Towards Improving an Algebraic Marking Scheme for Tracing DDoS Attacks

Moon-Chuen Lee, Yi-Jun He, and Zhaole Chen
(Corresponding author: Moon-Chuen Lee)

Department of Computer Science and Engineering, the Chinese University of Hong Kong
Shatin, NT, Hong Kong (Email: mclee@cse.cuhk.edu.hk)
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Abstract

Distributed Denial of Service (*DDoS*) attacks could be considered as one of the most serious security problems to the Internet today. To locate the sources of the attack packets, we usually need to find the paths through which the attack packets traversed from the sources to the victim. In this paper, we identify the weaknesses of an existing algebraic marking scheme for tracing *DDoS* attacks, and propose an improved version of the marking scheme. Simulation experiment results show that the proposed marking scheme could achieve a high success rate in tracing the attack sources. When compared with other marking schemes, it requires fewer packets for attack paths reconstruction. Further, it is characterized by generating no false positives, creating no additional traffic to the network, having a relatively low packet marking and attack path reconstruction overhead, and being backward compatible.

Keywords: Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS), IP Traceback, Probabilistic Packet Marking, Attack Graph Reconstruction

1 Introduction

Denial of service (*DoS*) or Distributed *DoS* (*DDoS*) attacks have become one of the most severe network attacks today. Though relatively easy to be executed [4], it could cause devastating damages. By consuming a huge amount of system resources, *DoS* attacks can render the normal services to the legitimate users unavailable. While email has become the most popular form of communication, the *DDoS* attack is a common mode of attack to cripple a mail server [10]. Lee and Fung [9] indicate that a *DoS* attack could be carried out during an authentication process involving public-key based operations. Many researchers have made much effort to withstand *DoS* attacks, focusing on how to mitigate the effect of the attacks [6, 8]. The most effective approach against *DoS* attacks is to isolate the attackers from the victim's network. Thus, locating the attacker is an important task. We cannot rely on the source address in the *IP* header of an attack packet, because the source address is never authenticated in the current protocol when a router forwards a packet, and the attacker can spoof the source *IP* address while launching an attack. Therefore, locating the source of an attack usually involves finding the paths of the relevant packets. Because of the stateless nature of Internet routing, it is very difficult to identify the paths of the packets. Finding the paths of the attack packets is known as the *IP* traceback problem [14].

In general, traceback techniques can be grouped into two major categories: one based on tracing a single packet, such as the hash-based traceback approach [15], and the other based on using a large number of packets for tracing back to the attackers. The marking scheme proposed in this paper belongs to the category based on using large number of packets for traceback. In the literature, different approaches, based on using a large number of packets, have been proposed for *IP* traceback, such as link testing [3, 14, 18], ICMP traceback [2], probabilistic packet marking (PPM) scheme based methods [1, 2, 11, 14, 16, 18, 20], advanced authenticated marking scheme [16], algebraic marking scheme [5], etc. However, all of them have drawbacks and cannot be easily exploited for practical applications.

This paper proposes an improved algebraic marking scheme which simplifies and improves the algebraic marking scheme [5] for a practical implementation. The proposed approach uses a new packet marking method, and simplifies significantly the paths reconstruction procedure. It can perform *IP* traceback efficiently even in the presence of multiple attacks.

The rest of this paper is organized as below. In Section 2, we introduce the existing algebraic marking scheme [5]. Section 3 presents our improved algebraic marking scheme; and Section 4 gives a detailed performance analysis of our method. After presenting the experiment results in Section 5, we conclude this paper in Section 6.

2 Existing Algebraic Marking Scheme

Dean, Franklin and Stubblefield proposed an algebraic marking scheme [5] for marking the packets and reconstructing the attack paths. The marking procedure writes two values in the packets, which correspond to $f(x)$ and x of the following polynomial.

$$\begin{aligned} f(x) &= a_n + a_{n-1}x + a_{n-2}x^2 + ... + a_0x^n \\ &= a_n + (a_{n-1} + (a_{n-2} + ... + (a_1 + a_0x)x...)x)x. \end{aligned}$$

They used *Fullpath* and x to denote the two values. In general, an attack packet will pass through a number of routers before reaching the victim. The first router that decides to make a marking determines a value for x and let *Fullpath* be the value of its *IP* address represented by a_0. Then the next router computes its *Fullpath* value by multiplying the *Fullpath* value (from the packet) by x, and adding its *IP* address (represented by a_1). The following routers mark the packet in a manner similar to what the second one did. When the packet arrives at the victim, it records a *Fullpath* value related to a path formed by a number of routers. In fact, it is the value of the above polynomial with the *IP* addresses of the routers represented by a_i's and the highest exponent (*i.e.* n) of the unknown x. Note that there is no way for a router to know whether it is the "first" participating router on a particular path; so it has to adopt a coin-flipping method-*random full* (*or partial*) *path encoding* to solve this problem. The router flips a coin and if it comes up tails the router will assume it is not the first router and simply follows the algorithm as presented above; otherwise the router will select an x for marking this packet and do the marking in the capacity as the first router. With this packet marking method, each marked packet received by the victim represents a polynomial. Each polynomial represents one suffix of the whole path. Because the selection of the first marking router is random, the degree of the polynomial is not fixed. They pointed out that with the recent advances in *coding theory* such mixed data problem could be solved to identify the paths if there are enough marked packets. However, their approach is not powerful enough for dealing with distributed *DoS* attacks because at present there is no effective means to find out those packets which have traversed to the victim via the same path; it also requires a huge number of packets to reconstruct the multiple paths.

