CIS 610: Advanced Topics in Systems Security
Virtual Machine Systems

Prof. Kevin Butler

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Where are we?

• OS Security from Reference Monitor perspective
  ‣ Mediation
    • LSM
  ‣ Tamperproof
    • Linux and TCB
  ‣ Simple enough to verify
    • Correct code
    • Correct policy
Basis for OS Security

- **Isolation**
  - A *protection domain* defines a boundary of isolation

- **Based on**
  - Rings
  - Address spaces
  - Access control policy

- **Do these work in modern OSes?**
Virtual Machine Systems

- Protection domain is extended to operating systems on one physical platform
  - Invented for resource utilization
- But, also provide a potential security benefit due to default
  - ISOLATION
- How does VM isolation differ from OS isolation?
Virtual Machine Security

- Rather than using system software to facilitate sharing between VMs, enforce isolation.

- Virtualization:
  - “A technique for hiding the physical characteristics of computing resources from the way in which other systems, applications, and end users interact with those resources.”

- Virtual machine: single physical resource can appear to be multiple logical resources.
VM Architectures

• Full system simulation
  ‣ simulate operation of the CPU (e.g., Bochs, QEMU)

• Paravirtualization
  ‣ VM has special API, requires OS changes (e.g., Xen)

• Full/Native virtualization
  ‣ support from hardware not requiring OS changes (e.g., VMWare, Xen running on processor with Intel VT extensions)

• Application Virtualization
  ‣ application API (e.g., JVM)
VM Types

• Type 1
  ‣ lowest-level, “bare metal” VMM
  ‣ e.g., Xen, VAX VM

• Type 2
  ‣ Runs on host operating system
  ‣ e.g., VirtualBox, KVM, JVM

• What are the trust issues with Type 2 VMMs compared to Type 1?
VM Systems and Ref Monitor

- How does a VM System improve ability to achieve reference monitor guarantees?
VM Systems and Ref Monitor

- How does a VM System improve ability to achieve reference monitor guarantees?
- Mediation
  - Mediation between VM interactions
- Tamperproof
  - Protection boundaries between OS
- Simple Enough to Verify
  - Code that needs to be correct?
  - Policy
VAX VMM

- A 1-assured VMM system
- Carefully crafted VMM
- Mediation
  - VM interaction
- Tamperproof
  - Minimal TCB
- Simple enough to verify
  - Code assurance
  - Policy assurance: MLS policy, Biba policy, privileges
VAX VMM Reference Monitor

- Key design tasks
  - Virtualize processor
    - Make all sensitive instructions privileged
  - More rings
    - Need a new ring for the VMM
  - I/O emulation
  - Self-virtualizable
- What components constitute the VAX VMM reference monitor?
VAX VMM Design

Diagram:
- Applications (Top Secret)
  - Ultrix OS
- Applications (Secret)
  - VMS OS
- Applications (Unclassified)
  - VMS OS

VMM Security Kernel
- Memory Device
- Disk Device
- Print Device
- Display Device
...

Oregon Systems Infrastructure Research and Information Security (OSIRIS) Lab
VAX VMM Policy

- MLS
  - Control secrecy
- Biba
  - Control integrity
- Privileges
  - Exceptional accesses
  - Audited
  - There are more of these than meets the eye!
- How is the protection state modified?
VAX VMM Evaluation

- **Mediation**: ensure all security-sensitive operations are mediated?
  - Virtualizing instructions, I/O emulation
  - VM-level operations? Privileges

- **Mediation**: mediate all resources?
  - VMM level

- **Mediation**: verify complete mediation?
  - AI-assured at VMM level
VAX VMM Evaluation

- **Tamperproof**: protect VMM?
  - Similar to Multics (no gatekeepers, but some kind of filters); authentication in VMM; protection system ops in VMM; fixed system?

