

Chapter 16: Confinement Problem

- What is the problem?
- Isolation: virtual machines, sandboxes
- Detecting covert channels
- Analyzing covert channels
- Mitigating covert channels

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Overview

- The confinement problem
- Isolating entities
 - Virtual machines
 - Sandboxes
- Covert channels
 - Detecting them
 - Analyzing them
 - Mitigating them

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Example Problem

- Server balances bank accounts for clients
- Server security issues:
 - Record correctly who used it
 - Send *only* balancing info to client
- Client security issues:
 - Log use correctly
 - Do not save or retransmit data client sends

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Generalization

- Client sends request, data to server
- Server performs some function on data
- Server returns result to client
- Access controls:
 - Server must ensure the resources it accesses on behalf of client include *only* resources client is authorized to access
 - Server must ensure it does not reveal client's data to any entity not authorized to see the client's data

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Confinement Problem

- Problem of preventing a server from leaking information that the user of the service considers confidential

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Total Isolation

- Process cannot communicate with any other process
- Process cannot be observed

Impossible for this process to leak information

- Not practical as process uses observable resources such as CPU, secondary storage, networks, etc.

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Example

- Processes p , q not allowed to communicate
 - But they share a file system!
- Communications protocol:
 - p sends a bit by creating a file called 0 or 1 , then a second file called $send$
 - p waits until $send$ is deleted before repeating to send another bit
 - q waits until file $send$ exists, then looks for file 0 or 1 ; whichever exists is the bit
 - q then deletes 0 , 1 , and $send$ and waits until $send$ is recreated before repeating to read another bit

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Covert Channel

- A path of communication not designed to be used for communication
- In example, file system is a (storage) covert channel

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Rule of Transitive Confinement

- If p is confined to prevent leaking, and it invokes q , then q must be similarly confined to prevent leaking
- Rule: if a confined process invokes a second process, the second process must be as confined as the first

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Lipner's Notes

- All processes can obtain rough idea of time
 - Read system clock or wall clock time
 - Determine number of instructions executed
- All processes can manipulate time
 - Wait some interval of wall clock time
 - Execute a set number of instructions, then block

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Kocher's Attack

- This computes $x = a^z \bmod n$, where $z = z_0 \dots z_{k-1}$

```
x := 1; atmp := a;
for i := 0 to k-1 do begin
  if zi = 1 then
    x := (x * atmp) mod n;
    atmp := (atmp * atmp) mod n;
end
result := x;
```

- Length of run time related to number of 1 bits in z

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Isolation

- Virtual machines
 - Emulate computer
 - Process cannot access underlying computer system, anything not part of that computer system
- Sandboxing
 - Does not emulate computer
 - Alters interface between computer, process

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Virtual Machine (VM)

- A program that simulates hardware of computer system
- *Virtual machine monitor* (VMM) provides VM on which conventional OS can run
 - Each VM is one subject; VMM knows nothing about processes running on each VM
 - VMM mediates all interactions of VM with resources, other VMS
 - Satisfies rule of transitive closure

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Example: KVM/370

- Security-enhanced version of IBM VM/370 VMM
- Goals
 - Provide virtual machines for users
 - Prevent VMs of different security classes from communicating
- Provides minidisks; some VMs could share some areas of disk
 - Security policy controlled access to shared areas to limit communications to those allowed by policy

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DEC VAX VMM

- VMM is security kernel
 - Can run Ultrix OS or VMS OS
- Invoked on trap to execute privileged instruction
 - Only VMM can access hardware directly
 - VM kernel, executive levels both mapped into physical executive level
- VMM subjects: users, VMs
 - Each VM has own disk areas, file systems
 - Each subject, object has multilevel security, integrity labels

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Sandbox

- Environment in which actions of process are restricted according to security policy
 - Can add extra security-checking mechanisms to libraries, kernel
 - Program to be executed is not altered
 - Can modify program or process to be executed
 - Similar to debuggers, profilers that add breakpoints
 - Add code to do extra checks (memory access, etc.) as program runs (*software fault isolation*)

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Example: Limiting Execution

- Sidewinder
 - Uses type enforcement to confine processes
 - Sandbox built into kernel; site cannot alter it
- Java VM
 - Restricts set of files that applet can access and hosts to which applet can connect
- DTE, type enforcement mechanism for DTEL
 - Kernel modifications enable system administrators to configure sandboxes

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Example: Trapping System Calls

