

Off by Default!

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I. INTRODUCTION

The original Internet architecture was designed to provide universal reachability; any host can send any amount of traffic (modulo congestion control) to any destination. This blanket openness enabled the Internet to adopt a single, globally routable address space. Unfortunately, today’s less trustworthy Internet environment has revealed the downside of such openness—*every* host is vulnerable to attack by *any* other host(s). In the face of mounting security concerns, a primitive set of protective mechanisms (such as firewalls and NATs) have been widely deployed while the research community has produced numerous proposals that address security vulnerabilities in a more comprehensive fashion [1], [2], [3], [4], [5], [6], [7]. These proposals use various sophisticated architectures and approach the problem from many different perspectives. However, none of them take the simplest and most direct approach: allow each host to explicitly declare to the network routing infrastructure what traffic it wants routed to it.

The goal of this paper is to explore the basic feasibility of such an approach. We describe an IP-level control protocol by which endhosts signal, and routers exchange, reachability constraints on different destination prefixes. Our interest in such a protocol stems from the conjecture that, if feasible, a reachability control protocol could encompass a number of previous security proposals (as described in Section-II) while enabling a network that is intrinsically less trusting. Specifically, under our proposal, a router may forward a packet from host A to host B only if B has explicitly informed the network of its willingness to accept incoming traffic from A. In effect, we’re proposing to flip the default constraint on host reachability from “on” to “off”. Given current security woes, we believe this more conservative default is appropriate.

Yet it is important to preserve the opportunity for openness. The great strength of the existing “default-on” model is the flexibility it gives applications in their choice of communication models (client-to-server, server-to-server, peer-to-peer) which has been credited with enabling the variety of Internet applications we enjoy today. To preserve this flexibility, our protocol allows hosts to dynamically modify and inform the network of their current reachability constraints; *i.e.*, our conservatism extends only to the network’s *default* behavior. On the face of it, requiring the network to dynamically maintain reachability information for every destination would seem to place an intractable burden on routers. Our feasibility analysis suggests that this is not necessarily the case and that a default-off Internet might well be a practical option.

We do not claim that such a default-off approach is sufficient or optimal. On the contrary, the general problem (control over host reachability) is a non-trivial one with a large design space and it’s likely too early for any particular approach to claim the prize. Moreover, given the complementary tradeoffs between various solutions (as pointed out in the next section), it is quite likely that the “sweet spot” in the design space involves more than one approach. Nonetheless, we hope that exploring an extreme design point will

Solution ⇒	Access Control			Criteria
	Proactive at victim	Proactive in network	Reactive in network	
Compromise attacks	High High Low	High High High	Not Useful	⇐ Assumptions ⇐ Effectiveness ⇐ Complexity
Resource exhaustion attacks	Not Useful	High High High	Medium Medium Medium	⇐ Assumptions ⇐ Effectiveness ⇐ Complexity
Examples	Firewalls	Mayday, i3 Handley et. al.	Pushback, AITF	

TABLE I

Access Control solutions for various attacks

better reveal (and stimulate discussion on) the different options and hence initiate a more principled approach to arriving at the ideal solution.

II. TAXONOMY OF PROBLEM AND SOLUTIONS

Before describing our solution, we first briefly discuss some broad categories of attacks and defenses. Not everything fits neatly into this taxonomy, but our goal is not to achieve completeness but to provide some pedagogical context that hopefully will make the nature of our proposal clearer.

The attacks we consider fall into two broad categories: *compromise* attacks and *resource-exhaustion* attacks. Compromise attacks are those that subvert the victim, be it an end host (client or server), or router. A common approach to dealing with such attacks is to *control access* to the victim. Applying access control thus requires identifying malicious traffic. Moreover, because compromise attacks need only one or a few packets to cause damage, such access control should be *pro-active*; that is, the network must prevent such packets from reaching the intended victim.¹ This access control can be exercised anywhere in the network, either at the victim or closer to the source.

