

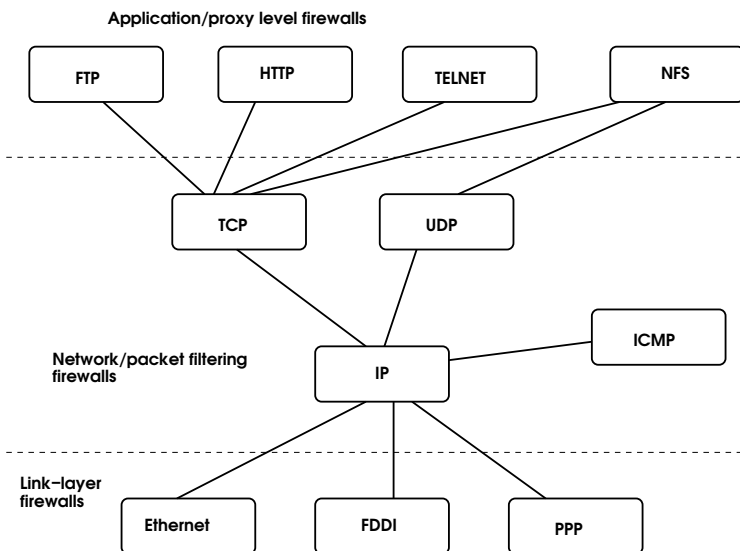
Network Security - ISA 656

Application Firewalls

Angelos Stavrou

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Filtering levels



Moving Up the Stack

- Application Firewalls
- Moving Up the Stack**
- Filtering levels
- Advantages
- Disadvantages
- Example: Protecting Email
- Email Threats
- In-bound Email
- Different Protection Layers
- Out-bound Email
- Combining Firewall Types
- Firewalling Email
- Policy Enforcement
- Out-bound Email
- The DNS
- Application Proxies
- Circuit Gateways
- Personal and Distributed Firewalls
- The Problems with Firewalls

- Why move up the stack?
- Apart from the limitations of packet filters discussed last time, *firewalls are inherently incapable of protecting against attacks on a higher layer*
- IP packet filters (plus port numbers. . .) can't protect against bogus TCP data
- A TCP-layer firewall can't protect against bugs in SMTP
- SMTP proxies can't protect against problems in the email itself, etc.

Advantages

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- Protection can be tuned to the individual application
- More context can be available
- You only pay the performance price for that application, not others

Disadvantages

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- Application-layer firewalls don't protect against attacks at *lower* layers!
- They require a separate program per application
- These programs can be quite complex
- They may be very intrusive for user applications, user behavior, etc.

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Email Threats

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- The usual: defend against protocol implementation bugs
- Virus-scanning
- Anti-spam?
- Javascript? Web bugs in HTML email?
- Violations of organizational email policy?
- Signature-checking?

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Example: Protecting Email

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- Do we protect in-bound or out-bound email? Some of the code is common; some is quite different
- Do we work at the SMTP level (RFC 2821) or the mail content level (RFC 2822)?
- What about MIME?
- (What about S/MIME- or PGP-protected mail?)
- What are the threats?

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In-bound Email

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- Email is easy to intercept: MX records in the DNS route in-bound email to a machine
- Possible to use "*" to refer and handle the entire domain
- Example: DNS records exist for gmU.edu and *.gmU.edu
- Net result: all email for that domain is sent to a front end machine

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Different Protection Layers

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- There are are multiple layers of protection possible here
- The receiving machine can filter IP Addresses from spammers, providing protection at the network layer
- The receiving machine can run a hardened SMTP, providing protection at the application layer
- Once the email is received, it can be scanned at the content layer for any threats
- The firewall function can consist of either or both

Combining Firewall Types

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- Use an application firewall to handle in-bound and out-bound email
- Use a packet filter to enforce the rules

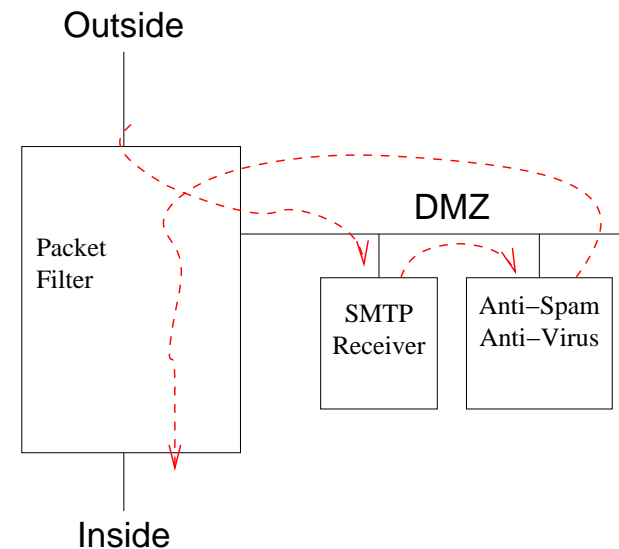
Out-bound Email

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- No help from the protocol definition here
- But — most mailers have the ability to forward some or all email to a relay host
- Create a policy that all mail has to pass through the relay in order to be delivered
- Enforce this with a packet filter. . .

