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Distributed Denial of Service Attacks – TCP Syn Flooding Attack Mitigation

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Abstract: In this new era of digital science, networks and their capacities are significantly growing and increasing their market values. Attackers are gradually improving their skill sets by developing powerful tools to stay ahead in the world of black hat. Distributed Denial of Service Attacks (DDoS) are most dangerous attacks with the internet services and networks which is carried out in various forms such as server crashing, router crashing, slow performance of the CPU etc. Attackers implement various techniques to launch DDoS attacks on target computers or networks. In this paper, we discussed TCP syn flooding DDoS attack and its mitigation techniques to reduce attacks effect. We present a mitigation method of the TCP syn flood DDoS attacks on the Apache server by capturing attackers IP addresses and set the TCP – RST over the continues flow of SYN+ACK. It will reduce the effect of syn flooding with customised time duration. Through this method legitimate users can maintain their connection accessibility.

Keywords: DDoS Attacks, TCP syn flooding, SYN+ACK, RST, Cyber Security, IP tables, Mitigation Techniques

I. INTRODAUCTION

Confidentiality, Integrity and Availability are the main parameters of the Information Security. Distributed Denial of Service Attack is the key factor which breaks the availability parameter [1]. Transmission Control Protocol (TCP) is the protocol through which computers can connect to the internet [2]. To achieve the internet communication, TCP talks with client and server which is known as three-way handshake. In a SYN flooding attacks, the attacker sends a large number of SYN request to the victim server. The attack creates incomplete TCP connections that use up network resources [1]. Attacker exploits the three-way handshake method [1][2]. At the beginning of this paper, we describe the Distributed Denial of Service attacks followed by the TCP syn flooding DDoS attack. In the next section details involved with threeway handshake method and TCP syn flooding method. Further we describe detection methodology and analysis of network traffic and based on this we define mitigation method to reduce the impact of the TCP syn flooding DDoS attack. We monitor three-way handshake traffic of the live network and attacker's activity who exploits the three-way handshake method and cause server down with heavy flooding traffic. We implemented RST to reduce impact of TCP syn flooding on the server and block the IPs with specific time duration.

TCP Three-way handshake

When a client wants to begin a TCP connection to a server, the client and the server exchange a series of messages, as follows:

- A TCP SYN request is sent to a server
- The server sends back a SYN+ACK (acknowledgement) in response to the request and store the request information in the memory stack. This connection is known as SYN-RECV.
- The client sends a response ACK to the server to complete the session setup. This connection is moved from the SYN-RECV to ESTABLISHED.

The above method is known as TCP three-way handshake method [3].

In figure 1 it is shown that how connection is getting establish within three messages. The way of three-way handshake process is clearly captured in the Wireshark tool for the client and server which is shown in the figure 2.

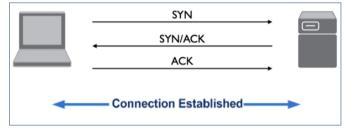


Figure 1. TCP Three-way handshake method

192.168.211.136	128.38.52.188	TCP	74 46284 > http [SYN] Seq=8
128.30.52.100	192.168.211.136	TCP	60 http > 46283 [SYN, ACK] S
192.168.211.136	128.38.52.100	TCP	54 46283 > http [ACK] Seq=1

Figure 2. Example of TCP Three-way handshake in Wireshark

II. TCP SYNFLOODING ATTACK

Behavior of the Transmission Control Protocol (TCP) is exploited by the attackers that cause Syn flooding in the network. As per three-way handshake process client will send the request to the server for connection establishment and after receiving client request, server will acknowledge the request by sending acknowledge message to the client [3].

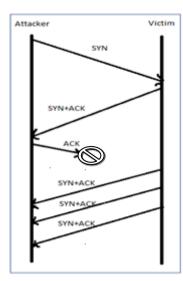


Figure 3. TCP SYN Flooding Attack

Same time, flow table entry is created and it will store receipt of the SYN packets. In the case of SYN flooding, flow table entry will be exhausted [3][4]. Attackers send connection establish request to the victim but they block the ACK as a response to the victim once they receive the SYN+ACK message from the victim which is shown in Figure 3. This is known as half open connection that cause heavy usage of victim resources resulting denial of service attack which will refuse the accessibility of the legitimate users or client.

This happens when malicious attackers send large number of SYN segments to a server by spoofing with their IP addresses. The server understand that the clients are asking for active open connection and allocates the necessary resources like creating communication tables and setting up the timer. If server is getting large number of SYN segments in short time then it runs out of resources and it may crash [5].