Resource-exhaustion attacks leave the victim intact but unable to provide much service to legitimate clients. Here too, access control serves as one type of defense. In this case however, the access control can also be *reactive*, in that the victim can invoke it after an attack is detected (though, of course, pro-active defenses are still preferable, in that no outage need occur). If the resource being exhausted is host-specific, such as disk or cpu, then the control could be exercised near the victim, but if bandwidth is the exhausted resource then the control must be applied closer to the source.

A second form of defense against resource-exhaustion attacks involves *resource sharing* mechanisms that control how resources are allocated across all requesting users (for that resource) without attempting to classify users as legitimate or not. For example, there are a variety of mechanisms such as Fair Queuing and its many variants that can help alleviate bandwidth exhaustion attacks while

¹Of course, building secure operating systems would be the first line of defense against such attacks, but here we concern ourselves only with network-level defenses.

careful CPU scheduling and memory allocation by the operating system can serve to protect resources at the endhost. Such defenses avoid the need to identify malicious users but are somewhat less effective in that they cannot completely deny service to malicious users, are vulnerable in the face of spoofed addresses/identifiers, and do not help with compromise attacks.

Our proposal for a reachability control protocol is of relevance to solutions that attempt access control. This category currently includes a set of defense mechanisms that are either pro-active or reactive, and are applied at the victim or within the network. Typically, each such category has been implemented with its own mechanism. For instance, firewalls provide pro-active access control at the victim while defenses such as AITF [7] and Pushback [1], [8] are designed for in-network reactive access control. A variety of solutions [2]², [6], [9], [10] deliver pro-active in-network access control but, to our knowledge, none target reactive access control at the victim, although re-active firewalls (if they existed) would fit in this category. See table I for a summary.

A reachability protocol of the form we explore in this paper could serve as a single mechanism that covers these various access control options. Such a design follows from having the end host determine their reachability explicitly (either pro-actively or reactively) and letting the natural routing state computations move the control into the network whenever practical.

Of course, access control methods are not sufficient in themselves! Access control is only effective if one can accurately identify the traffic that must be stopped. In some cases, such as client end hosts that don't want to be reached at all (except in response to their own traffic) or enterprise servers, access control need not be narrowly targeted. However, for public servers, there is often no way to distinguish between attack and legitimate traffic.

Finally, there are defense mechanisms that don't fit neatly into our taxonomy. For example, proposals based on the use of capabilities [4], [11], [3] combine reactive access control, proactive access control, and resource sharing mechanisms. See [12] for a perspective on these. Also, the *net-work* proposal [13] deals with application-level resource exhaustion attacks by requiring attackers and legitimate clients alike to spend additional bandwidth to receive service.

III. DESIGN GOALS AND CHALLENGES

We identify three key goals for a default-off network:

a) Off by default: Routers should not forward packets unless explicitly directed to do so by the destination host, in contrast to the current Internet where routers forward packets unless prevented by an operator-configured ACL rule. The off-by-default policy is thus similar to that of typical firewalls, but applied globally to the whole network. A direct consequence is that to receive unsolicited traffic, a host must now *proactively* inform the network of its willingness to do so. As [2] observes, this restriction of traffic to deliberately enabled communication paths raises the bar for attacks on hosts that are not reachable.

b) Explicit expression: Hosts must have a way to explicitly and unambiguously express their reachability, unlike NATs and firewalls which implicitly control a host's reachability by virtue of being in the data path. This expression can be *proactive* or *reactive*.

²Handley et. al. also talk about reactive components involving middlewalls etc.

c) Flexible constraints: A host should be able to dynamically regulate its reachability along multiple dimensions: who gets to send a host traffic, when, what type (*i.e.*, protocol, port) of traffic, how much, etc. This flexibility is essential to preserve the rich communication models possible today while respecting the administrative boundaries that often define reachability. In this paper, we discuss a limited number of dimensions—temporal (when is a host reachable), spatial (which hosts/prefixes can reach a host, on what ports), and scope (where a host's reachability is advertised).