3 Proposed Marking Scheme

In this section, we introduce our improved algebraic marking scheme in detail. Unlike the algebraic marking scheme of Dean, *et. al.*, our proposal does not require the use of sophisticated mathematical techniques for paths reconstruction, because we have improved the underlying packets marking procedure. We exploit the idea of probabilistic packets marking (i.e. to mark the packets with a low probability) scheme [14] to reduce the marking overhead of the participating routers. Before presenting further details of our method, we first introduce some relevant definitions and the basic assumptions behind the design of the algorithms. Some of the definitions and assumptions are similar to those presented in [5, 17, 18].

3.1 Definitions and Assumptions

An *upstream routers map* describes the topology of the upstream routers of a single host. We assume the *upstream routers map* captures the *IP* addresses of the routers. Figure 1 depicts an *upstream routers map* with respect to the victim. We use the symbols V, R, and A to denote the victim, router, and attacker respectively. Here *upstream* is used to describe routers viewed from the victim. For example, R_9 and R_{10} are the upstream routers of A_2. In this graph, there are two attack paths represented by the dotted lines: one is $(A_1R_6R_3R_2R_1)$, and the other is $(A_2R_3R_2R_1)$. The *distance* between two hosts means the number of routers in the attack path between them. For example, in the attack path $(A_1R_6R_3R_2R_1)$, the distance between router R_6 and the victim is 3. Some routers might be compromised by the attacker and they would mark fake information in the packets. Therefore, we limit the traceback problem to finding a candidate attack path that contains a suffix of the real attack path, and such a suffix is called *valid suffix* of that path. For example, the path $(R_3R_2R_1)$ is a valid suffix of the real attack path $(A_1R_6R_3R_2R_1)$. We say a traceback technique is robust if the attackers cannot prevent the victim from finding the candidate paths containing the valid suffixes of the attack paths. We say that a router is a *false positive* if it is in the reconstructed attack path but not in the real attack path.

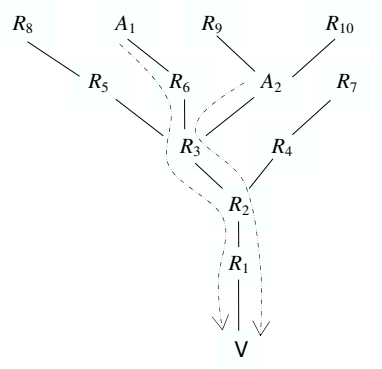

Figure 1: An *upstream routers map* as seen from the victim V. There are two attack paths indicated by the dotted lines

For practical considerations, we make the following assumptions, some of them being similar to those outlined in [5, 17, 18] in the design of our marking scheme.

1) Attackers are able to generate and send any number of packets to a target destination.

2) Multiple attackers may coordinate their attack.

3) Packets may be reordered or lost.

4) The routes between the attack sources and the victim are fairly stable.

5) The routers have limited CPU and memory resources and cannot do too much processing per packet.

6) Attackers might be aware that they are being traced.

7) The markings in a packet may be modified by the attacker.

8) The source address of a packet may be forged.

9) Routers are not compromised widely and the routers adjacent to the victim should not be compromised.

10) The packet size should not grow as a result of tracing.

Assumptions 1 to 8 reflect the ability of the *DoS* attackers and the weakness of the current network infrastructure. Sophisticated attackers could detect that they are being traced and might send fake packets to confuse the victim. So any *IP* traceback algorithm designer should be aware of such a potential ability of the attackers. Similar to the probabilistic marking scheme proposed in [14], our method marks packets with a low probability; therefore, it requires a good number of packets, sent by the attacker, to reconstruct the attack paths. If some routers are compromised, we might only trace the source back to the compromised router which could tamper the information marked by its upstream routers. Therefore, we use a *valid suffix* instead of the entire attack path to assess the robustness of a traceback technique. Note that the nearest routers should not be compromised; otherwise they could tamper any information marked by the upstream routers and the victim might not be able to reconstruct any attack paths correctly. Therefore, Assumption 9 is a realistic one.

The last assumption concerns avoiding the growth of packet size. There are a number of protocols today which support the packet size to grow. However, increasing the packet size could create the MTU problem and consume additional bandwidth. Thus, we try to avoid designing a traceback system which requires the packet size to grow.

3.2 Improved Algebraic Marking Scheme

Our proposed marking scheme is presented below. Before introducing the packets marking algorithm, and the attack paths reconstruction algorithm, we first introduce the underlying basic mathematical theory.

$$\begin{bmatrix} 1 & x_1 & x_1^2 & \cdots & x_1^{n-1} \\ 1 & x_2 & x_2^2 & \cdots & x_2^{n-1} \\ \cdots & \cdots & \cdots & \cdots & \cdots \\ 1 & x_n & x_n^2 & \cdots & x_n^{n-1} \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} A_1 \\ A_2 \\ \cdots \\ A_n \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} Fullpath_1 \\ Fullpath_2 \\ \cdots \\ Fullpath_n \end{bmatrix}$$

3.2.1 Basic Mathematical Theory

The above is a matrix equation (or system of equations) with Vandermonde matrix coefficients. In linear algebra, there is a theorem stating that the above matrix equation, with A_i 's unknown, has a unique solution if and only if the x_i 's are distinct [12]. By applying field theory to the above theorem, we can obtain a similar theorem over *GF(p)*, where *GF* denotes Galios Field and p is a prime number if the x_i 's and $Fullpath_i$'s are elements in *GF(p)* [7].