In order to mitigate the SYN flooding DDoS attack it is mandatory to detect and analyze the flow of flooding from the suspicious IP addresses. Mostly attackers use fake IP addresses to attack. It is necessary to monitor and captured this kind of suspicious activity in packet capture tool. Here we are going to use Wireshark packet capture tool.

In the next section, we are going to describe detection and mitigation process followed by generating DDoS SYN flooding attack.

III. METHODOLGY

A. Test bed

In order to practice DDoS SYN flood detection and mitigation we need following test environment:

- VMware Workstation to install test environment.
- Number of Ubuntu or Windows machines to generate DDoS SYN flood attacks (Acting as an attacker or legitimate clients/users).
- Ubuntu 14.04.1 machine with installed Apache2 server which will be acting as a server machine or victim.
- NMAP or ZENMAP tool to find open ports of the server machine or victim.

- Wireshark tool to capture suspicious traffic from the attacker and analysis of the captured traffic of the network after mitigation.
- PuTTY tool to check SSH connection with server after attack.
- Hping3 or Scapy script to generate TCP SYN flooding attack on the server or victim.
- Set of iptables chain.

Above environment consists of tools, operating systems and command based arguments or scripts. Operating Systems, Servers and required tools are installed in the VMware Workstation. SYN flood attacks are generated by Scapy script and with hping3 tool as per requirement of damage with respect to time duration.

In further section, we have described the generation of DDoS attack with detection analysis and mitigation results.

B. Flow of procedure

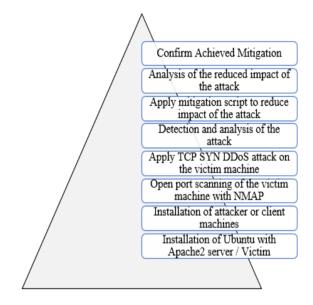


Figure 4. Flow of the Detection and Mitigation of the TCP SYN Flood

With reference of the Figure 3 we followed the steps to confirm achievement of the mitigation for TCP SYN flood attack on the top of the pyramid. We have generated SYN flood attacks on the victim server by conforming of the open ports on the victim server. By applying the mitigation method, we confirmed that reduce of the attack impact in network traffic. Mitigation script consists of following tasks:

- Set of iptables chain rules.
- Log generation with attacker IP addresses.
- Attackers identification mechanism and log into log file.
- Reducing attack impact by sending RST message.
- Setup sleeping time with respect to attack strength.

C. TCP SYN Flood attack generation

In this section, we have generated TCP SYN flood attack to flood the victim system. We have considered only two machines as an attacker. It may increase as per heavy flood requirement.

IP configuration of the attacker 1.

sneclient	:@sneclient-virtual-machine:~\$ ifconfig					
eth0	Link encap:Ethernet HWaddr 00:0c:29:47:af:86					
	inet addr: 192.168.211.141 Bcast: 192.168.211.255 Mask: 255.255.255.0					
	inet6 addr: fe80::20c:29ff:fe47:af86/64 Scope:Link					
	UP BROADCAST RUNNING MULTICAST MTU:1500 Metric:1					
	RX packets:32293 errors:0 dropped:0 overruns:0 frame:0					
	TX packets:15285 errors:0 dropped:0 overruns:0 carrier:0					
	collisions:0 txqueuelen:1000					
	RX bytes:40079734 (40.0 MB) TX bytes:1233832 (1.2 MB)					
lo	Link encap:Local Loopback					
	inet addr:127.0.0.1 Mask:255.0.0.0					
	inet6 addr: ::1/128 Scope:Host					
	UP LOOPBACK RUNNING MTU:65536 Metric:1					
	RX packets:878 errors:0 dropped:0 overruns:0 frame:0					
	TX packets:878 errors:0 dropped:0 overruns:0 carrier:0					
	collisions:0 txqueuelen:0					
	RX bytes:136879 (136.8 KB) TX bytes:136879 (136.8 KB)					
sneclient	@sneclient-virtual-machine:~\$					

Figure 5. Attacker 1 IP address

IP configuration of the attacker 2.

sneatta eth0	acker§sneattacker-virtual-machine:-\$ ifconfig Link encap:Ethernet HWaddr 00:0c:29:f9:ed:fb inet addr:[92:103:21114] Bcast:192.168.211.255 Mask:255.255.255.0 inet6 addr: fe80::20c:29ff:fef9:edfb/64 Scope:Link UP BROADCAST RUNNING MULTICAST MTU:1500 Metric:1 RX packets:10215 errors:0 dropped:0 overruns:0 frame:0 TX packets:10215 errors:0 dropped:0 overruns:0 carrier:0 collisions:0 txqueuelen:1000 RX bytes:8072075 (8.0 MB) TX bytes:737212 (737.2 KB)
10	Link encap:Local Loopback inet addr:127.0.0.1 Mask:255.0.0.0 inet6 addr: :1/128 Scope:Host UP LOOPBACK RUNNIKG MTU:65536 Metric:1 RX packets:836 errors:0 dropped:0 overruns:0 frame:0 TX packets:836 errors:0 dropped:0 overruns:0 carrier:0 collisions:0 txqueuelen:0 RX bytes:132457 (132.4 KB) TX bytes:132457 (132.4 KB)
sneatta	acker@sneattacker-virtual-machine:~\$

