ECS 235B Module 50
Isolation
Isolation

• Constrain process execution in such a way it can only interact with other entities in a manner preserving isolation
  • Hardware isolation
  • Virtual machines
  • Library operating systems
  • Sandboxes

• Modify program or process so that its actions will preserve isolation
  • Program rewriting
  • Compiling
  • Loading
Hardware Isolation

• Ensure the hardware is disconnected from any other system
  • This includes networking, including wireless

• Example: SCADA systems
  • 1st generation: serial protocols, not connected to other systems or networks; no security defenses needed, focus being on malfunctions
  • 2nd generation: serial networks connected to computers not connected to Internet
  • 3rd generation: TCP/IP protocol running on networks connected to Internet; need security defenses for attackers coming in over Internet

• Example: electronic voting systems
  • Physical isolation protects systems from attackers changing votes remotely
  • Required in many U.S. states, such as California: never connect them to any network
Virtual Machine

• Program that simulates hardware of a machine
  • Machine may be an existing, physical one or an abstract one
  • Uses special operating system, called virtual machine monitor (VMM) or hypervisor, to provide environment simulating target machine

• Types of virtual machines
  • Type 1 hypervisor: runs directly on hardware
  • Type 2 hypervisor: runs on another operating system

• Existing OSes do not need to be modified
  • Run under VMM, which enforces security policy
  • Effectively, VMM is a security kernel
VMM as Security Kernel

• VMM deals with subjects (the VMs)
  • Knows nothing about the processes within the VM
• VMM applies security checks to subjects
  • By transitivity, these controls apply to processes on VMs
• Thus, satisfies rule of transitive confinement
Example 1: KVM/370

- KVM/370 is a security-enhanced version of VM/370 VMM
  - Goal: prevent communications between VMs of different security classes
  - Like VM/370, provides VMs with minidisks, sharing some portions of those disks
  - Unlike VM/370, mediates access to shared areas to limit communication in accordance with security policy
Example 2: VAX/VMM

• Can run either VMS or Ultrix
• 4 privilege levels for VM system
  • VM user, VM supervisor, VM executive, VM kernel (both physical executive)
• VMM runs in physical kernel mode
  • Only it can access certain resources
• VMM subjects: users and VMs
Example 2

- VMM has flat file system for itself
  - Rest of disk partitioned among VMs
  - VMs can use any file system structure
    - Each VM has its own set of file systems
  - Subjects, objects have security, integrity classes
    - Called access classes
  - VMM has sophisticated auditing mechanism
Example 3: Xen Hypervisor

- Xen 3.0 hypervisor on Intel virtualization technology
- Two modes, VMX root and nonroot operation
- Hardware-based VMs (HVMs) are fully virtualized domains, support unmodified guest operating systems and run in non-root operation mode
  - Xen hypervisor runs in VMX root mode
- 8 levels of privilege
  - 4 in VMX root operation mode
  - 4 in VMX root operation mode
  - No need to virtualize one of the privilege levels!
Xen and Privileged Instructions

• Guest operating system executes privileged instruction
  • But this can only be done as a VMX root operation
• Control transfers to Xen hypervisor (called VM exit)
• Hypervisor determines whether to execute instruction
• After, it updates HVM appropriately and returns control to guest operating system (called VM entry)
Problem

- Physical resources shared
  - System CPU, disks, etc.
- May share logical resources
  - Depends on how system is implemented
- Allows covert channels
Container

• Unlike VM, all containers on a system share same kernel, execute instructions natively (no emulation)
• Each container contains libraries, applications needed to execute the program(s) contained in it
• Isolates contents from other containers
Example: Docker

• Widely used in Linux systems

• Container with all libraries, programs, other data for contained software

• Runs as a daemon that launches containers, monitors them, controls levels of isolation using Linux kernel features
  • Containers have own namespace, file system, reduced set of capabilities
  • Control network access; each container can have this set as appropriate, and each assigned its own IP address
  • root user of container differs from that of system
Alternate Approach

• VMs present a full system (hardware and operating system)
  • But process in the VM may be able to optimize use of system resources better than the VM
  • Example: VM operating system assumes disk drive, but it’s really SSD

• Proposed: a kernel with only 2 functions:
  • Use hardware protections to prevent processes from accessing another’s memory, or overwriting it
  • Manage access to shared physical resources
  • Everything else is done at user level
Library Operating System

- A library, or set of libraries, that provide operating system functionality at the user level
  - Goal is to minimize overhead of context switching and provide processes with as much flexibility as possible