In the context of algebraic marking scheme proposed by Dean, *et al.*, the above matrix equation represents a sub-path or full path along which the attack packets traversed. Each full path value $Fullpath_i$ is represented by n *IP* addresses $A_1...A_n$ of the routers which form the attack path. The markings in each marked packet include the *Fullpath* value and the corresponding value of x. So each *Fullpath* value captures the information of a path represented by the *IP* addresses of the underlying routers. The reconstruction of an attack path would involve using *Fullpath* markings for n routers from n packets each with a distinct value of x. The n *Fullpath* markings correspond to n polynomials equations for n unknown *IP* addresses of n routers. Mathematically, the n unknown router *IP* addresses can be solved with n relevant equations.

Instead of encoding the whole attack path, the algebraic marking scheme proposed in this paper encodes only one edge of a path in a packet. An edge consists of two adjacent routers on an attack path through which the packet traversed to the victim. In order to reduce the number of bits for a *Fullpath* marking, each *IP* address is split into 4 fragments. In our proposed marking scheme, the above matrix equation has been modified to the following form:

$$\begin{bmatrix} 1 & x_1 & x_1^2 & \cdots & x_1^7 \\ 1 & x_2 & x_2^2 & \cdots & x_2^7 \\ \cdots & \cdots & \cdots & \cdots & \cdots \\ 1 & x_8 & x_8^2 & \cdots & x_8^7 \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} A_{1,1} \\ A_{1,2} \\ \cdots \\ A_{2,4} \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} Fullpath_1 \\ Fullpath_2 \\ \cdots \\ Fullpath_8 \end{bmatrix}$$

The matrix equation now represents 8 polynomials which encode an edge formed by two adjacent routers, referred to as the first (or start) router and second (or end) router; where $A_{1,1}...A_{1,4}$ and $A_{2,1}...A_{2,4}$ represent the four *IP* address fragments of the first router and the four *IP* address fragments of the second router respectively; $x_1...x_8$ represent 8 distinct random integers, one for each marked packet.

3.2.2 Packet Marking

Similar to other marking schemes, our method involves writing partial path information into the packets' *IP* headers by the routers and reconstructing the attack paths by the victim. The information recorded in each marked packet includes three integer values: x, *distance* and *Fullpath*; x is a packet related value; *distance* is the distance between the start router of the edge in the marking and the victim. To reduce the value of *Fullpath*, we

split a router R_i 's *IP* address into c identical fragments, and use $A_{i,j}$ (j = 1, 2,...,c) to denote the value of each fragment. For example, if router R_1 's *IP* address is 137.189.89.101 and we split it into 4 fragments, then $A_{1,1}$ = 137, $A_{1,2}$ = 189, $A_{1,3}$ = 89, and $A_{1,4}$ = 101. Using c equal to 4 is an eclectic choice while considering the bits needed to store the *Fullpath* value, and the reconstruction time. The idea behind the proposed packet marking is similar to edge sampling. Consider a packet being marked respectively by any two consecutive routers R_i and R_j; that is, R_i and R_j would become the start router and end router of the edge respectively in the marking. Router R_i may compute the *Fullpath* as follows:

$$Fullpath = (A_{i,1} + A_{i,2}x + A_{i,3}x^2 + A_{i,4}x^3) \bmod p.$$

Then router R_j may compute the *Fullpath* for the edge as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} & Fullpath \\ = \; & (Fullpath + A_{j,1}x^4 + A_{j,2}x^5 + A_{j,3}x^6 + A_{j,4}x^7) \\ = \; & (A_{i,1} + A_{i,2}x + A_{i,3}x^2 + A_{i,4}x^3 + A_{j,1}x^4 \\ & \quad + A_{j,2}x^5 + A_{j,3}x^6 + A_{j,4}x^7) \bmod p, \end{aligned}$$

where p is the smallest prime number larger than $255(2^8$-1), *i.e.* 257. If R_i is adjacent to the victim, the last 4 terms of *Fullpath* for R_j would be omitted. The aim of mod p in the above formulae is to reduce the value of *Fullpath* so that it would occupy fewer bits in the *IP* header.

```
Packet marking procedure
for each packet P {
   generate a random number u [0, 1) ;
      if (u ≤ q ) { // start router R'
         // q is the marking probability of each router
         P.distance = 0;
         select an integer x in the range 0..7;
         P.x = x ; // each packet P is assigned one value of x
         Fullpath = (A1,1 + A1,2x + A1,3x^2 + A1,4x^3) mod p;
      }
      else {
         if (P.distance == 0) {// end router R
            Fullpath = (Fullpath + A2,1x^4 + A2,2x^5
                     + A2,3x^6 + A2,4x^7) mod p;
          // x is from a packet marked by an upstream router
            P.distance = P.distance + 1;
         }
         else if (P.distance > 0) P.distance =P.distance+1;
               else call error_handler;
      }
}
```

Figure 2: Packet marking algorithm

Figure 2 depicts the packets marking algorithm, with c equal to 4; we also assume c equal to 4 in the following sub-sections.