Figure 6. Attacker 2 IP address

Open port scan of the victim server by ZENMAP tool

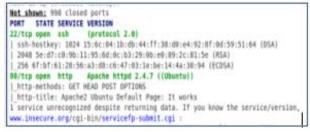


Figure 7. Port no. 22 and Port no. 80 are open for victim machine

Attackers have applied iptables rules to stop the ACK for the victim server that cause production of unnecessary SYN+ACK to the attacker for the establishment of the connection. After setting up the iptables rules attacker will generate the flood attacks.

Applied TCP SYN flood attack by Scapy script. We can generate from hping3 tool by option.

ack	1	IntField	- 1	888	(0)
dataofs		BitField	- N		(None)
reserved		BitField	- 8		(0)
flags		FlagsField	= 2		(2)
window		ShortField	- 1		(8192)
chksum		XShortField	- N		(None)
uraptr		ShortField	- 0		(none) (0)
options	-	TCPOptionsField	= {)	(())
load		StrField		Haxer SVP'	(°)
		ts in 0.3 second			
					145:58519 SA / Padding
					.145:21303 SA / Paddin
					145:15337 SA / Padding
					.145:25562 SA / Paddin
					145:13172 SA / Padding
IP	1	TCP 192.168.211.	136:http	> 192.168.211	.145:47638 SA / Paddin
RECV 2: IP	1	TCP 192.168.211.	136:ssh	> 192.168.211.	145:37523 SA / Padding
IP	1	TCP 192.168.211.	136:http	> 192.168.211	.145:29299 SA / Paddin
RECV 2: IP	1	TCP 192.168.211.	136:ssh	> 192.168.211.	145:47155 SA / Padding
IP	1	TCP 192.168.211.	136:http	> 192.168.211	.145:38894 SA / Paddin
					145:35108 SA / Padding
					.145:63785 SA / Paddin
					145:23636 SA / Padding
					.145:12105 SA / Paddin
					145:trcs SA / Padding
					.145:51336 SA / Paddin
					145:53321 SA / Padding
					.145:12140 SA / Padding
					145:12140 SA / Padding
					.145:62086 SA / Paddin
					145:41641 SA / Padding
					.145:24043 SA / Paddin
					145:62554 SA / Padding
					.145:42005 SA / Paddin
					145:23186 SA / Padding
					.145:12294 SA / Paddin
					145:18152 SA / Padding
					.145:64080 SA / Paddin
RECV 2: IP	1	TCP 192.168.211.	136:ssh	> 192.168.211.	145:9251 SA / Padding
IP	1	TCP 192.168.211.	136:http	> 192.168.211	.145:40888 SA / Paddin
RECV 2: IP	1	TCP 192.168.211.	136:ssh	> 192.168.211.	145:7381 SA / Padding
					.145:30130 SA / Paddin
					145:58542 SA / Padding
					.145:56837 SA / Paddin
					145:6196 SA / Padding
					.145:39128 SA / Paddin
		107 192.100.211.	radiurh	·	restaurant and predoction

Figure 8. Flood generated on the Victim Server machine

IV. RESULT & DISCUSSION

As result of the TCP SYN flood attack, we have captured the traffic to analyze the flood attack as following:

A. Detection of TCP SYN flood attacks on victim machine

IP configuration of the victim/server machine.

```
sneserver@sneserver-virtual-machine:-$ ifconfig
eth@ Link encap:Ethernet HWaddr 00:0c:29:21:0e:45
inet addr:1922.1038.2114.155 Mask:255.255.255.0
inet6 addr: fe80::20c:29ff:fe21:e45/64 Scope:Link
UP BROADCAST RUNNING MULTICAST MTU:1500 Metric:1
RX packets:117086 errors:0 dropped:0 overruns:0 frame:0
TX packets:57150 errors:0 dropped:0 overruns:0 carrier:0
collisions:0 txqueuelen:1000
RX bytes:16675143 (156.6 MB) TX bytes:4213683 (4.2 MB)
lo Link encap:Local Loopback
inet addr:27.0.0.1 Mask:255.0.0.0
inet6 addr:: 1/128 Scope:Host
UP LOOPBACK RUNNING MTU:65536 Metric:1
RX packets:1445 errors:0 dropped:0 overruns:0 carrier:0
collisions:0 txqueuelen:0
RX bytes:244749 (244.7 KB) TX bytes:244749 (244.7 KB)
sneserver@sneserver-virtual-machine:-$ ■
```