- Janus: execution environment
 - Users restrict objects, modes of access
- Two components
 - *Framework* does run-time checking
 - *Modules* determine which accesses allowed
- Configuration file controls modules loaded, constraints to be enforced

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Janus Configuration File

```
# basic module
basic
  - Load basic module
# define subprocess environment variables
putenv IFS="\t\n " PATH=/sbin:/bin:/usr/bin TZ=PST8PDT
  - Define environmental variables for process
# deny access to everything except files under /usr
path deny read,write *
path allow read,write /usr/*
  - Deny all file accesses except to those under /usr
# allow subprocess to read files in library directories
# needed for dynamic loading
path allow read /lib/* /usr/lib/* /usr/local/lib/*
  - Allow reading of files in these directories (all dynamic load libraries are here)
# needed so child can execute programs
path allow read,exec /sbin/* /bin/* /usr/bin/*
  - Allow reading, execution of subprograms in these directories
```

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Janus Implementation

- System calls to be monitored defined in modules
- On system call, Janus framework invoked
 - Validates system call *with those specific parameters* are allowed
 - If not, sets process environment to indicate call failed
 - If okay, framework gives control back to process; on return, framework invoked to update state
- Example: reading MIME mail
 - Embed “delete file” in Postscript attachment
 - Set Janus to disallow Postscript engine access to files

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Covert Channels

- Channel using shared resources as a communication path
- *Covert storage channel* uses attribute of shared resource
- *Covert timing channel* uses temporal or ordering relationship among accesses to shared resource

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Example: File Manipulation

- Communications protocol:
 - p sends a bit by creating a file called 0 or 1 , then a second file called *send*
 - p waits until *send* is deleted before repeating to send another bit
 - q waits until file *send* exists, then looks for file 0 or 1 ; whichever exists is the bit
 - q then deletes 0 , 1 , and *send* and waits until *send* is recreated before repeating to read another bit
- Covert storage channel: resource is directory, names of files in directory

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Example: Real-Time Clock

- KVM/370 had covert timing channel
 - VM1 wants to send 1 bit to VM2
 - To send 0 bit: VM1 relinquishes CPU as soon as it gets CPU
 - To send 1 bit: VM1 uses CPU for full quantum
 - VM2 determines which bit is sent by seeing how quickly it gets CPU
 - Shared resource is CPU, timing because real-time clock used to measure intervals between accesses

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Example: Ordering of Events

- Two VMs
 - Share cylinders 100–200 on a disk
 - One is *High*, one is *Low*; process on *High* VM wants to send to process on *Low* VM
- Disk scheduler uses SCAN algorithm
- *Low* process seeks to cylinder 150 and relinquishes CPU
 - Now we know where the disk head is

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Example (*con't*)

- *High* wants to send a bit
 - To send 1 bit, *High* seeks to cylinder 140 and relinquish CPU
 - To send 0 bit, *High* seeks to cylinder 160 and relinquish CPU
- *Low* issues requests for tracks 139 and 161
 - Seek to 139 first indicates a 1 bit
 - Seek to 161 first indicates a 0 bit
- Covert timing channel: uses ordering relationship among accesses to transmit information

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Noise

- *Noiseless covert channel* uses shared resource available to sender, receiver only
- *Noisy covert channel* uses shared resource available to sender, receive, and others
 - Need to minimize interference enough so that message can be read in spite of others' use of channel

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Key Properties

- Existence
 - Determining whether the covert channel exists
- Bandwidth
 - Determining how much information can be sent over the channel

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Detection

- Covert channels require sharing
- Manner of sharing controls which subjects can send, which subjects can receive information using that shared resource
- Porras, Kemmerer: model flow of information through shared resources with a tree
 - Called *covert flow trees*

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Goal Symbol Tree Nodes

- Modification: attribute modified
- Recognition: attribute modification detected
- Direct recognition: subject can detect attribute modification by referencing attribute directly or calling function that returns it
- Inferred recognition: subject can detect attribute modification without direct reference
- Inferred-via: info passed from one attribute to another via specified primitive (e.g. syscall)
- Recognized-new-state: modified attribute specified by inferred-via goal

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Other Tree Nodes

- Operation symbol represents primitive operation
- Failure symbol indicates information cannot be sent along path
- And symbol reached when for all children
 - Child is operation; and
 - If child goal, then goal is reached
- Or symbol reached when for any child:
 - Child is operation; or
 - If child goal, then goal is reached