To achieve these goals, we propose that hosts signal their first hop routers with their intent to receive packets from other hosts. Routers propagate these as *reachability advertisements* and use this information to forward or drop packets. This naïve approach faces two obvious challenges:

Scalability: If routers were required to maintain reachability state for every host in the network network, our scheme would not scale. We address this in two ways. First, since hosts that are "off" do not issue reachability advertisements and incur no additional state at routers, we maximize the number of hosts that can be treated as "off". To do so, we borrow from Handley and Greenhalgh[2] and arrange that a host that only receives traffic in *response* to its own traffic need not be "on".

Second, we allow routers to *aggregate* reachability advertisements according to available memory. While legitimate packets are always forwarded, aggregation introduces a tradeoff between the network's effectiveness at limiting unwanted traffic and the size of reachability state needed at routers. More state means less aggregation, and hence unwanted traffic is dropped nearer the source. In other words, we allow the enforcement of default-off policies to be best-effort.

Network dynamics: A naïve implementation of Default-off would couple reachability advertisements with the routing protocol, so that a router advertises a route only if the corresponding host(s) have requested that they be reachable. However, since we expect the reachability of hosts in a domain to be much more dynamic than routes to the domain, this would lead to undesirable routing dynamics. Instead, we avoid the issue of routing dynamics altogether by decoupling reachability maintenance from route computation.

Specifically, routes are computed as they are today, and reachability information for hosts in the prefix is stored in an extension to that prefix's entry in the router forwarding information base (FIB). This keeps the complexity of FIB updates on the order of the number of routable prefixes rather than the much larger number of (possibly aggregated) reachable hosts.

We now present a design for a default-off network that addresses these goals and challenges.

IV. DESIGN DESCRIPTION

In our straw-man design for Default-off, when a router receives a packet, it performs a normal route lookup to locate the routing entry for the destination prefix and then checks the associated reachability state, dropping packets that are not explicitly allowed by a reachability entry.

A host explicitly signals reachability to its first-hop router. Routers exchange this state via a *reachability protocol*; this can in some cases be piggybacked on route advertisements. This protocol could be run at both the intra- and inter-domain level. In this paper, we describe and evaluate only the inter-domain scenario; the intra-domain case follows straightforwardly. Thus, we assume border routers exchange *reachability state* for their prefixes with neighbors in other ASes. This state indicates which hosts in a prefix are reachable, and under

what constraints. Like BGP, the protocol is incremental, but unlike BGP, exchanges between routers are periodic.

“Off” hosts, like those behind NATs, can only receive packets in response to traffic they initiate. As noted above, we adopt the design in [2]: when an “off” host sends a packet, the domain-level path from the client to the server is recorded in the packet header; when the server responds, the packet is routed along the reverse path to the client. The existence of this source route allows routers to verify the connection to some extent and no router state is needed for such client traffic. We refer the reader to [2] for the useful properties and issues arising out of the use of path based addresses and the possible use of encryption by Internet domains to increase the level of security provided by such addresses.

We do not specify in this paper how hosts decide on their reachability, though this should *not* be directly controlled by existing network APIs (e.g., listening on a socket should not automatically make the host reachable). In practice, some combination of administrator policies and user interaction in the host will determine reachability.

We now describe various features of Default-off in detail.