Figure 3 illustrates the marking procedure; F and d denote *Fullpath* and distance respectively; v' represents

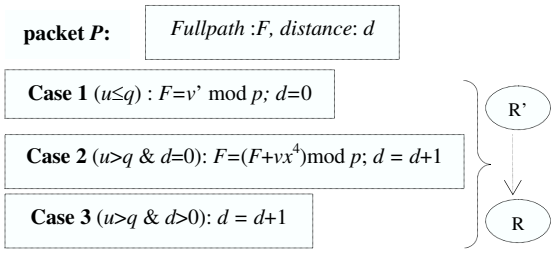

Figure 3: Packet marking illustration at start or end router.F and d denote *Fullpath* and distance respectively, $v' = A_{1,1} + A_{1,2}x + A_{1,3}x^2 + A_{1,4}x^3, v = A_{2,1} + A_{2,2}x + A_{2,3}x^2 + A_{2,4}x^3$; R' is an upstream router of R

the value of $A_{1,1} + A_{1,2}x + A_{1,3}x^2 + A_{1,4}x^3$ for router R', where $A_{1,i}$'s(i = 1, 2, 3, 4) are the 4 fragments of the *IP* address of R'. When router R receives a packet from its upstream router R', it first generates a random number u and performs packet marking depending on the value of u, and the distance d from the packet.

As an example, let the *IP* address of router R be 192.168.10.5 and the values of (F, d, x) from the packet being marked are (133, d, 2). Router R would first generate a random number u. Then the marking algorithm would produce one of the 3 possible outcomes:

- Case 1 ($u \leq q$): Suppose the randomly selected x is 3.

  Then, $F = (192 + 168 * 3 + 10 * 3^2 + 5 * 3^3) \bmod 257 = 150$, $d = 0$.

- Case 2 ($u > q \& d = 0$): Assume d from packet is 0.

  $F = (133 + (192 + 168 * 2 + 10 * 2^2 + 5 * 2^3) * 2^4) \bmod 257 = 95, d = 1$.

- Case 3 ($u > q \& d > 0$): Increment d by 1.

When 8 (or 4) packets with distinct x's arrive at the victim, the victim can solve the relevant matrix equation in Section 3.2.1 to obtain the *IP* addresses (or address) of two adjacent routers (or the nearest router to the victim) in the attack path. Therefore, we use a set of 8 distinct x's (0-7) to do the marking. The distance field in the packet indicates the number of routers the packet has traversed from the router which first marked the packet (without being re-marked afterwards) to the victim. An attacker could insert fake marks which may remain unchanged in the packets. Using such a scheme, any packet written by the attacker will have distance field greater than or equal to the length of the real attack path because of the mandatory increment of the distance field. The distance field allows a victim to check if the distance value corresponds to the actual distance of the particular edge, represented by the mark, to the victim. So, with the help of an upstream internet map, and the distance field, the victim can easily check if the edge, represented by the packet mark, in the map and the distance value are

compatible during the hop by hop reconstruction process. If they are not compatible, it implies that the marking is a fake one. Thus the inclusion of the distance field helps to improve the *robustness* of the proposed method.

3.2.3 Attacks Paths Reconstruction

There is no simple means to group the packets coming from the same path. It will involve a high computation overhead if we check all possible combinations of the marked packets similar to the probabilistic marking scheme [14]. Therefore, we resort to using an *upstream routers map* of the victim to simplify attacks paths reconstruction. As pointed out by Song and Perrig, it is quite easy to obtain and maintain such an *upstream routers map* [16]. After receiving enough marked packets, the victim can reconstruct all the attack paths by using the algorithm as presented in Figure 4.

Figures 5 and 6 are used to illustrate the reconstruction algorithm. Figure 5 shows the initial stage of the attack paths reconstruction, starting from the routers adjacent to the victim. The algorithm first identifies the nearest routers in layer 1 (its distance from the victim is 0). The routers in layer 1 can be found by using the packets from the packet set P_0 (for d=0) since all packets are grouped by distance d. The table on the left side of Figure 5 depicts the packets in each subset $P_{0,x}$ of P_0. For each adjacent upstream router R_i of V in the *upstream routers map* M, and for each packet subset $P_{0,x}(x = 0...7)$, a path value can be computed; for instance, the path value for R_1 can be computed as $path = (A_{1,1} + A_{1,2}x + A_{1,3}x^2 + A_{1,4}x^3) \bmod p$.

Then search for a packet from $P_{0,x}$ with *Fullpath* equal to the computed *path* value. If there are 4 packet subsets each having at least one packet with *Fullpath* equal to the *path* value, we can conclude that the selected router is on one of the attack paths and insert it in the reconstructed attack graph.

Figure 6 shows how to reconstruct the attack paths by identifying the routers in other layers after finding the routers in the first layer. Suppose an attack path has been reconstructed from the victim to router R_j in layer i (whose distance to the victim is i-1). Now, we need to identify its upstream router R_k in layer i+1 by using the packets from the set P_i. The table on the left side of Figure 6 depicts the packets in each packet subset $P_{i,x}$. For each upstream router R_k next to R_j in M, and for each packet subset $P_{i,x}$ (x=0..7), the value for *path* can be computed as follows:

$$path = (A_{1,1} + A_{1,2}x + A_{1,3}x^2 + A_{1,4}x^3 + A_{2,1}x^4 + A_{2,2}x^5 + A_{2,3}x^6 + A_{2,4}x^7) \bmod p.$$

