entropy. Assuming in one observation, total number of traffic is S , in which exists N OD-pairs (Origin-Destination Pairs), and n_i stands for the traffic amount of OD-pair i . Therefore OD-pair i will occur n_i times in this observation. So that $S = \sum_{i=1}^N n_i$. And sample entropy of this network is defined as following:

$$H(X) = - \sum_{i=1}^N \frac{n_i}{S} \log_2 \frac{n_i}{S}. \quad (12)$$

The result $H(X)$ lies in the range $(0, \log_2 N)$. It will takes the value 0 when the distribution is maximally concentrated, and takes the value $\log_2 N$ when the distribution is maximally dispersed.

We continually the experiment setting, and change some parameters to make a comparison between PCA and sample entropy.

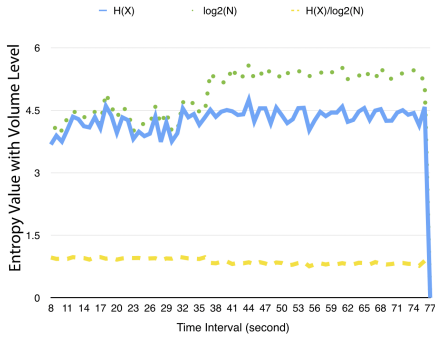
We want to verify following questions: (i) whether the amount of normal traffic would impact the result, (ii) will these scheme detect when DDoS attack stop, and (iii) introduce a mutated DDoS attack aiming SDN, and to check whether these scheme are able to detect this attack.

2) Evaluation of DDoS:

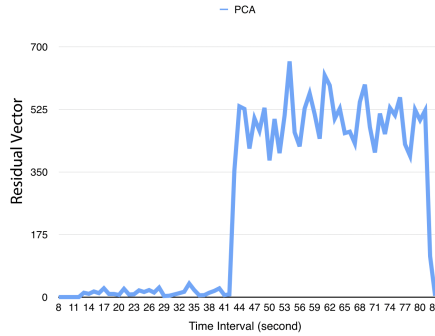
The result of sample entropy is not only affected by the distribution but also effected by the amount of OD-pairs appeared. In this experiment, the time interval is set to each one second, the normal network traffic start at time interval 11, start the DDoS attacks at time interval 152, and double the amount of normal traffic at time interval 172. We want to see how the change of normal traffic would effect the result. We analyze the data through sample entropy, conventional PCA scheme, and our partition PCA scheme on each switches, and

get a result from Fig.3 that sample entropy, PCA and partition PCA all captured the DDoS attack. And the value of sample entropy slightly increased when the amount of normal traffic doubled. Meanwhile, the result calculated by PCA scheme and partition PCA scheme clearly separated with normal time interval, and didn't affected by the doubled normal traffic.

3) *Evaluation of New Type DDoS attack*: Sample entropy detect DDoS attack by that the destination IP is fixed, so that the entropy will decrease when DDoS attacks happened. But we can simply adjust the DDoS attack, that to set the destination IP randomly, so that sample entropy may not able to detect such attacks. So in this experiment, we start normal traffic from time interval 8, and launch mutated DDoS attack from time interval 43. And the result is shown in Fig.4.



(a) Sample Entropy



(b) PCA

Fig. 4: Comparison Between Sample Entropy, PCA react when DDoS stop at time interval 173

We can see that sample entropy can not handle this mutated attack, when PCA value level still change significantly. In the meantime, we also try to remove the parameter N by dividing the result by $\log_2 N$, but the result is hard for us to separate the normal condition with attacked condition.

VI. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have proposed a novel DDoS scheme using principal component analysis, to detect DDoS attack on SDN environment. Then, we have evaluated the performance of the proposed scheme with sample entropy, a popular used scheme. We have shown that this scheme have clearer results than another. Meanwhile, we have identified a novel DDoS

attack aiming on SDN environment, which could cause more damages on SDN, and used the two detection method on this novel DDoS attack, and found this novel attack is hardly detected by sample entropy, and still be captured by PCA.

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