Figure 9. IP Address of the victim/server

After DDoS flood attack server status

tcp	0	0 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.141:64535	SYN_RECV
tcp	0	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.145:48390	SYN_RECV
tcp	0	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.141:16348	SYN_RECV
tcp	8	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.141:22711	SYN_RECV
tcp	8	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.145:47372	SYN_RECV
tcp	8	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.141:914	SYN_RECV
tcp	8	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.141:11647	SYN_RECV
tcp	8	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.141:14593	SYN_RECV
tcp	8	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.145:12303	SYN_RECV
tcp	8	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.145:46109	SYN_RECV
tcp	8	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.141:35272	SYN_RECV
tcp	8	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.145:46984	SYN_RECV
tcp	8	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.141:41917	SYN_RECV
tcp	8	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.141:48876	SYN_RECV
tcp	8	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.145:24310	SYN_RECV
tcp	0	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.141:8502	SYN_RECV
tcp	0	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.145:51918	SYN_RECV
tcp	0	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.145:10275	SYN_RECV
tcp	0	0 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.141:44079	SYN_RECV
tcp	0	0 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.145:24265	SYN_RECV
tcp	0	8 192.168.211.136;ssh	192.168.211.145:38703	SYN_RECV
tcp	0	0 192.168.211.136;ssh	192.168.211.141:15573	SYN_RECV
tcp	0	0 192.168.211.136;ssh	192.168.211.145:53470	SYN_RECV
tcp	0	0 192.168.211.136;ssh	192.168.211.145:45861	SYN_RECV
tcp	0	0 192.168.211.136;ssh	192.168.211.141:42287	SYN_RECV
tcp	0	0 192.168.211.136;ssh	192.168.211.145:56867	SYN_RECV
tcp	0	0 192.168.211.136;ssh	192.168.211.145:28559	SYN_RECV
tcp	0	0 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.141:56415	SYN_RECV
tcp	0	0 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.141:27703	SYN_RECV
tcp	0	0 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.145:50529	SYN_RECV
tcp	0	0 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.141:9186	SYN_RECV
tcp	0	0 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.141:18496	SYN_RECV
tcp	0	0 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.141:56197	SYN_RECV
tcp	8	0 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.145:31983	SYN_RECV
tcp	8	0 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.141:593	SYN_RECV
tcp	8	0 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.145:41026	SYN_RECV
tcp	8	0 192.168.211.136:ssh 0 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.145:6805 192.168.211.141:14618	SYN_RECV SYN_RECV
tcp	8	8 192.168.211.136:55h	192.168.211.141:14618	SYN_RECV SYN_RECV
tcp	8	8 192.168.211.136:55h	192.168.211.141:17188	SYN_RECV SYN_RECV
tcp	8	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.141:37669	SYN RECV
tcp	8	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.145:30524	SYN RECV
tcp	8	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.145:39524	SYN RECV
tcp	8	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.141:17249	SYN_RECV
tcp	8	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.141:47952	SYN RECV
tcp	8	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.141:22578	SYN RECV
tcp	8	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.141:22576	SYN_RECV
tcp	8	8 192.168.211.136:ssh	192.168.211.141:58826	SYN RECV
a ch		· ./c	192110012111111130020	and more