A. Expressing Reachability

Hosts signal reachability to routers by providing the host IP address, a list of *reachability constraints* or *RCs*, and a propagation *scope* (described below). To allow for aggregation of addresses, we extend the IP address to a prefix in reachability advertisements. The general form of advertisements is thus:

$$[\textit{prefix}, \textit{prefix-length}, \{ \textit{RC}, \textit{RC}, \dots \}, \textit{scope}]$$

Our current proposal uses three levels of constraints: \mathbf{RC}_0 constraints are 3-tuples of destination IP address, protocol, and port, and are used by hosts that wish to be “on” to any and all sources. \mathbf{RC}_1 constraints are 4-tuples and are used by hosts that wish to be selectively “on” to specified hosts; they additionally include a list of IP addresses of such sources. \mathbf{RC}_2 constraints are 4-tuples and are used by hosts that wish to be selectively “off” to specified hosts. Hence, \mathbf{RC}_0 and \mathbf{RC}_1 are positive reachability constraints while \mathbf{RC}_2 is a negative reachability constraint. Clearly, this initial scheme can be extended. For example, a simple enhancement would include source ports to be specified, or particular flow rates.

The *scope* of an advertisement avoids needless propagation of state when a host wishes to restrict its reachability along topological or administrative boundaries (e.g., a department’s internal file server). A simple solution defines a scope of (router or AS-level) hop count that bounds the topological extent of advertisement propagation. Alternatively, one could encode the set of ASes or subnets through which the advertisement can be advertised.

In the limit, scoping could restrict the propagation of a host’s reachability advertisement along only those parts of the network that lie on the path from acceptable sources for that destination. However, achieving such fine-grained scoping with full generality is a non-trivial challenge (akin in some sense to scalable multicast routing) and one we leave open for future research. For simplicity, this paper assumes all reachability adverts are globally propagated; incorporating scoping would only improve our performance results.

In addition to scoping, we provide *temporal control* by using standard soft-state techniques to determine the lifetime of a host’s reachability advertisement. A host periodically beacons its current reachability, and immediately signals changes to its reachability. To turn “off” altogether, the endhost either sends an explicit withdrawal to its local router or simply ceases its periodic updates and waits for expiry.

B. Encoding Reachability

Encoding the reachability of each host as a straightforward list of constraints clearly leads to excessive router state. Instead, we encode the positive reachability constraints using Bloom filters [14], trading space for processing in routers. Note that because Bloom filters return false positives, hosts that are “off” may be reported as being “on” and packets to such destinations might arrive at the destination’s router before being dropped. Also, the false positives imply that the negative reachability constraints do not lend themselves to such encoding. However, we envision that such constraints will only be reactively used in face of an attack and so, a naive propagation should be technically feasible [7]. Hence, given that such \mathbf{RC}_2 propagation is similar to previously proposed Pushback approaches, the rest of the paper does not describe the technicalities of doing so.

A domain’s access router uses k globally known hash functions to encode a host’s reachability constraints, using different filters for different constraint types: all constraints of type \mathbf{RC}_0 for the host are represented by a bloom filter that encodes all \mathbf{RC}_0 three-tuples {destination IP address:destination port:protocol}, and similarly for \mathbf{RC}_1 constraints. The Bloom filter size must be chosen judiciously to keep probability of false positives at an acceptable level.

C. Aggregating Reachability

To scale in reachability state, a Default-off router aggregates advertisements to fit its memory limitations. There are two levels at which to apply such aggregation. First, we can merge multiple advertisements into one by bitwise OR-ing the corresponding bloom filters, and setting the key for the merged advertisement to the longest common prefix across the aggregated advertisements. Second, we can reduce the size of the bloom filters within a single advertisement, for example shrinking filters by a factor of two by splitting them and performing a bitwise OR of the halves.

As advertisements propagate through the network, each router combines and possibly aggregates new and existing advertisements. This results in higher false positives, meaning more unwanted traffic is allowed further into the network, towards the destination. Unwanted traffic is dropped when it encounters a sufficiently unaggregated filter.

The decision of which advertisements should be aggregated depends on resource constraints at the router, false positives induced by aggregation, and/or the aggregator’s relationship with the domain whose reachability state is being aggregated. For example, advertisements from customer domains might have higher priority than those from a peer or even a provider. We can even imagine acceptance of unaggregated advertisements being part of SLAs between customers and providers. Our evaluation in the next section uses a simple aggregation rule: non-customer advertisements are always aggregated before customer advertisements; given this policy, the entries to be aggregated are selected at random. Clearly, more sophisticated aggregation rules can potentially improve our results. In fact, an interesting open question is whether there exists an aggregation rule that achieves an optimal tradeoff between the state consumed and the resultant false positive rate while respecting the policy constraints.