Firewalling Email

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- Email can't flow any other way
- The only SMTP server the outside can talk to is the SMTP receiver
- It forwards the email to the anti-virus/anti-spam filter, via some arbitrary protocol
- That machine speaks SMTP to some inside mail gateway
- Note the other benefit: if the SMTP receiver is compromised, it can't speak directly to the inside

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DNS Issues

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- UDP (discussed previously)
- Internal versus external view
- DNS cache corruption
- Optimizing DNSSEC checks

Out-bound Email

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- Again, we use a packet filter to block direct out-bound connections to port 25
- The only machine that can speak to external SMTP receivers is the dedicated out-bound email gateway
- That gateway can either live on the inside or on the DMZ

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UDP Issues

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- Remember the DNS server location discussed last time
- In fact, what we did there was use an application-level relay to work around packet filter restrictions
- We're lucky — since the DNS protocol includes provision for recursion, it requires no application changes for this to work

Internal Versus External View

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- Should outsiders be able to see the names of all internal machines?
- What about `secretproject.foobar.com`?
- Solution: use two DNS servers, one for internal requests and one for external request
- Put one on each side of the firewall
- Issue: which machine does the NS record for `foobar.com` point to, the inside or the outside server?
- Can be trickier than it seems — must make sure that internal machines don't see NS records that will make them try to go outside directly

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DNS Filtering

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- All internal DNS queries go to a *DNS switch*
- If it's an internal query, forward the query to the internal server or pass back internal NS record
- If it's an external query, forward the query to outside, but:
 - ◆ Scrub the result to remove any references to inside machines
 - ◆ Scrub the result to remove any references to any NS records; this prevents attempts to go outside directly
- Use a packet filter to block direct DNS communication

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Cache Contamination Attacks

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- DNS servers cache results from queries
- Responses can contain “additional information” — data that may be helpful but isn't part of the answer
- Send bogus DNS records as additional information; confuse a later querier

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Small Application Gateways

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- Some protocols don't need full-fledged handling at the application level
- That said, a packet filter isn't adequate
- Solution: examine some of the traffic via an application-specific proxy; react accordingly

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FTP Proxy

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- Remember the problem with the PORT command?
- Scan the FTP control channel
- If a PORT command is spotted, tell the firewall to open that port temporarily for an incoming connection
- (Can do similar things with RPC — define filters based on RPC applications, rather than port numbers)

Web Proxies

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- Again, built-in protocol support
- Provide performance advantage: caching
- Can enforce site-specific filtering rules

Attacks Via FTP Proxy

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- Downloaded Java applets can call back to the originating host
- A malicious applet can open an FTP channel, and sea PORT command listing a vulnerable port on a nominally-protected host
- The firewall will let that connection through
- Solution: make the firewall smarter about what host and port numbers can appear in PORT commands. . .

Circuit Gateways

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- Circuit gateways operate at (more or less) the TCP layer
- No application-specific semantics
- Avoid complexities of packet filters
- Allow controlled in-bound connections, i.e., for FTP
- Handle UDP
- Most common one: SOCKS. Supported by many common applications, such as Firefox and GAIM.

Application Modifications

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- Application must be changed to speak the circuit gateway protocol instead of TCP or UDP
- Easy for open source
- Socket-compatible circuit gateway libraries have been written for SOCKS — use those instead of standard C library to convert application

Rationale

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- Conventional firewalls rely on topological assumptions — these are questionable today
- Instead, install protection on the end system
- Let it protect itself

Adding Authentication

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- Because of the circuit (rather than packet) orientation, it's feasible to add authentication
- Purpose: extrusion control

Personal Firewalls

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- Add-on to the main protocol stack
- The “inside” is the host itself; everything else is the “outside”
- Most act like packet filters
- Rule set can be set by individual or by administrator

Saying “No”, Saying “Yes”

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- It’s easy to reject protocols you don’t like with a personal firewall
- The hard part is saying “yes” safely
- There’s no topology — all that you have is the sender’s IP address
- Spoofing IP addresses isn’t that hard, especially for UDP

Distributed Firewalls

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- In some sense similar to personal firewalls, though with central policy control
- Use IPsec to distinguish “inside” from “outside”
- Insiders have inside-issued certificates; outsiders don’t
- Only trust other machines with the proper certificate
- No reliance on topology; insider laptops are protected when traveling; outsider laptops aren’t a threat when they visit

Application-Linked Firewalls

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- Most personal firewalls act on port numbers
- At least one such firewall is tied to applications — individual programs are or are not allowed to talk, locally or globally
- Pros: don’t worry about cryptic port numbers; handle auxiliary ports just fine
- Cons: application names can be just as cryptic; service applications operate on behalf of some other application

Problems with Firewalls

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Malicious Insiders

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- Firewalls assume that everyone on the inside is good
- Obviously, that's not true . . .
- Insiders can cause much more damage since there is no control
- For example, open proxies over encrypted tunnels

Dynamic Connectivity

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- Firewalls rely on topology and on “static” services
- If there are too many connections, some will bypass the firewall
- Sometimes, that's even necessary; it isn't possible to effectively firewall all external partners
- A large company may have hundreds or even thousands of external links, most of which are unknown to the official networking people

Mobile Devices

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- Laptops and smart phones, more or less by definition, are mobile
- When they're outside the firewall, what protects them?
- Similar problems with all networked devices (over powerlines, blue-tooth)
- Is there a solution for mobile devices? (Personal firewalls, secure/close all unnecessary services)

Evasion

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- Firewalls and firewall administrators got too good
- Some applications weren't able to run
- Vendors started building things that ran over known ports (i.e HTTP)
- HTTP usually gets through firewalls and even web proxies. . .