- Example: V++ Cache Kernel
  - Cache kernel tracks OS objects such as address spaces, and handles process co-ordination (like scheduling) -- runs in privileged mode
  - Application kernel manages process resources such as paging, when on page fault it loads new page mapping descriptor into Cache Kernel – runs in user mode
Example: Drawbridge

• Library OS developed for Windows 7
  • Supports standard Windows applications (Excel, IIS), gives access to features like DirectX

• Security monitor provides application binary interface (ABI), virtualizing system resources
  • Processes use library OS to access ABI; all interactions with operating system go through that interface
  • ABI has calls to manage virtual memory, processes and threads, etc.

• Library OS provides application services like frameworks, graphics engines
Example: Drawbridge (con’t)

• Kernel dependencies handled using Windows NT emulator at lowest level of library OS
  • Effect: all server dependencies, Windows subsystems moved into user space

• Human-computer interactions use emulated device drivers tunneling input, output between desktop and security monitor

• Provides process isolation
  • Experiment: run malware that deleted all registry keys
    • Under Drawbridge, only the process with the malware was affected
    • Without Drawbridge, all processes affected
  • Experiment: try attack vectors causing Internet Explorer to escape its normal protected mode (so writing to disk was unconstrained, for example)
    • Drawbridge kept Internet Explorer properly confined
Sandboxes

• An environment in which actions are restricted in accordance with security policy
  • Limit execution environment as needed
    • Program not modified
    • Libraries, kernel modified to restrict actions
  • Modify program to check, restrict actions
    • Like dynamic debuggers, profilers
Examples Limiting Environment

• Java virtual machine
  • Security manager limits access of downloaded programs as policy dictates

• Sidewinder firewall
  • Type enforcement limits access
  • Policy fixed in kernel by vendor

• Domain Type Enforcement
  • Enforcement mechanism for DTEL
  • Kernel enforces sandbox defined by system administrator
Modifying Programs

• Add breakpoints or special instructions to source, binary code
  • On trap or execution of special instructions, analyze state of process
• Variant: *software fault isolation*
  • Add instructions checking memory accesses, other security issues
  • Any attempt to violate policy causes trap
Example: Janus

• Implements sandbox in which system calls checked
  • *Framework* does runtime checking
  • *Modules* determine which accesses allowed

• Configuration file
  • Instructs loading of modules
  • Also lists constraints
# basic module
basic

# define subprocess environment variables
putenv IFS="\t\n " PATH=/sbin:/bin:/usr/bin TZ=PST8PDT

# deny access to everything except files under /usr
path deny read,write *
p
ath allow read,write /usr/*
# allow subprocess to read files in library directories
# needed for dynamic loading
path allow read /lib/* /usr/lib/* /usr/local/lib/*
# needed so child can execute programs
path allow read,exec /sbin/* /bin/* /usr/bin/*
How It Works

• Framework builds list of relevant system calls
  • Then marks each with allowed, disallowed actions

• When monitored system call executed
  • Framework checks arguments, validates that call is allowed for those arguments
    • If not, returns failure
    • Otherwise, give control back to child, so normal system call proceeds
Use

- Reading MIME Mail: fear is user sets mail reader to display attachment using Postscript engine
  - Has mechanism to execute system-level commands
  - Embed a file deletion command in attachment ...

- Janus configured to disallow execution of any subcommands by Postscript engine
  - Above attempt fails
Example: Capsicum

- Framework developed to sandbox an application
- *Capability* provides fine-grained rights for accessing, manipulating underlying file
- To enter sandbox (*capability mode*), process issues `cap_enter`
- Given file descriptor, create capability with `cap_new`
  - Mask of rights indicates what rights are to be set; if capability exists, mask must be subset of rights in that capability
- At user level, library provides interface to start sandboxed process and delegate rights to it
  - All nondelegated file descriptors closed
  - Address space flushed
  - Socket returned to creator to enable it to communicate with new process
Example: Capsicum (con’t)

• Global namespaces not available
  • So system calls that depend on that (like open(2)) don’t work
    • Need to use a modified open that takes file descriptor for containing directory
  • Other system calls modified appropriately
    • System calls creating memory objects can create anonymous ones, not named ones (as those names are in global namespace)

• Subprocesses cannot escalate privileges
  • But a privileged process can enter capability mode

• All restrictions applied in kernel, not at system call interface
Program Confinement and TCB