Our proposal effectively turns the network into a global firewall while the aggregation of advertisements as they propagate through the network implies that the protection the network offers to a domain drops as the distance from the domain increases. We analyze the quality of this protection in Section V-B. At the same time, there is an opposite trade off between the protection the network offers and the extent to which the network is exposed to the dynamics of endhost reachability. The greater the protection, the deeper into the

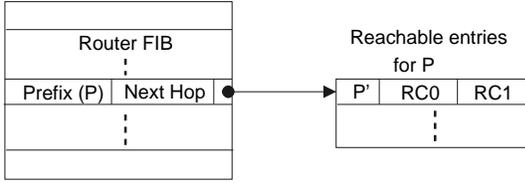


Fig. 1. Conceptual structure of the FIB in a Default-off router. Here, $P' \in P$

Name	Remark	Number
<i>Stub-AS</i>	an AS with no customers	11232
<i>Regional ISPs</i>	an AS with customers and degree < 11	1475
<i>Core-ISPs</i>	rest of the ASs	695

TABLE II

Three categories of ASs based on the number and relationship with neighbors in the AS topology

network reachability advertisements must propagate and hence the network is subject to more reachability dynamics. In particular, the time it takes a host to transition from “off” to “on” depends on how far into the network it’s reachability advertisement must propagate before encountering an aggregated reachability entry that already (due to aggregation) had the host marked down as reachable. We analyze this trade off in Section V-C.

D. Packet Forwarding

In addition to performing the standard longest-prefix match before forwarding packets, a router must perform a reachability check. On receiving a packet, a router first checks whether the destination is a path-based address. If so, it immediately forwards the packet based on the path-address. Otherwise, it performs a regular IP lookup in its FIB to locate the next hop and the reachability entry for the destination IP address (see Figure 1)³. If no such reachability entry exists, the packet is dropped. Otherwise, the router checks the packet’s destination IP address, port and protocol 3-tuple against the reachability entry’s RC_0 filter. If the Bloom filter returns a hit, the packet is forwarded otherwise the packet’s destination address, port, protocol and source address 4-tuple is checked against RC_1 . If that check too fails, the packet is dropped.

V. FEASIBILITY STUDY

Our design from the previous section raises two main performance questions:

- How effective is Default-off at limiting unwanted traffic?
- Can the design handle the dynamics of hosts turning on/off?

This section tries to address these questions. We stress, however, that our results are merely an initial sanity check of the feasibility of our proposal; we defer a more comprehensive evaluation to future work. We start with a brief description of our methodology in Section V-A and then explore the above questions in Sections V-B and V-C respectively.

A. Methodology

Because simulator limitations prevent us from simulating Default-off on a realistic router-level Internet graph, we choose to simulate

³Locating the reachability advertisement involves doing a longest prefix lookup on the reachability entries associated with the destination prefix. Given that the number of reachability entries is likely very small, we do not imagine the lookup and updating will be expensive, and in fact could likely be trivially handled by storing the prefixes for the reachability entries in TCAM.

it over the Internet AS-level topology maps from Subramanian *et al.* [15]. These topologies are annotated with inter-AS relationships (customer-provider or peers) and hence our simulations respect policy in the propagation of routing and reachability advertisements. Table II summarizes the key statistics of our topology, the details of which can be found in [15]. We set the total number of prefixes on the Internet (P) to 200,000 [16] and assign these to ASes in our topology.

