ECS 235B Module 48
Information Flow Examples

Example Information Flow Control Systems

- Privacy and Android Cell Phones
  - Analyzes data being sent from the phone
- Firewalls

Privacy and Android Cell Phones

- Many commercial apps use advertising libraries to monitor clicks, fetch ads, display them
  - So they send information, ostensibly to help tailor advertising to you
- Many apps ask to have full access to phone, data
  - This is because of complexity of permission structure of Android system
- Ads displayed with privileges of app
  - And if they use Javascript, that executes with those privileges
  - So if it has full access privilege, it can send contact lists, other information to others
- Information flow problem as information is flowing from phone to external party

Analyzing Android Flows

- Android based on Linux
  - App executables in bytecode format (Dalvik executables, or DEX) and run in Dalvik VM
  - Apps event driven
  - Apps use system libraries to do many of their functions
  - Binder subsystem controls interprocess communication
- Analysis uses 2 security levels, *untainted* and *tainted*
  - No categories, and *tainted* < *untainted*

TaintDroid: Checking Information Flows

- All objects tagged *tainted* or *untainted*
  - Interpreters, Binder augmented to handle tags
- Android native libraries trusted
  - Those communicating externally are *taint sinks*
- When untrusted app invokes a taint sink library, taint tag of data is recorded
- Taint tags assigned to external variables, library return values
  - These are assigned based on knowledge of what native code does
- Files have single taint tag, updated when file is written
- Database queries retrieve information, so tag determined by database query responder

TaintDroid: Checking Information Flows

- Information from phone sensor may be sensitive; if so, *tainted*
    - TaintDroid determines this from characteristics of information
- Experiment 1 (2010): selected 30 popular apps out of a set of 358 that required permission to access Internet, phone location, camera, or microphone; also could access cell phone information
    - 105 network connections accessed *tainted* data
    - 2 sent phone identification information to a server
    - 9 sent device identifiers to third parties, and 2 didn’t tell user
    - 15 sent location information to third parties, none told user
    - No false positives

TaintDroid: Checking Information Flows

- Experiment 2 (2012): revisited 18 out of the 30 apps (others did not run on current version of Android)
  - 3 still sent location information to third parties
  - 8 sent device identification information to third parties without consent
    - 3 of these did so in 2010 experiment
    - 5 were new
  - 2 new flows that could reveal *tainted* data
  - No false positives

Firewalls

- Host that mediates access to a network
  - Allows, disallows accesses based on configuration and type of access
- Example: block Conficker worm
  - Conficker connects to botnet, which can use system for many purposes
    - Spreads through a vulnerability in a particular network service
  - Firewall analyze packets using that service remotely, and look for Conficker and its variants
    - If found, packets discarded, and other actions may be taken
  - Conficker also generates list of host names, tried to contact botnets at those hosts
    - As set of domains known, firewall can also block outbound traffic to those hosts

Filtering Firewalls

- Access control based on attributes of packets and packet headers
  - Such as destination address, port numbers, options, etc.
  - Also called a *packet filtering firewall*
  - Does not control access based on content
  - Examples: routers, other infrastructure systems

Proxy

- Intermediate agent or server acting on behalf of endpoint without allowing a direct connection between the two endpoints
  - So each endpoint talks to proxy, thinking it is talking to other endpoint
  - Proxy decides whether to forward messages, and whether to alter them

Proxy Firewall

- Access control done with proxies
  - Usually bases access control on content as well as source, destination addresses, etc.
  - Also called an *applications level* or *application level firewall*
  - Example: virus checking in electronic mail
    - Incoming mail goes to proxy firewall
    - Proxy firewall receives mail, scans it
    - If no virus, mail forwarded to destination
    - If virus, mail rejected or disinfected before forwarding

Example

- Want to scan incoming email for malware
- Firewall acts as recipient, gets packets making up message and reassembles the message
    - It then scans the message for malware
    - If none, message forwarded
    - If some found, mail is discarded (or some other appropriate action)
- As email reassembled at firewall by a mail agent acting on behalf of mail agent at destination, it's a proxy firewall (application layer firewall)