• Confinement mechanisms part of trusted computing bases
  • On failure, less protection than security officers, users believe
  • “False sense of security”

• Must ensure confinement mechanism correctly implements desired security policy
Program Modification

• Source, binary code transformed to implement confinement constraints

• Can be done in several ways:
  • Code rewriter, used before compiling to alter source code
  • Compiler, transforming code as it compiles it
  • Binary code rewriter, used on the executable
  • Linking loader, used to transform linkages between program and library functions, system calls to validate interactions
Rewriting

• Software fault isolation: put untrusted modules in special virtual segments
  • Code modified so control flow remains in that segment when module invoked
  • All memory accesses in segment are to data in that segment
Implementation

• Each virtual segment has a unique *segment identifier* in upper part of virtual address
  • *Unsafe instruction* is one that accesses an address that cannot be verified to be in module’s segment

• Segment matching: analyze program, identify all unsafe instructions and wrap them so they are checked at run time
  • If check shows address not in module, trap it

• Alternative: set upper bits of any virtual address to segment identifier
  • Illegal memory accesses handled in usual way
Implementation (con’t)

• Threat: untrusted module issues system call to close file that trusted modules rely on
  • Causes program crash or other undesirable actions

• Trusted arbitration code places in its own segment
  • This accepts RPC requests from other modules, validates them, and translates them into system calls
  • Results returned via RPC

• Untrusted modules rewritten so system calls done via the arbitration code (i.e., using RPC to that module)
Rewriting

• Can put security-sensitive parts into separate trusted process
  • Application rewritten so untrusted parts invoke trusted parts via IPC
  • Both trusted, untrusted parts must be started to run application

• Example: Nizza architecture
  • Untrusted process executed on VM
  • AppCore, a trusted process, executed in trusted computing environment
    • Analyze application to identify security-sensitive components
    • Place these components into a standalone process (AppCore). May need to be altered to conform to security policy
    • Transform rest of process to use AppCore to execute security-sensitive components
Compiling

• Compiler implements a security policy so resulting executable provides desired isolation
  • Example: type-safe languages, in which compiler verifies use of types is consistent

• Certifying compiler includes proof that program satisfies specified security properties
  • Proof can be validated before execution
Transforming Compiler

• CCured imposes type safety on C programs by adding semantics to constructs that can produce undefined results
  • Safe pointer of type $t$ points to the address of an object of type $t$, or 0 (NULL pointer)
  • Sequence pointer points into memory area of objects of type $t$; so check is that it is a pointer of type $t$, points to object of type $t$ in that memory area
  • Dynamic pointer can point to untyped areas of memory, or memory of arbitrary type (this is tagged with type of values currently in that area)

• Type inference algorithm used to construct CCured program honoring type rules
Certifying Compiler

• Touchstone works on type-safe subset of C
  • All array references are checked to ensure they are in bounds

• Compiler translates program into assembly

• VCGen generates verification conditions
  • Works on per-function basis using symbolic execution
    • Type specifications declare types of arguments (preconditions) and return values (postconditions)
  • Builds a predicate based on machine instructions
  • On a return instruction, emits a predicate that includes check on instantiation of preconditions, predicate built from assembly language, and a check on postconditions
  • Predicate can be proved iff program satisfies postcondition and registers preserved on entry are not changed

• Theorem prover verifies proof
Like sandboxing, but framework embedded in libraries and not a separate process

When called, a constrained library applies security policy rules to determine whether it should take desired action

Example: Aurasium for Android apps
  - Goal: prevent exfiltration of sensitive data or misuse of resources
  - Adds code to monitor all interactions with phone’s resources; these can be considerably more granular than default permissions set at installation
Aurasium

• Goal: prevent exfiltration of sensitive data or misuse of resources on Android phone by apps
  • Adds code to monitor all interactions with phone’s resources; these can be considerably more granular than default permissions set at installation

• First part: tool that inserts code to enforce policies when app calls on phone resources, such as SMS messages

• Second part: use modified Android standard C libraries that determine whether app’s requested system call should be blocked

• App signatures verified before Aurasium transforms app; then Aurasium signs app
  • Issue is that when Aurasium transforms app, original signature no longer valid
Quiz

What is the difference between a virtual machine and a container?

1. A virtual machine has its own kernel in it; a container uses the host system’s kernel

2. A host machine can run several containers at once; a host can run only one virtual machine at a time

3. Containers provide the libraries needed to execute a process; a virtual machine does not have any libraries that a process can use

4. The name