- **Tamperproof**: protect TCB?
  - All trusted code at ring 0; trusted path from VMs for admin;

- **Verification**: verify code?
  - A1-assured at VMM level

- **Verification**: verify policy?
  - MLS and Biba express goals and policy; Privileges are ad hoc
Despite AI assurance, still several challenges in VAX VMM system:

- Device driver management; no network
- Amount of assembler code
- Covert channel countermeasures
- Implications of ‘privileges’

Nonetheless, interesting mechanisms:

- Trusted path administration
- Architecture of VMM
- Virtualization for security
Modern VM Systems

- The development of a virtual machine monitor for x86 systems unleashed VMs on the masses
  - Why did this take so long?
- VMware, Xen, KVM, NetTop, …
  - Everyone is a virtual machine monitor now
- How do we implement a reference validation mechanism for these systems?
  - What granularity of control?
Isolation and Network

- VMware and NetTop assume that the VMM (and privileged VM) will isolate guest VMs.
- Then, the problem is to control inter-VM communication.
  - Only other communication is via the network.
- VMware uses network layer.
  - Also supports VMCI for direct communication between VMs.
- NetTop is built on VMware where only VMs of the same label may communicate.
VMs as Processes

- Type II VM systems can treat VMs as processes
- **KVM** uses SELinux to control access of VMs as if they are a process
  - VMs are processes to the host OS
  - VMs can access host OS resources (files)
- Uses SELinux to control VM access
Control of VMM Resources

- There are many virtual machine monitor resources that may be used to communicate
  - Memory, devices, IPC, …
- **sHype** adds reference monitor for some objects (IPC) and the privileged VM uses for networking
- **Xen Security Modules (XSM)** adds reference validation on the Xen hypervisor’s distribution of these resources
  - Less trust in privileged VMs, so finer-grained policy results
- Minimizing TCB versus simplicity
Xen as a Reference Monitor?

- Reference Monitor
  - XSM in Xen
  - Scope includes dom0 Linux and user-level

- Mediation
  - XSM to control VMM operations
  - SELinux in dom0; use network to communicate

- Tamperproof
  - Xen has a much larger TCB, and more flexible

- Verification
  - Code – lots
  - Policy – SELinux style
Conventional OS vs VM System

- **Conventional OS**
  - Broken easily and often

- **VM system**
  - Coarser control based on isolation

- If we trust the VM system and don’t trust the OS, what can we do?
Untrusted OS

- Don’t trust OS, but need its services
- Run programs on a specialized, trusted system
  - But use conventional OS like an untrusted network
- Run programs directly on VMM
  - But use conventional OS like an untrusted network
  - (must use more OS)
- How do we accomplish these options?
Options

- **Microkernels**
  - Reduce code running in kernel mode
  - But, need the same services
  - These are just as “trusted” running in user-space

- **SELinux/AppArmor/Trusted Solaris**
  - What do you think?

- **Isolate in VM systems (e.g., Terra)**
  - Can deploy an application on a custom OS
  - Still have to trust all services used though
A solution should…

• Ease Adoption
  ‣ It is usable…

• Support Diverse Applications
  ‣ …to a lot of people…

• Have an Incremental Path to Higher Assurance
  ‣ …also.
Splitting Interfaces

Solution

• Separate application from other apps/kernel
  – Use separate VM for app with a Private OS separate from Commodity OS

• Provide interaction between apps/kernel in a secure way
  – Application developer decides what is sensitive and what is not
    • Separate sensitive part into VM on Private OS
    • Public part remains on Commodity OS
    • Interaction between apps also passes through kernel (e.g. pipe(), mkfifo())
      • Sensitive part communicates through system calls with other apps
  – Use policy to decide if system calls are to be performed on commodity OS or private OS
Proxos Architecture

Diagram showing the Proxos Architecture with two sections: Private VM and Commodity OS VM. The Private VM includes Private OS Methods, Private Application, and Proxos. The Commodity OS VM includes Other Applications, Host Process, Commodity OS Kernel, and VMM. The diagram illustrates how trusted system calls are routed to private OS methods, while untrusted system calls are routed to the commodity OS kernel. Private apps can interact with other apps via the host process, and all apps can access commodity OS resources.
Proxos Guarantees

• Assumption
  – VMM enforces separation
  – Application developer correctly specifies routing rules

• Guarantee
  – Confidentiality and integrity of sensitive private application data inspite of malicious commodity OS
    • VMM => No direct interference possible
    • Commodity OS can interfere with system calls routed to it, which are not security-sensitive
  – Availability not guaranteed
Proxos Implementation

Host Process

\texttt{pr\_execve(app\_name)}

Linux Kernel

Allocate shared mem
Pass (app\_name, addr of shared mem) to VMM
Start private VM

VMM/dom0

VMM creates private VM, gives it shared mem addr
Associate VMID with addr
Return VMID

