Advanced Systems Security: Linux Security Modules

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Linux Authorization circa 2000

- Linux implements discretionary access control
Linux Security circa 2000

- Patches to the Linux kernel
  - Enforce different access control policy
    - Restrict root processes
  - Some hardening
- Argus PitBull
  - Limited permissions for root services
- RSBAC
  - MAC enforcement and virus scanning
- grsecurity
  - RBAC MAC system
  - Auditing, buffer overflow prevention, /tmp race protection, etc
- LIDS
  - MAC system for root confinement
Linus’ Dilemna

SELinux, DTE, MAC, …hmmmm

What is the right solution?
The Answer

- The solution to all computer science problems

- Add another layer of indirection
Linux Security Modules Was Born

“to allow Linux to support a variety of security models, so that security developers don't have to have the ‘my dog's bigger than your dog’ argument, and users can choose the security model that suits their needs.”, Crispin Cowan

Linux Before and After

Before LSM

- Linux
  - DTE
  - DAC
  - MAC

Access control models implemented as Kernel patches

After LSM

- Linux
  - LSM interface
  - DTE
  - DAC
  - MAC

Access control models implemented as Loadable Kernel Modules
LSM Requirements

- LSM needs to reach a balance between kernel developer and security developers requirements. LSM needs to unify the functional needs of as many security projects as possible, while minimizing the impact on the Linux kernel.
  - Truly generic
  - conceptually simple
  - minimally invasive
  - Efficient
  - Support for POSIX capabilities
  - Support the implementation of as many access control models as Loadable Kernel Modules
LSM – A Reference Monitor

- To enforce mandatory access control
  - We need to develop an authorization mechanism that satisfies the reference monitor concept

- How do we do that?
  - And satisfy all the other goals?
LSM – Complete Mediation

• First requirement is complete mediation

• Add security hooks to mediate various operations in the kernel
  ‣ These hooks invoke functions defined by the chosen module

• These hooks construct “authorization queries” that are passed to the module
  ‣ Subject, Object, Operations
 LSM Hooks

- Function calls that can be overridden by security modules to manage security fields and mediate access to Kernel objects.

- Hooks called via function pointers stored in `security->ops table`

- Hooks are primarily “restrictive”
LSM Hooks

```c
#include <linux/fs.h>

ssize_t vfs_read(...) {
    ...  
    ret = security_file_permission(file, ...);
    if (!ret) {
        ret = file->f_op->read(file, ...);
    }
    ...  
}
```
LSM – Complete Mediation

- First requirement is complete mediation
- Enables authorization by module
- Linux extends “sensitive data types” with opaque security fields
  - Modules manage these fields – e.g., store security labels
- Which Linux data types are sensitive?
LSM Security Fields

- Enable security modules to associate security information to Kernel objects
  - Implemented as void* pointers
- Completely managed by security modules
- What to do about object created before the security module is loaded?
LSM – Complete Mediation

- First requirement is **complete mediation**
- How do we know LSM implements complete mediation?
- Asked one of the lead developers (Cowan)
  - His reply?
LSM – Complete Mediation

- First requirement is complete mediation
- How do we know LSM implements complete mediation?
- Asked one of the lead developers (Cowan)
  - His reply?
- “We don’t”
LSM Analysis

- **Static analysis** of Zhang, Edwards, and Jaeger [USENIX Security 2002]
  - Based on a tool called CQUAL

- **Approach**
  - Objects of particular types can be in two states
    - Checked, Unchecked
  - All objects in a “security-sensitive operation” must be checked
    - Structure member access on some types
LSM Analysis

- Static analysis of Zhang, Edwards, and Jaeger [USENIX Security 2002]
  - Based on a tool called CQUAL
- Found a TOCTTOU vulnerability
  - Authorize filp in sys_fcntl
  - But pass fd again to fcntl_getlk
- Many supplementary analyses were necessary to support CQUAL
LSM Analysis