If *path* is equal to *Fullpath* from any packet in $P_{i,x}$, we move to another packet subset $P_{i,x+1}$. If there is no single packet in $P_{i,x}$ having a *Fullpath* value equal to *path*, we can declare that the selected router is not on the attack paths involving routers in this layer (it could be on the paths involving other layers). If each of the 8 packet subsets has at least one packet with its *Fullpath* value equal to *path*, we can conclude that the selected router is on one of the attack paths and insert it into the reconstructed

Reconstruction algorithm

```
/* Let M denote the upstream routers map;
Let G denote the reconstructed attack graph and be initialized with one node V for the victim;
Let P_d denote a set of packets with distance d (0 ≤ d ≤ maxd) and P_d,k denote a subset of P_d with x = k;
maxd is the distance from the furthest attack source to the victim; */
for each direct upstream router R of V in M {
   count = 0; k = 0;
   while (count <4 && k < 8) { x = k;
      path = (A1,1 + A1,2x + A1,3x^2 + A1,4x^3) mod p
      // A1,j (j = 1, 2, 3, 4) form the IP address of R
      // x and Fullpath are from the packet
      for each packet in P0,k {
        if (path ==Fullpath){
            count=count+1; quit this loop; }
      k=k+1; }
   if (count == 4) insert R into G next to V;
}
for d = 1 to maxd
   for each router R inserted into G in the last loop {
      for each upstream router R' of R in M{
         k = 0;
         while (k < 8){ x = k; found = false;
            path = (A1,1 + A1,2x + A1,3x^2 + A1,4x^3 + A2,1x^4
                  + A2,2x^5 + A2,3x^6 + A2,4x^7) mod p
            // A1,j (j = 1, 2, 3, 4) form the IP address of R'
            // A2,j (j = 1, 2, 3, 4) form the IP address of R
            for each packet in Pd,k {
              if (path == Fullpath ) {k = k + 1;
                  found = true; quit the present for loop} }
             if not found {quit while loop};
             if (k == 8) insert R' into G next to R;   }
   }}
Output the reconstructed attack paths from graph G
```

Figure 4: Attack paths reconstruction algorithm

$P_{d,x}$	d	F	x
$P_{0,0}$	0	F_{01}	0
	…	…	…
	0	F_{0a}	0
$P_{0,1}$	0	F_{11}	1
	…	…	…
	0	F_{1b}	1
…	…	…	…
$P_{0,7}$	0	F_{71}	7
	…	…	…
	0	F_{7h}	7

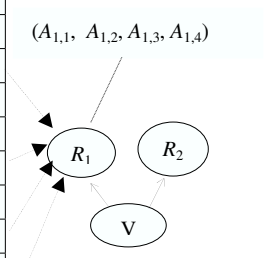

Figure 5: Reconstruction Illustration 1. F and d denote *Fullpath* and distance respectively. R_1, R_2 are upstream routers of V

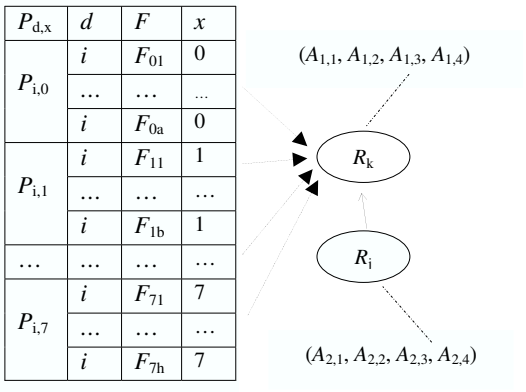

Figure 6: Reconstruction illustration 2. F and d denote *Fullpath* and distance respectively. R_k is an upstream router of R_j

attack graph.

With the proposed reconstruction algorithm, we can reconstruct multiple attack paths by examining the routers on the victim's *upstream routers map*, starting from the routers adjacent to the victim, and adding routers to the reconstructed attack graph hop by hop until the ends of the paths have been reached. Note that to identify each router nearest to the victim on an attack path, four packets are used; whereas to identify two adjacent routers, eight packets are used.

4 Analysis

The evaluation of a marking scheme for *IP* traceback is normally based on a number of parameters, including number of false positives, minimum number of packets needed to reconstruct each path, marking and reconstruction overheads, backward compatibility, *etc.* In the following sub-sections, we analyze our proposed *IP* traceback method based on the above-mentioned parameters.

4.1 Number of Positives

The most prominent strength of our marking scheme is that no false positives are generated by the attack paths reconstruction algorithm. Any two routers with distinct *IP* addresses cannot yield the same *Fullpath* value for their packets having the same set of values for x's; in addition, any two edges formed by a router R and any two of its immediate upstream routers R_1 and R_2 will not have same *Fullpath* value in their packets. Therefore, the reconstruction algorithm will never include any irrelevant router in an attack path. Moreover, the unique paths traced by the proposed method can be proved mathematically because a *Vandermonde* matrix equation has a unique solution as long as distinct values of x's are used in solving the equation (Section 3.2.1).

Many other marking schemes produce a certain amount of false positives; for instance, some of them employ hash functions for encoding purpose, which could have a collision problem; that is, they could have the same hash value for two different *IP* addresses. The algebraic marking schemes proposed by Dean *et al.* could also have some amount of false positives (refer to [5] for details).