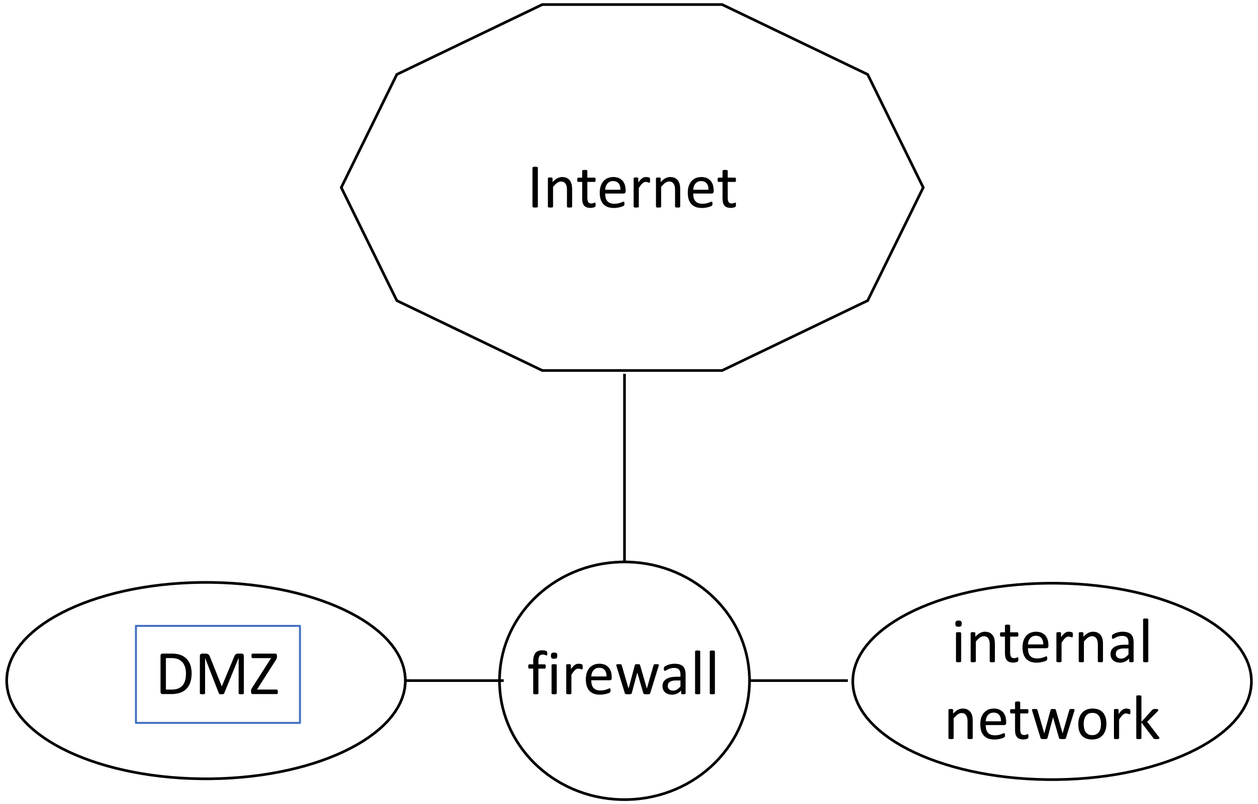
Stateful Firewall

- Keeps track of the state of each connection
- Similar to a proxy firewall
  - No proxies involved, but this can examine contents of connections
  - Analyzes each packet, keeps track of state
  - When state indicates an attack, connection blocked or some other appropriate action taken