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Constructing Tree

- Example: files in file system have 3 attributes
 - *locked*: true when file locked
 - *isopen*: true when file opened
 - *inuse*: set containing PID of processes having file open
- Functions:
 - *read_access(p, f)*: true if *p* has read rights over file *f*
 - *empty(s)*: true if set *s* is empty
 - *random*: returns one of its arguments chosen at random

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Locking and Opening Routines

```
(* lock the file if it is not locked and
not opened *)
procedure Lockfile(f: file);
begin
  if not f.locked and empty(f.inuse)
  then
    f.locked := true;
  end;
  (* unlock the file *)
  procedure Unlockfile(f: file);
  begin
    if f.locked then
      f.locked := false;
    end;
  end;
  (* say whether the file is locked *)
  function Filelocked(f: file): boolean;
  begin
    Filelocked := f.locked;
  end;

  (* open the file if it isn't locked and
  the process has the right to read the file
  *)
  procedure Openfile(f: file);
  begin
    if not f.locked and
      read_access(process_id, f) then
      (* add process ID to inuse set *)
      f.inuse = f.inuse + process_id;
    end;
  end;
  (* if the process can read the file, say
  if the file is open, otherwise return a
  value at random *)
  function Fileopened(f: file): boolean;
  begin
    if not read_access(process_id, f) then
      Fileopened := random(true, false);
    else
      Fileopened := not isempty(f.inuse);
    end;
  end;
```

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Attributes and Operations

	Lockfile	Unlockfile	Filelocked	Openfile	Fileopened
reference	<i>locked, inuse</i>	<i>locked</i>	<i>locked</i>	<i>locked, inuse</i>	<i>inuse</i>
modify	<i>locked</i>	<i>locked</i>	∅	<i>inuse</i>	∅
return	∅	∅	<i>locked</i>	∅	<i>inuse</i>

∅ means no attribute affected in specified manner

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Tree Construction

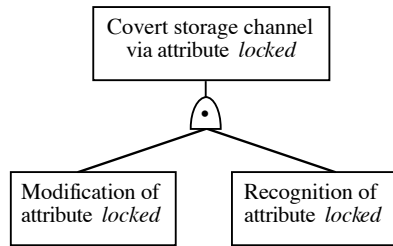
- This is for attribute *locked*
 - Goal state: “covert storage channel via attribute *locked*”
 - Type of goal controls construction
- “And” node has 2 children, a “modification” and a “recognition”
 - Here, both “of attribute *locked*”

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First Step



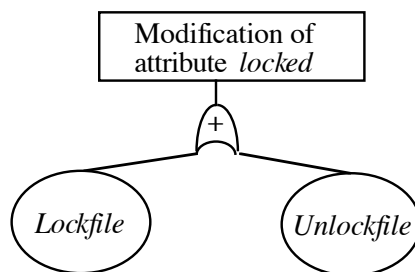
- Put “and” node under goal
- Put children under “and” node

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Second Step



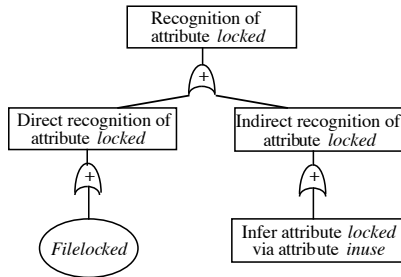
- Operations *Lockfile* and *Unlockfile* modify *locked*
 - See attribute and operations table

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Third Step



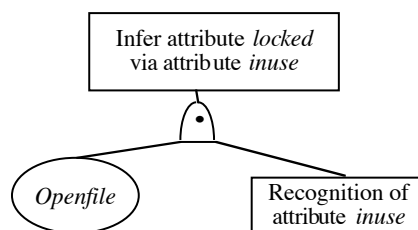
- “Recognition” had direct, inferred recognition children
- Direct recognition child: “and” node with *Filelocked* child
 - *Filelocked* returns value of *locked*
- Inferred recognition child: “or” node with “inferred-via” node
 - Infers *locked* from *inuse*

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Fourth Step



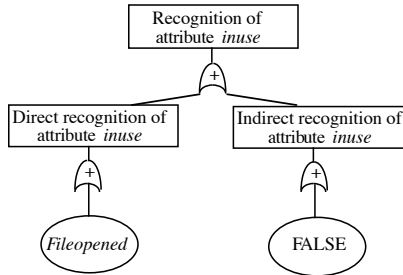
- “Inferred-via” node requires *Openfile*
 - Change in attribute *inuse* represented by recognize-new-state goal