- **Runtime analysis** of Edwards, Zhang, and Jaeger [ACM CCS 2002]
  - Built a runtime kernel monitor
  - Logs structure member accesses and LSM hook calls
  - Rules describe expected consistency
- **Good for finding missing hooks where one is specified**
  - Six cases were found
LSM Analysis

- Automatically inferring security specifications from code – Tan, Zhang, Ma, Xiong, Zhou [USENIX Security 2008]
  - Automate look at which functions are behind pointers

Security check

```
linux/fs/read_write.c:
ssize_t vfs_read(...) {
    ...
    ret = security_file_permission(file, ...);
    if (!ret) {
        ret = file->f_op->read(file, ...);
    }
    ...
}
```

```
linux/fs/readdir.c:
ssize_t vfs_readdir(...) {
    ...
    ret = security_file_permission(file, ...);
    if (!ret) {
        ret = file->f_op->readdir(file, ...);
    }
    ...
}
```

```
linux/fs/read_write.c:
ssize_t do_read_write(...) {
    ...
    ret = file->f_op->readv(file, ...);
    ...
}
```

Forgot to call `security_file_permission()`.

Same security sensitive operation: file read/write
LSM – Tamperproof

• Second requirement is tamperproof
• Prevent adversaries from modifying the reference monitor code or data
• How is LSM code protected?
• How is LSM data protected?
LSM – Tamperproof

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- Prevent adversaries from modifying the reference monitor code or data
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LSM – Tamperproof

- Second requirement is tamperproof
- Add functions to register and unregister Linux Security Modules
  - Implemented as a set of function pointers defined at registration time
- LSM module defines code
- LSM function pointers define targets of hooks
  - These are data – modifiable
- Implications?
LSM – Tamperproof

• Second requirement is tamperproof

• Add functions to register and unregister Linux Security Modules
  ‣ Implemented as a set of function pointers defined at registration time

• Adversaries could modify the code executed by Linux by modifying these function pointer data values
  ‣ Some people opposed this idea and refused to participate
  ‣ Eventually changed to require compiled-in LSM modules
LSM API

Linux Kernel

Hook

Object (Label)

SysFS

Load Policy

Register/Unregister

Syscall

Define
LSM Tasks

- Linux Kernel modified in 5 ways:
  - Opaque security fields added to certain kernel data structures
  - Security hook function calls inserted at various points with the kernel code
  - A generic security system call added
  - Function to allow modules to register and unregistered as security modules
  - Move capabilities logic into an optional security module
Hook Details

- Difference from discretionary controls
  - More object types
    - 29 different object types
    - Per packet, superblock, shared memory, processes
    - Different types of files
  - Finer-grained operations
    - File: ioctl, create, getattr, setattr, lock, append, unlink,
  - System labeling
    - Not dependent on user
  - Authorization and policy defined by module
    - Not defined by the kernel
LSM Performance

- Microbenchmark: LMBench
  - Compare standard Linux Kernel 2.5.15 with Linux Kernel with LSM patch and a default capabilities module
    - Worst case overhead is 5.1%

- Macrobenchmark: Kernel Compilation
  - Worst case 0.3%

- Macrobenchmark: Webstone
  - With Netfilter hooks 5-7%
  - Uni-Processor 16%
  - SMP 21% overhead
LSM Use

- Available in Linux 2.6
  - Packet-level controls upstreamed in 2.6.16
- Modules
  - POSIX Capabilities module
  - SELinux module
  - Domain and Type Enforcement
  - Openwall, includes grsecurity function
  - LIDS
  - AppArmor
- Not everyone is in favor
  - How does LSM impact system hardening?
Take Away

• Aiming for mandatory controls in Linux
  ‣ But everyone had their own approach

• Linux Security Modules is a general interface for any* authorization module
  ‣ Much finer controls – interface is union of what everyone can do

• What does this effort say about
  • Achieving complete mediation?
  • Whether complete mediation should be policy-dependent?