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# QUIC & The Dead: Which of the Most Common IDS/IPS Tools Can Best Identify QUIC Traffic?

*GIAC (GCIA) Gold Certification*

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## Abstract

The QUIC protocol created by Google for use in their popular browser Chrome has begun to be adopted by other browsers. Some organizations have a robust strategy to handle TLS with HTTP2. However, QUIC (HTTP/2 over UDP) lacks visibility via crucial information security tools such as Wireshark, Zeek, Suricata, and Snort. Lack of visibility is due to both its use of TLS 1.3 for encryption and UDP for communication. The defender is at a disadvantage as selective blocking of QUIC isn't always possible. Moreover, some QUIC traffic may be legitimate, and so outright blocking of endpoints that use QUIC is likely to cause more issues than it solves. To complicate matters further, QUIC has begun to appear in Command and Control (C2) frameworks like Merlin as an additional means of hiding traffic.

This paper seeks to establish the current state of open-source detection tools, identify which tools detect the most metrics, and add to current detection capabilities by creating a proof of concept Zeek script to enhance detection.

## 1. Introduction

The QUIC protocol was created in 2012 by Google engineer Jim Roskind. QUIC improves the performance of web-based applications by using UDP instead of TCP. UDP allows the connection to enhance the performance of web-based applications by reducing the traditional TCP three-way handshake to a single UDP round-trip (Ghedini, 2018). In addition to solving performance challenges, QUIC also supports encryption by default using TLS 1.3. To further complicate matters, the IETF took the original Google QUIC protocol (GQUIC) and improved it. This QUIC protocol expands and diverges from GQUIC (Ghedini, 2018).

Both GQUIC and QUIC create new challenges for information security practitioners. By utilizing both UDP which, is connectionless and TLS 1.3 for encryption, many of the proven packet tools such as Wireshark, Zeek (formerly Bro), Suricata, and Snort lose visibility or functionality. Most QUIC/GQUIC traffic may be legitimate. Google uses it to speed up Youtube, and Microsoft has plans to use it to accelerate SMB/file traffic (Pyle, 2020), so outright blocking of endpoint traffic is likely to create more issues than it solves. To complicate matters further, GQUIC has begun to appear in Command & Control (C2) frameworks to help obfuscate malicious traffic. Russel Vay Tuly added support for GQUIC to the Merlin C2 framework in 2018 to aid penetration testers and defenders.

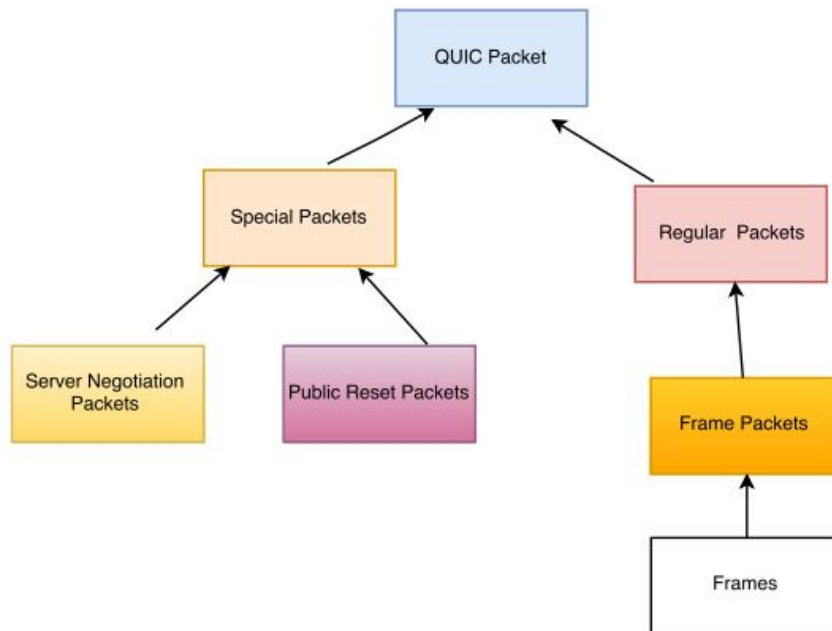
Both QUIC & GQUIC protocols are works in progress, and implementations may vary among applications. Different libraries support different versions and features (Shah, 2018). Both Wireshark and Zeek's plugin Bro-Quic by Corelight support earlier versions of GQUIC (Google QUIC). The GQUIC plugin by Salesforce supports the current version of Q046 (Yu, 2019).