4.2 Minimum Number of Packets

As the minimum number of packets required to reconstruct an attack path is path independent, it can be analyzed based on a single attack path. Suppose we split an *IP* address into c identical chunks and the distance from the attacker to the victim is d. As mentioned above, we need c packets to identify each router adjacent to the victim and $2c$ packets to identify each upstream edge formed a pair of routers. For each edge, the victim should receive at least $2c$ packets with markings of the edge for attack path reconstruction. If the marking probability is q, we need at least $2c/(q(1-q)^{d-1})$ packets. For example, with c, d, and q equal to 4, 20, and 0.01 respectively, the minimum number of packets needed would be 968.

We can also evaluate an upper bound for the expected number of packets for path reconstruction. The probability that a router receives a packet having a marking with a distance d is $q(1-q)^{d-1}$. Suppose the attack path length is D. We can conservatively estimate the probability of a packet marked with a distance $d < D$ to be $q(1-q)^{D-1}$. Since the victim needs at least $2c$ packets marked with distinct values of x and *distance* from 0 to $D-1$ for reconstructing the entire path, based on the well-known *coupon collector problem* [13], we have

$$E(N) < \frac{2cln(2cD)}{q(1-q)^{D-1}}$$

where $E(N)$ denotes the expectation of the number of packets needed for attack path reconstruction.

For example, with $c = 4$, $D = 20$, $q = 0.01$, the upper bound expectation of the number of packets needed for path reconstruction would be 4242. The experimental results presented in Section 5 show that, for this case (c=4, D=20, q=0.01), the number of packets needed for path reconstruction, with a success probability of 95%, is around 3500, which is smaller than the expectation.

It is obvious that a larger value for $q(1-q)^{D-1}$ implies a smaller value for $E(N)$. In addition, it can be shown that when q is $1/D, E(N)$ reaches a minimum; and as long as q is smaller than $1/D$, the value of $E(N)$ differs by only a small amount, and q should not be smaller than 1%.

In our implementation, the x values are selected by each router in such a way that it can mark packets with markings using the 8 different values (0..7) of x relatively quickly. In this way, fewer marked packets would be required for attack paths reconstruction. Since neither any concrete packet marking schemes and attack paths reconstruction algorithms nor any implementation details were provided by Dean *et al.* [5], our proposed method cannot be compared to their marking schemes based on experiment results.

4.3 Multiple Attacks

A distributed *DoS* attack normally involves a huge number of packets being sent from multiple attack sources under the control of the attacker. The proposed packets marking algorithm performs packets marking in such a way that the attack paths reconstruction algorithm does not need to discern the packets by the paths through which they traversed to the victim. With the help of the victim's *upstream routers map*, it can uniquely identify any upstream edge formed by two adjacent routers on each path during attack paths reconstruction. Therefore, the proposed marking scheme is effective for tracing multiple attacks.

Dean *et al.* did not mention in [5] the use of an upstream network map for reconstructing the attack paths. In fact, they did not provide any concrete method for attack paths reconstruction. With their proposed marking schemes, finding the right packets for the multiple sets of polynomials representing the multiple attack paths and solving the multiple sets of polynomials mathematically could be very tedious and computationally intensive.

4.4 Marking and Reconstruction Overheads

The packet marking algorithm as shown in Figure 2 takes only a constant time to execute. Each router marks the packets with a small marking probability. When marking a packet, it computes a *Fullpath* value for a single router or for an edge involving two adjacent routers. To reduce the overhead on the computation of such *Fullpath* values, we can keep possible pre-computed *Fullpath* values in a table for each router. Then any required *Fullpath* value can be obtained by table lookup; thus, the marking overhead would become very small.

The complexity of the reconstruction algorithm as shown in Figure 4 depends on a number of parameters including the number of attack paths, the number of direct upstream edges of each router on an attack path, the number of packets collected in each packet set for a certain distance from the victim, the time to compute *path* values during the reconstruction process, *etc.* The reconstruction is done hop by hop, starting from the routers closest to the victim. To check if a certain edge is on an attack path, we need to compute 8 *path* values; overall, it is quite fast.

Compared to the probabilistic marking scheme of Savage *et al.* [14] and Dean *et al.* [5], checking each direct edge (from the *upstream routers map*) of a router already found to be on a reconstructed path is much more efficient than checking all possible combinations of *IP* fragments. In addition, we can further speed up the reconstruction process by storing in a table the *path* values based on different values of x for each router. Then, instead of computing the *path* values, the reconstruction algorithm can search from the table the *path* values for any upstream router being examined; so much computation time could be reduced. Overall, the proposed paths reconstruction algorithm is quite efficient.

4.5 Backward Compatibility

Backward compatibility is an important issue concerning whether the proposed method can be put into practice. As our marking scheme involves writing some information to the *IP* header of a packet, we should find out the maximum number of bits available in an *IP* header that can be used to store the markings.

The total number of bits b needed to store the markings can be estimated by: $log_2(p)+log_2(d)+log_2(n)$; the three terms estimate the bits to store *Fullpath* (a value less than p), *distance*, and x respectively. In practice, we can set c, d, p, and n as follows: $c = 4$, $d = 32$, $p = 257$, $n = 2c = 8$.

Then the total number of bits b would be 17. The reason for setting n equal to $2c$ is that each *Fullpath* value is related to $2c$ fragments of two *IP* addresses. As long as there are $2c$ packets with distinct values of x, the next hop router can be identified. Therefore, 3 bits have been used to represent 8 distinct values of x.

There is a tradeoff between the number of packets needed for paths reconstruction and the number of bits for the markings, which depends partly on the number of *IP* address fragments, c. A smaller c implies: i) fewer packets and a shorter time would be required for attack paths reconstruction; ii) more bits would be needed since the value of each *IP* address fragment would be larger. Though the range of distinct values for x would be smaller, the total number of bits needed would be larger.