Network Organization: DMZ

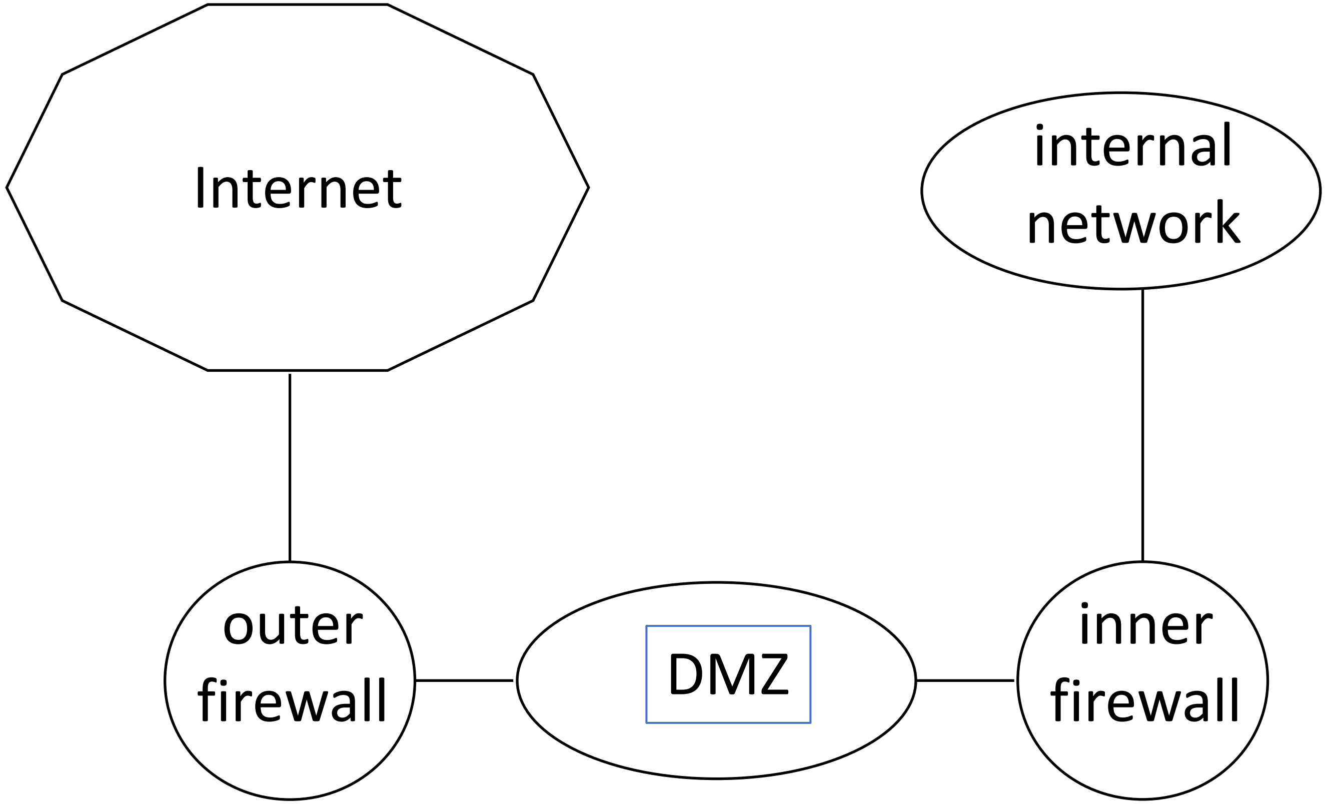
- DMZ is portion of network separating a purely internal network from external network
- Usually put systems that need to connect to the Internet here
- Firewall separates DMZ from purely internal network
- Firewall controls what information is allowed to flow through it
    - Control is bidirectional; it control flow in both directions

One Setup of DMZ



One dual-homed firewall that routes messages to internal network or DMZ as appropriate

Another Setup of DMZ



Two firewalls, one (outer firewall) connected to the Internet, the other (inner firewall) connected to internal network, and the DMZ is between the firewalls

Quiz

The taint/untaint mechanism used to analyze Android apps most closely resembles which of the following policy models?

1. Bell-LaPadula
2. Biba
3. Chinese Wall
4. ORCON
5. RBAC