The lack of support for QUIC is found not only among open-source security solutions but also among commercial proxy solutions like Cisco's Web Security Appliance. Many commercial firewall vendors currently recommend blocking QUIC (Liebetrau, 2018). Chrome and other browsers will default to HTTP/HTTPS using TCP if GQUIC/QUIC isn't available.

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Traditional web traffic over TCP requires a three-way handshake. QUIC uses UDP instead of TCP. UDP speeds up web traffic by causing less delay and fewer packets sent (Niroshan,2017). Using UDP instead of TCP provides several benefits, including connection migration, forward error correction, improved establishment latency, and better congestion control.

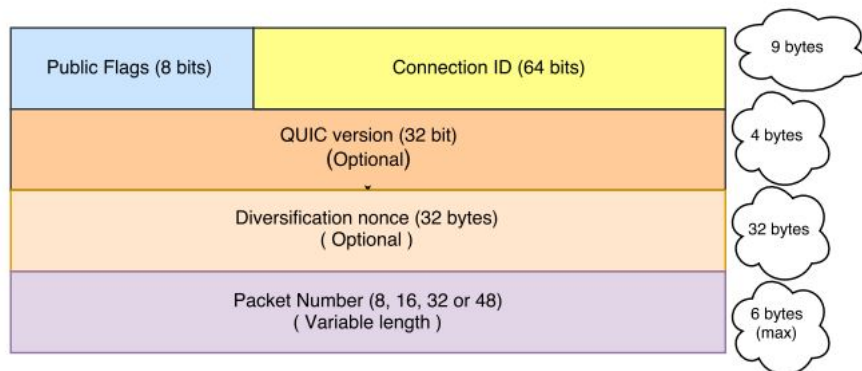
Various tools must decode QUIC's packet structure to gain insight into its contents. QUIC consists of two different packet types: special and regular.



**Figure 1 - QUIC Packet Types (Niroshan, 2017)**

Both types of QUIC packets begin with a public header between 1 and 51 bytes that provides details concerning the rest of the packet.

## Public header



**Figure 2 - QUIC Public Header (Niroshan, 2017)**

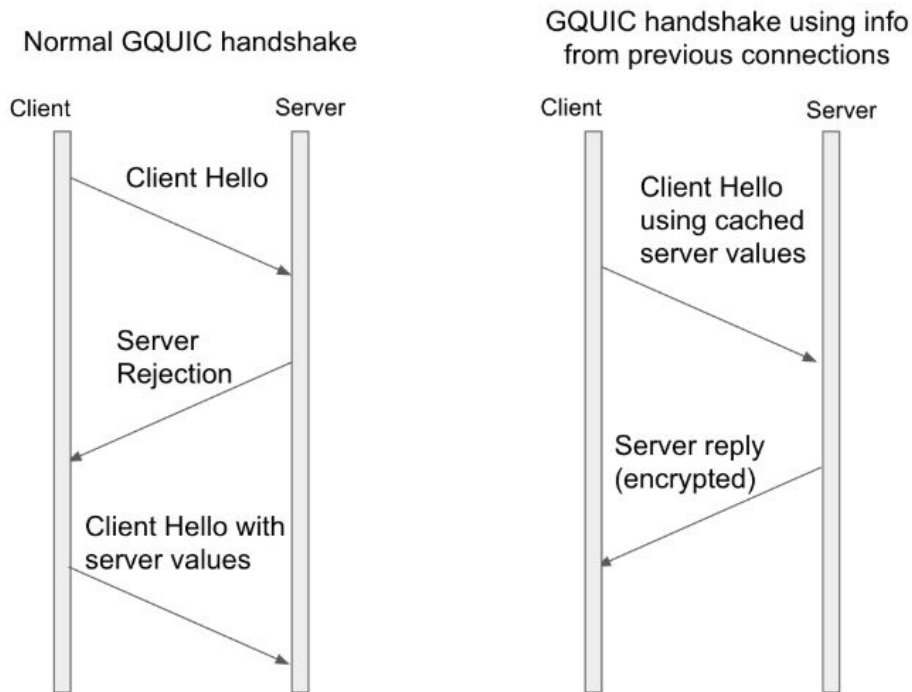
Special packets consist of two types: version negotiation packets or public reset packets. Regular packets consist of frame packets with type and payload information (2017, Niroshan). The researcher's focus will primarily be on these packets, which are un-encrypted and can provide critical information.