As the number of bits available in the *IP* header that can be used to store the markings is very limited, we eclectically choose c equal to 4 in our implementation. Since almost any packet can reach its destination through no more than 32 hops [19], allocating 5 bits for *distance* should be sufficient. In summary, we need only $17(> log_2(257)+log_2(32)+log_2(8))$ bits to store the markings in our marking scheme.

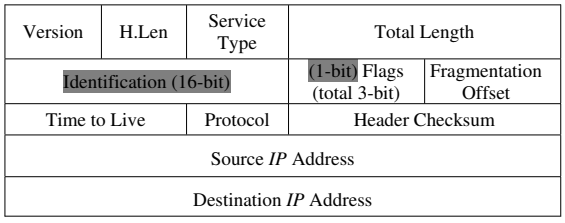

Figure 7: IPv4 header. The shaded fields (17 bits) are little used in current network design

Figure 7 shows the structure of the IPv4 header. The 16-bit *Identification* field is used to allow the destination host to determine which datagram a newly arrived packet fragment belongs to I Stoica and H.Zhang pointed out that less than 0.25% of the entire network traffic is fragments [17]; we consider that overloading the Identification

field can be backward compatible. There is also one out of three bits of the *Flags* field, which is little used in the current implementation [5]. These 17 bits could be used in the proposed marking scheme. Therefore, our marking scheme is backward compatible with current protocols and could be considered for practical use.

Nonetheless, the proposed marking scheme could not be applied directly to *IPv6*, where the *IP* header does not have the *Identification* field and the *IP* address is 128 bits. However, it is possible that there could be similar space available in the *IP* header of *IPv6*; if the space available is not sufficient, we need to partition the *IP* address into more fragments.

5 Simulation Results

We have performed a good number of simulation experiments to examine the feasibility and to assess the performance of our marking scheme. The primary objective of the experiments is to examine the following parameters related to the performance of the marking scheme: the number of false positives, the minimum number of packets needed for reconstruction, the reconstruction time, *etc.*

We prepare for the simulation experiments an *upstream routers map* with over 2000 routers. The routers are assigned some real *IP* addresses obtained from the Internet by using the *traceroute* technique. The attack paths are randomly chosen from the paths in the map; and different numbers of packets are generated and transmitted along each of these paths respectively. Each router simulates marking any packets it receives, according to our packet marking algorithm. After collecting sufficient number of marked packets, the victim simulates reconstructing the attack paths according to our proposed reconstruction algorithm. The experiment results show that the proposed marking scheme is feasible and the performance is satisfactory.

Figures 8 and 9 present two plots showing the minimum number of packets, required for reconstruction, sent by the attacker along any single path for two different marking probabilities 4% and 1% respectively, assuming the reconstruction success probability being 95%. As expected, with a smaller marking probability q, more packets would be needed for attack paths reconstruction. Each data point in each of the plots corresponds to an average of the data values obtained from over 300 independent experiments for a certain path length.

The experiment results on the minimum number of packets needed for paths reconstruction have been compared with those presented in FMS [14] and the advanced marking scheme [16] respectively. Note that such results are independent of the platforms of the experiments. When compared with FMS [14], and scheme 1 of the advanced marking scheme [16], our marking scheme requires significantly less packets for attack paths reconstruction. Our scheme is also fairly better than scheme 2 with $m > 7$ (the case of the minimum number of false positives), and

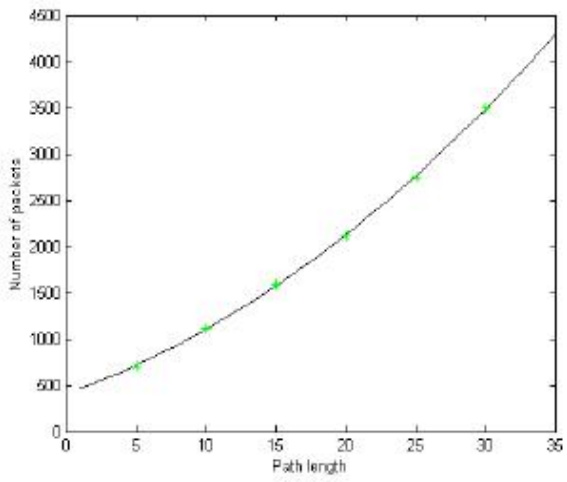

Figure 8: Minimum number of packets required for attack paths reconstruction ($q = 4\%$)

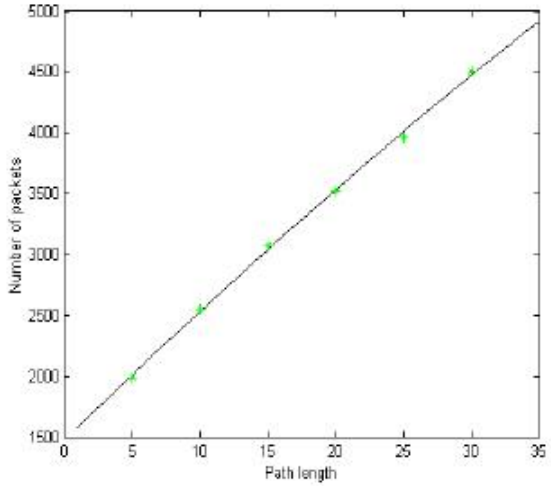

Figure 9: Minimum number of packets required for attack paths reconstruction ($q = 1\%$)

not worse than scheme 2 with $m > 6$ (the case of the second least number of false positives) of the advanced marking scheme [16].