Private VM

Maps syscall shared mem into addr space

When private VM gives map request, checks if VMID corresponds to addr

Associates VMID with PID of host for identifying future syscalls
Proxos Implementation

Private VM
- Private Application
- Proxos

Commodity OS VM
- Host Process
- Linux Kernel
- Interrupt Handler

Shared Buffer
- Return Value

Xen VMM
Proxos SSH Server

Private VM
- Private OS
  - Passwords
  - Host Keys
- SSH Server
  - Encrypt
  - Proxos

Commodity OS VM
- Host Process
- Linux Kernel
- Command Shell
- Pipe

Network
Compare to Privilege Separation

Partitioning Interfaces to Resources

Private SSH Server
- Linux OS
  - SSH listening parent
  - Command Shell
  - encrypted Traffic
  - Set up pipe & start shell
- Private SSH Server
  - Private Application VM

Partitioning Code (Provos et al)
- Network connection
  - fork unprivileged child
  - Monitor
    - Request Auth
      - Auth Result
    - State Export
      - fork user child
    - Pass PTY
- Monitor
  - user priviledged OpenSSH
    - User Request Processing
  - Key Exchange
    - Authentication
  - User Network Data
Remaining Problem

- Deploying a custom OS is painful
  - Building a special kernel is non-trivial
- And it may not be secure itself
  - Still need a methodology to determine code correctness and tamperproofing
- What if you want to eliminate trust in the OS altogether?
Insight: Shadowing Memory

- VMMs need to manage physical to virtual mapping of memory
- This is done with a shadow page table
- Multi-shadowing give context aware views of this memory
  - Use encryption instead
Memory Cloaking

• Not new idea
  ‣ XOM, LT

• Leverage power of VMMs

• Encrypt the pages in memory
  ‣ (IV, H) meta data

• This is used for writes to disk too
  ‣ How do we store the metadata?
Overshadow

- Mediate all application interaction with OS to ensure correct cloaking of memory
  - Context Identification
  - Secure Control Transfer
  - System Call Adaptation
  - Mapping Cloaked Resources
  - Managing Protection Metadata
• The key to overshadow is the **Shim**
  ‣ Manages transitions to and from VMM via a hypercall

• **Shim Memory** protects application
  ‣ CTC protects control registers

• **Uncloaked Shim**
  ‣ Neutral ground
  ‣ Trampoline!
Loading Applications

- The Shim uses a **Loader** program
- Sets up the cloaked memory with a hypercall
- The loader / shim must be trusted
  - Metadata on the CTC checks for compromise
  - Here is the **meat** of the problem
    - Is it even used?
- Propagate shims to spawned applications
Its not that easy…

- Lot of OS interfaces that must be handled
- Faults / Interrupts
- System Calls
  - Pass control to the VMM
  - The shim catches this and stores registers
    - Clear the registers to prevent side channels
Complex Syscalls

- Some syscalls are easy
  - No side effects
  - Nice, getpid, sync
- Others, less so...
  - Pipe, r/w (Zero data)
  - Clone
  - Fork
  - Signal Handling
Performance

- **Microbenchmarks**
  - Not so hot 15-60%
  - Although a lot better than Proxos

- **Application Benchmarks**
  - SPEC isn’t so bad
  - High bandwidth hits some bottlenecks
  - Why?
Take Away

- VM Systems provide isolation
  - Between OSes/apps that may be untrusted
- VM Systems enable a small TCB
  - Type 1 VMMs
    - A1-Assured, like VAX VMM
- VM Systems can mediate inter-VM actions
  - Virtualized operations
  - Inter-VM operations
Take Away

• VM Systems provide isolation
  ‣ At OS granularity: some can be untrusted

• OS provides services used by applications
  ‣ Access to devices demultiplexed among VMs

• Can we use VM isolation to prevent compromise of applications by OS compromise?
  ‣ Proxos: use a “trusted” OS and redirect service requests
  ‣ Overshadow: use OS as untrusted communication media
Trusted VMs

- VMware and NetTop assume that the privileged VM (there is only one in these systems) prevents information flow (like a kernel)

- Thus, the only information flows between VMs are via networking
  - Privileged VM controls inter-VM communication via networking

- shype controls IPC and networking at hypervisor level
  - Privileged VM uses hypervisor as policy store