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Fifth Step



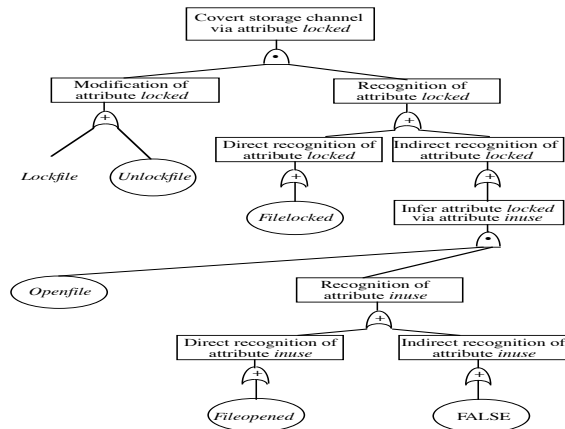
- “Recognize-new-state” node
 - Direct recognition node: “or” child, *Fileopened* node beneath (recognizes change in *inuse* directly)
 - Inferred recognition node: “or” child, *FALSE* node beneath (nothing recognizes change in *inuse* indirectly)

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Final Tree



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Finding Covert Channels

- Find sequences of operations that modify attribute
 - (*Lockfile*), (*Unlockfile*)
- Find sequences of operations that recognize modifications to attribute
 - (*Filelocked*), (*Openfile*, *Fileopened*)

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Covert Channel Commands

- Sequences with first element from first list, second element from second list
 - *Lockfile*, then *Filelocked*
 - *Unlockfile*, then *Filelocked*
 - *Lockfile*, then *Openfile*, then *Fileopened*
 - *Unlockfile*, then *Openfile*, then *Fileopened*

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Mitigation

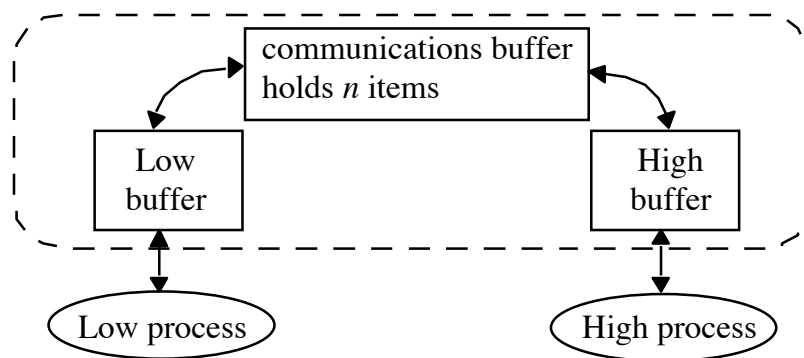
- Goal: obscure amount of resources a process uses
 - Receiver cannot determine what part sender is using and what part is obfuscated
- How to do this?
 - Devote uniform, fixed amount of resources to each process
 - Inject randomness into allocation, use of resources

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Example: Pump



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Covert Timing Channel

- High process can control rate at which pump sends it messages
- Initialization: Low sends messages to pump until communications buffer full
 - Low gets ACK for each message put into the buffer; no ACK for messages when communications buffer full
- Protocol: sequence of trials; for each trial
 - High sends a 1 by reading a message
 - Then Low gets ACK when it sends another message
 - High sends a 0 by not reading a message
 - Then Low doesn't get ACK when it sends another message

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How to Fix

- Assume: Low process, pump can process messages faster than High process
- Case 1: High process handles messages more quickly than Low process gets acknowledgements
 - Pump artificially delaying ACKs
 - Low process waits for ACK regardless of whether buffer is full
 - Low cannot tell whether buffer is full
 - Closes covert channel
 - Not optimal (processes may wait even when unnecessary)

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How to Fix (*con't*)

- Case 2: Low process sends messages faster than High process can remove them
 - Maximizes performance
 - Opens covert channel
- Case 3: Pump, processes handle messages at same rate
 - Decreases bandwidth of covert channel, increases performance
 - Opens covert channel, sub-optimal performance

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Adding Noise to Direct Channel

- Kang, Moskowitz: do this in such a way as to approximate case 3
 - Reduces covert channel's capacity to $1/nr$
 - r time between Low process sending message and receiving ACK when buffer not full
 - Conclusion: pump substantially reduces capacity of covert channel between High, Low processes when compared with direct connection

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Key Points

- Confinement problem: prevent leakage of information
 - Solution: separation and/or isolation
- Shared resources offer paths along which information can be transferred
- Covert channels difficult if not impossible to eliminate
 - Bandwidth can be greatly reduced, however!