Figure 10. SYN_RECV status on server after attack

Overall traffic performance of the victim machine in kbps bandwidth

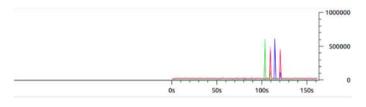


Figure 11. Victim machine performance approx. 500 kbps

B. Mitigation of TCP SYN flood attacks on victim machine Applying mitigation method on the victim machine.

2149 53.157111006 192.168.211.136	192.168.211.141	TCP	54 ssh > 8735 [RST, ACK] Seg=1 Ack=10 Win=0 Len=0
2150 53.16435100€ 192.168.211.145	192.168.211.136	SSH	63 Encrypted request packet Len=9
2151 53.16439200€ 192.168.211.136	192.168.211.145	TCP	54 ssh > 32028 [RST, ACK] Seg=1 Ack=10 Win=0 Len=0
2152 53.164966006 192.168.211.141	192.168.211.136	TCP	63 [TCP segment of a reassembled PDU]
2153 53.164997886 192.168.211.136	192.168.211.141	TCP	54 http > 9759 [RST, ACK] Seq=1 Ack=10 Win=0 Len=0
2154 53.176909006 192.168.211.145	192.168.211.136	TCP	63 [TCP segment of a reassembled PDU]
2155 53.17693800€ 192.168.211.136	192.168.211.145	TCP	54 http > 19874 [RST, ACK] Seq=1 Ack=10 Win=0 Len=0
2156 53.440111006 192.168.211.145	192.168.211.136	SSH	63 Encrypted request packet len=9
2157 53.440152000 192.168.211.136	192.168.211.145	TCP	54 ssh > 58142 [RST, ACK] Seq=1 Ack=10 Win=0 Len=0
2158 53.443438000 192.168.211.145	192.168.211.136	TCP	63 [TCP segment of a reassembled PDU]
2159 53,443481000 192,168,211,136	192.168.211.145	TCP	54 http > 35133 [RST, ACK] Seq=1 Ack=10 Win=0 Len=0
2160 53.440032000 192.168.211.141	192.168.211.136	SSH	63 Encrypted request packet len=9
2161 53.448895886 192.168.211.136	192.168.211.141	TCP	54 ssh > 60102 [RST, ACK] Seq=1 Ack=10 Win=0 Len=0
2162 53.450224000 192.168.211.141	192.168.211.136	TCP	63 [TCP segment of a reassembled PDU]
2163 53.450254000 192.168.211.136	192.168.211.141	TCP	54 http > 34645 [RST, ACK] Seq=1 Ack=10 Win=0 Len=0
2164 53.49365400€ 192.168.211.1	239.255.255.258	UDP	698 Source port: 63736 Destination port: ws-discover
2165 53.74701100€ 192.168.211.141	192.168.211.136	SSH	63 Encrypted request packet len=9
2166 53.747084000 192.168.211.136	192.168.211.141		54 ssh > 53866 (RST, ACK) Seq=1 Ack=10 Win=0 Len=0
2167 53.75213500€ 192.168.211.141	192.168.211.136	TCP	63 [TCP segment of a reassembled PDU]
2168 53.752168886 192.168.211.136	192.168.211.141	TCP	54 http > 53536 [RST, ACK] Seq=1 Ack=10 Win=0 Len=0
2169 53.75318388£192.168.211.145	192.168.211.136	SSH	63 Encrypted request packet len-9
2170 53.75312300€ 192.168.211.136	192.168.211.145	TCP	54 ssh > 60860 [RST, ACK] Seq=1 Ack=10 Win=0 Len=0
2171 53.75811400€ 192.168.211.145	192.168.211.136	TCP	63 [TCP segment of a reassembled PDU]
2172 53.75815000€ 192.168.211.136	192.168.211.145	TCP	54 http > 14912 [RST, ACK] Seq=1 Ack=10 Win=0 Len=0
2173 54.04144700€ 192.168.211.141	192.168.211.136	SSH	63 Encrypted request packet len=9
2174 54.041481000 192.168.211.136	192.168.211.141	TCP	54 ssh > 10842 [RST, ACK] Seq=1 Ack=10 Win=0 Len=0

Figure 12. Set up of the RST message for the attackers

Overall traffic performance of the server after the mitigation.

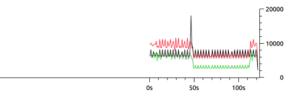


Figure 13. Impact of mitigation is reduced by approx. 20 kbps

Log captured in log files.

Thu	May	4 04:17:56 IST 201	17
	20	192.168.211.141	
	23	192.168.211.145	
Thu	May	4 04:17:56 IST 201 192.168.211.141 192.168.211.145 4 04:18:58 IST 201	17

Figure 14. Captured attackers IP addresses in the log file

V. CONCLUSION & FUTURE WORK

Internet service provider and network capacities are increasing their market space. Skilled hackers are damaging the revenue cycle of the big corporate by applying various DDoS attack. In which TCP SYN flooding attack is the most dangerous and long-time attack that cause unavailability of servers to the legitimate users or clients. This attack is very strong to interrupt server activities for that we implemented our detection technique using shell script. So, this shell code can be used to make application which can run to mitigate the TCP SYN attack that cause the reducing of the attack impact. In this method, we continuously applying RST signal and removing all iptables chain and based on requirement we can make sleep the system for the specific time duration.

We studied one of the DDoS attack that is "TCP SYN flooding DDoS attack" in the network. We have studied about the existing techniques on detection of TCP SYN flood attack. So, in our dissertation work, we tried to achieve the defined objectives and explore some dedicated work on that.

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