The crucial usage parameter is H , the number of hosts per prefix that signal their intent to be reachable. As described in [2], there are two kinds of reachable hosts: servers and peers. Measurements of P2P traffic in a tier-1 ISP backbone [17] indicate $\sim 2\text{-}3\%$ of observed flows can be attributed to P2P applications from which we approximate that 2-3% of Internet hosts act as peers at any given time.⁴ With 600M hosts on the Internet [19], this leads to a total of 6-9M peers or 30-45 peers per prefix. We assume that the number of servers per prefix is small compared to the number of P2P hosts and hence set $H=45$, the high end of the P2P estimate. As we will see, our results are not very sensitive to slight variations in H .

The crucial technology parameter is the amount of router memory (T) available in the data plane to store reachability state. Since our simulations are at the AS-level, not the router level, we cannot accurately model the state held by each individual router and instead adopt two simplified (but hopefully informative) models. In the first (**model 1**), we assume that each domain has a single border router. This is the same as assuming that each border router in the domain holds the same state and has the same amount of available memory. We also assume that this router’s available memory T is proportional to the total number of prefixes P ; $T = \alpha P$ for some α . Most of our simulations use $\alpha = 3$.

In the second (**model 2**), we merely assume that each AS has sufficient state so that it never needs to aggregate reachability state for its customer prefixes. This appears reasonable since border routers within a single AS are attached to different sets of customers and hence no single router has to hold unaggregated reachability state for all customers of the AS. As mentioned earlier, non-aggregation of customer reachability state may become a standard part of SLAs, and later we argue that this is economically feasible. For this model, when the immediate customers use less than T memory, the rest is devoted to other prefixes. When the immediate customers consume more than T memory, reachability state for all the other prefixes is completely aggregated to one entry each.

B. Protection

Default-off scales by aggregating reachability advertisements as dictated by available memory at a router. Aggregation introduces false positives, and allows traffic to make some progress towards “off” destinations before being dropped. As described in Section IV-A, a reachability advertisement is composed of two components: the prefix (and the prefix length) and the reachability constraints (RC). Aggregation of an advertisement can lead to false positives in both components. To factor out the effect due to each, we first consider reachability advertisements as comprised of only prefixes (this is equivalent to merely distinguishing between “on” and “off” hosts) and then consider adding on reachability constraints.

1) *Aggregating prefixes:* Here, each “on” host’s advertisement only includes its IP address represented as a /32 prefix. Using the setup described in Section V-A, we simulate the propagation

⁴Note that this is very likely an overestimate because, in most P2P applications [18], a single peer will initiate multiple flows for a single transfer.

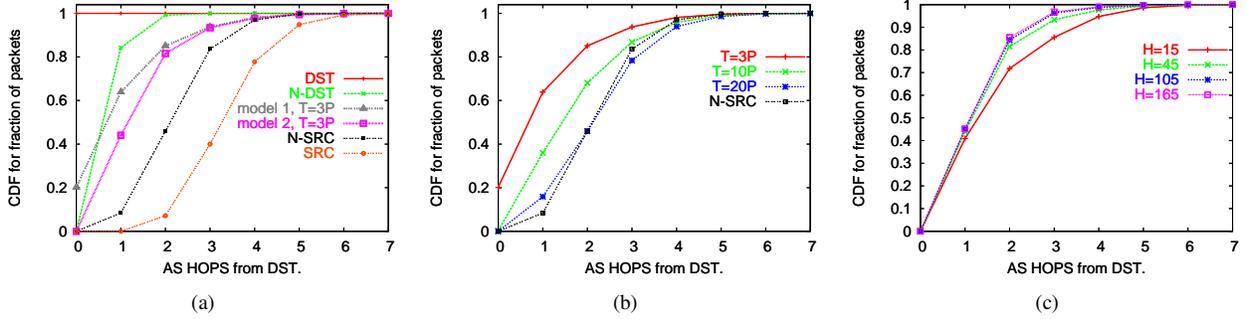


Fig. 2. CDF for the fraction of packets that are dropped a given number of AS hops from the destination with different protection schemes, varying T (H=45, model 1) and varying H (T=3P, model 2)

(with aggregation) of these reachability advertisements. Once the reachability protocol converges, we route a packet from a random source to a destination host that is “off” (i.e., has not initiated a reachability advertisement) and observe the location at which the packet is dropped. We repeat this for 6 million source-destination pairs.