In addition, if the number of false positives is used as a performance metric, the experiment result also confirms that our marking scheme outperforms the different versions of the advanced marking scheme [16] since our reconstruction algorithm does not generate any false positives.

We have also performed experiments to investigate how the number of packets needed for reconstruction varies for different successful reconstruction probabilities. Figure 10 shows the results based on a marking probability of 4%; the solid line, dashed line, dash-dotted line and dotted line represent the number of packets for reconstruction with a success probability of 85%, 90%, 95%, and 99% respectively. As shown in Figure 10, for a given path

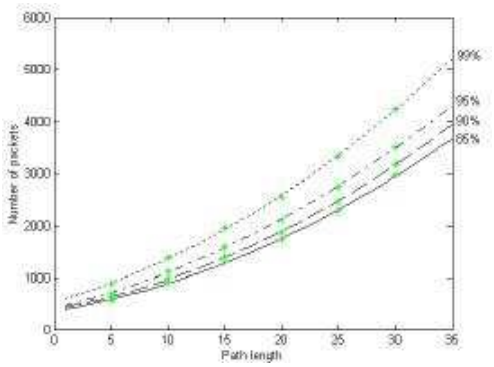

Figure 10: Minimum number of packets, with q = 4%, required for reconstruction for different success probabilities: 85%, 90%, 95%, and 99%

length the number of packets for reconstruction increases geometrically as the success probability is increased. For example, for the path length of 25, the number of packets increases from 2290 to 2470, 2740, and 3330 as reconstruction success probability increases from 85% to 90%, 95%, and 99% respectively. The figures show that the number of packets for path reconstruction increases non-linearly with the success probability. The increase in the number of packets will be more acute as the success probability approaches 100%.

In summary, if an attacker sends out more than 3000 packets along a single path whose length is generally no more than 30, the attack path could most likely be traced by our marking scheme.

Concerning the speed of attack paths reconstruction, our algorithm can reconstruct 50 distributed attack paths (path lengths ranging between 20 and 30) within 3 seconds on a 500MHz Pentium III Linux workstation. It is obviously much faster than FMS [14]. A good portion of the reconstruction time is spent on grouping the packets. When the number of received packets becomes very large, say, more than 300,000, the proposed reconstruction algorithm might take more time than does the advanced marking scheme [16]. However, in practice, the victim can simply use a subset of received packets for reconstruction if the reconstruction time is crucial; moreover, if necessary, the overhead on grouping the packets could be much reduced by using sophisticated sorting algorithms and implementation techniques.

6 Conclusion

The algebraic marking scheme proposed in this paper simplifies and improves on the algebraic marking scheme proposed by Dean *et al.* [5] by using an innovative packet marking technique which records probabilistically in each packet marking related to at most two adjacent routers' *IP* addresses. The attack paths can be reconstructed with the help of the victim's *upstream routers map*, which allows the reconstruction algorithm to be simplified and speeded up significantly. With the inclusion of a distance value in the packet, a compromised router cannot arbitrarily add a fake marking in a packet to mislead the victim. Therefore, the distance field improves the robustness of the markings. Another advantage of the proposed marking scheme is that it can trace multiple attacks efficiently. The reconstruction algorithm is not required to identify packets coming from the same path; it simply examines efficiently all upstream edges of any reconstructed router by using the *upstream routers map* to reconstruct the attack paths hop by hop, starting from the router closest to the victim. When compared to other *IP* traceback schemes, the proposed method has the advantage of being able to effectively eliminate the false positives, and to perform paths reconstruction with fewer packets from the attackers. While Dean et al. [5] did not give any concrete method for a practical implementation, this paper provides an innovative, efficient and yet practical method for the implementation of their proposed algebraic marking scheme.

One minor disadvantage of the proposed method is that it does not authenticate the markings. Therefore, a compromised router might tamper the markings of its upstream routers and make the victim reconstruct wrong paths. As a result, our marking scheme can reconstruct only a valid suffix of the real attack path, though the compromised router could be regarded as an attacker to a certain extent. As discussed in one previous section, the distance field could help to make the markings more robust. In our future work, we shall consider designing a light weight function to encode the marking with an id, which can be authenticated only by its adjacent routers. If a router cannot authenticate any markings created by its immediate upstream router, the packet could be discarded. In this way, fake markings would not be transmitted further in the network. While our proposed marking scheme is backward compatible with the present *IP* network protocols, it cannot be applied directly to *IPv6*. However, we believe that it could be modified to suit the future network protocol.

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Moon-Chuen Lee received the B.Sc. degree from University College London, the M.Sc. degree from the Imperial College of Science and Technology London, and the Ph.D. degree in Computer Science from the University of London. He is currently an Associate Professor at the Dept of Computer Science & Engineering of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. His research interests lie in the areas of content based image retrieval, multimedia applications, network security, and mobile positioning.

Yi-Jun He received B.Sc. degree in computer science from Hunan University of Science and Technology, and the M.S. degree in computer science from Central South University, Hunan, China. She was a Research Assistant in the Department of Computer Science and Engineering of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Her research interests include network security, wireless communications and cryptography.

Zhaole Chen received the Master of Philosophy degree in Computer Science from the Chinese University of Hong Kong. His major research interest is the area of network security.