For models 1 and 2, with $\alpha = 3$ and H=45, Figure 2(a) plots the CDF of the fraction of dropped packets versus the distance (in AS hops) between the destination and the point at which the packets were dropped. To better calibrate our results, we plot four bounding cases: **At-Source (SRC)**: All unwanted packets are dropped at the source. Note that this is effectively the CDF of path lengths.

Near-Source (N-SRC): All unwanted packets are dropped at the core ISP closest to the source (along the source-to-destination path). This is intended to represent the boundary between the source and the core. Dropping packets here effectively shields both the network core and the destination’s access path from unwanted traffic.

Near-Destination (N-DST): All unwanted packets are dropped at the core ISP nearest to the destination. This represents the boundary between destination and core. Here the destination but not the core are shielded from unwanted packets.

At-Destination (DST): All unwanted packets are dropped at the destination (akin to firewall-based protection).

Even with the more conservative model 1, Default-off can drop most (>80%) of unwanted traffic within the network’s core, well away from the destination. With model 2, ~60% of the packets are dropped 2 or more AS hops away from the destination and the destination’s peering link is never choked.

Figures 2(b) and 2(c) show the effect of varying T and H respectively. As can be seen, increasing T leads to better protection while the system scales well with increasing H.

2) **Aggregating Bloom Filters**: Our simulations so far evaluated the protection offered by the reachable prefix field. The use of bloom filters encoding reachability constraints (RC_0 and RC_1) offer better protection for increased state at routers. Here, we estimate the amount of additional state needed, and then compute the approximate cost of the total state per router.

Instead of assuming “on” hosts are reachable on all ports by everybody, we now assume that each “on” host specifies 5 addresses it wants to be reachable from⁵. This is encoded in RC_1 . We also assume that the end-site’s reachability router chooses the size of the bloom filter to encode RC_1 so as to ensure that the false positive ratio is less

⁵This implies that each host has 5 reachability constraints; a host saying that it wants to be “on” to all sources for a particular destination port and protocol (RC_0) introduces just one constraint and hence, requires less state

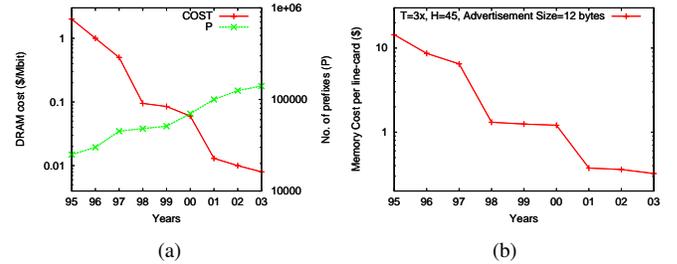


Fig. 3. DRAM Cost/Mbit [21], FIB size [22] and the cost of reachability state per line card over the years

than 1%. This would require ~10 bits for each constraint inserted into the bloom filter and hence, yield a RC_1 of size 50 bits and an advertisement of ~12 bytes. Maintaining 600,000 such reachability entries in the routers (i.e. T=3P) would lead to a reachability state of ~7 MB in the forwarding plane.

Given the state required at typical ISP access routers for tasks such as packet classification and relative to previous proposals that require upto 1Gbit DRAM for FIBs [20], the memory requirements for Default-off appear modest and should not face significant technical barriers. On the contrary, at current prices this would cost about \$0.52 per line card for DRAM, and \$150 per line card for SRAM. Moreover, technology trends are with us; memory costs are dropping far faster than the rate at which the number of prefixes are rising (Figure 3(a)), and hence the total costs should only decrease over time (Figure 3(b)).

C. Dynamics

Another trade-off introduced by our proposal is the time it takes for a host to turn on versus the update load imposed on the routers. The turn-on time is directly proportional to the distance the advertisement must traverse and the interval at which routers exchange reachability information. For example, the model 2 results shown in section V-B.1 imply that exchanging reachability state at an interval of 20 seconds would yield an average turn-on time of ~36 seconds, which seems reasonable. The time to turn off is less critical because the destination stops receiving packets as soon as its first-hop router is notified of the change in the host’s reachability. As the corresponding reachability advertisement moves upstream, the drop point moves further away from the destination.

Given that a 20 second inter-advertisement interval leads to an acceptable turn-on time, the question is whether the load this imposes on routers is manageable. Note however that because reachability is computed separately from routing, a reachability event (turning “off” or “on”) does not involve recalculating routes and updating the FIB

but only involves a longest-prefix match to locate the reachability state for the prefix and then updating it. As mentioned earlier, the reachability state for a prefix is smaller than the router FIB and hence, easier to update. In the worst case scenario, each prefix in the Internet can have at least one reachability event (host turning “on” or “off”) every interval, leading to an update rate of 10,000 per second. Existing data structures for FIBs can handle 10,000 routing updates [23], and hence routers could certainly handle the lighter load of updating the reachability database.

Moreover, the fact that unwanted packets in a default-off network can traverse half the network before getting blocked implies that reachability advertisements need to traverse just the other half. For example, figure 2(a) (model 2) shows that 40% of the advertisements only need propagate to the first AS hop and 80% of the advertisements only need to propagate through to two AS hops. Hence, the aggregation of the reachability advertisements reduces the impact of reachability dynamics.

VI. DISCUSSION

In this paper, we have described a reachability control protocol that covers the space defined by most previous access control approaches. We have also argued for a network which is “off” by default and shown the feasibility of an extreme version of this: as a proactive in-network policy. As mentioned earlier, Default-off draws upon and can be viewed as a relaxation of the radical DoS solution proposed by Handley and Greenhalgh [2]. We retain their inherent conservatism but allow hosts flexibility in their reachability constraints. There is also a distinction to be drawn in terms of mechanism: while Default-off pushes control over reachability into the routing layer, Handley and Greenhalgh’s proposal operates at the addressing layer by defining different address spaces for clients and servers.

We now briefly note some of the larger questions left unaddressed in this work. The first has to do with securing the reachability protocol itself. Because we overlay reachability over existing routing protocols, Default-off inherits the hop-by-hop trust model of current routing and the deployment of more secure routing proposals [24] would apply directly to our scheme too. Similarly, while malicious end hosts may advertise bogus reachability adverts, the damage they can cause should be limited because a router is always free to not aggregate a particular host’s advertisement (if, for example, doing so would increase the false positive rate of the RCs) or to simply “upgrade” a host’s advertised reachability. Precisely proving the extent of possible damage is however a topic for future work.

Deploying Default-off also merits closer scrutiny in terms of both mechanism and incentives. Indeed, many industry solutions for DoS protection are already on this trajectory although their solutions are based on special-purpose middleboxes [25]. Also open, are the engineering details of how one might best incorporate the Default-off mechanisms into the control and data plane of routers.

An interesting open question has to do with the interplay between Default-off and the enforcement of organizational policies. On the one hand, default-off allows end users (presumably in conjunction with their administrators) to independently regulate their reachability but on the other our proposal for an explicit signalling of intended reachability appears conducive for systematic policy enforcement.

In conclusion, we compare our work with the most prevalent security mechanisms: firewalls. Default-off takes the basic firewalling notion of blocking all traffic except that explicitly whitelisted, and extends it to be more dynamically controllable by hosts, as well as propagating the whitelists far into the network. Note moreover,

that when viewed globally, a firewalled Internet leaves the default “on” at routers only turning it “off” at the destination host’s firewall (if one exists at all!). Given current security woes, we believe the more conservative “default-off everywhere” architecture is more appropriate.

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