The first communication between a client and a new server consists of a *hello* packet, followed by a rejection response packet containing the information needed to establish the connection. The *hello* packet is then resent with the new parameters, and an encrypted channel created. On further communications, the client can use cached information to establish encryption, thus bypassing the un-encrypted packets which are necessary to fingerprint and gather information (2019, Yu).

These *HelloInfo* packets contain up to twenty-eight tags that can be analyzed to gather information about the connection, including user-agent header and server information.

Server rejection packet – *RejInfo* contains up to seventeen tags that provide additional information to aid in the profiling of the packet.

The diagram below illustrates how GQUIC handles the initial handshake and all further handshakes that follow.



**Figure 3 - GQUIC Handshake (Yu,2019)**

A study published in 2019 by Jan Ruth and others, shows GQUIC accounts for as much as 40% of Google's traffic. With the more recent adoption of QUIC in Firefox and support from Cloudflare (Ghendi, 2018) and other providers, these numbers will only increase.

While this is good for the public due to speed increases, reduced latency, and easier maintenance in the userspace instead of the operating system (Pearce,2019), it presents challenges in the corporate space.

Information security professionals will need to adapt old tools and develop new techniques to address this blind-spot in corporate systems.

The researcher's goal is to see what commonly available tools have the best support for the current version of GQUIC/QUIC and create a Zeek script to provide additional intelligence. By analyzing the state of the existing open-source tools, the researcher will gather additional information to aid security professionals in both controlling known "good" traffic and identifying and blocking malicious traffic.

## 2. Research Method

### 2.1. Lab Design

#### 2.1.1. Overview of Lab

The researcher chose to use VMware Workstation 15.5.1 build-15018445 to virtualize the infrastructure. Data gathering and analyzation workspaces consist of Virtual machines of KALI Linux 2019.4 and Security Onion 16.04.6.3. These distributions are both readily accessible and stable. To the KALI workspace (based on Debian Linux), the researcher added the following applications – Chrome version 79.0.3945.130 (Official Build) (64-bit), and Firefox version 72.0.2 (64bit).

Security Onion contains the following version of tools: Snort 2.9.15, Suricata 4.15 Bro/Zeek 2.6.4, and Wireshark 2.6.10. Two plugins were then added to Bro/Zeek: corelight/bro-quit and salesforce/GQUIC\_Protocol\_Analyzer.

Two additional VM's were built based on Kali 2019.4, one to act as the Merlin C2 client and one to serve as the Merlin C2 server. Merlin is currently in beta, version 0.8.0.

#### 2.1.2. “Good” versus “Bad” packets

After being configured to enable QUIC, Google Chrome & Firefox are each used for ten packet captures using tcpdump. These packet captures are “good” or potentially “legitimate” traffic that will be analyzed using various tools.

GQUIC is the default with the current version of Google Chrome. But to ensure GQUIC was enabled, the researcher toggled QUIC under chrome://flags/ (Liebert, 2018). You can then confirm the visited website is using GQUIC and the version used while in developer mode. Then while Google, Youtube, and other sites known to use GQUIC/QUIC are visited, **tcpdump -i eth0 -w filename** is running in an additional terminal window to capture the packets.

QUIC is the default with the current build of Firefox. But to confirm this, the researcher goes to **about:config** and search for **network.http.http3.enabled**. After making the change, restarting Firefox applies the setting. HTTP3 is another name for the newer QUIC protocol, not the GQUIC protocol. Tcpdump captures packets while various sites are visited.

Merlin C2 client and the Merlin C2 server run on separate VM's and ten packet captures are created from the client-side, while various commands run. These packet captures are considered "bad" or potentially "malicious" traffic.

## 2.2. Tools used for Analysis & Packet Generation

The researcher reviewed the current state of open-source packet analysis tools and frameworks to determine which was best for dealing with the GQUIC/QUIC protocol.

### 2.2.1. Suricata

Suricata is an open-source network threat detection framework. The engine can act as both an IDS, IPS, and NSM. Packets can also be processed offline, which is the primary use case demonstrated for this research. Although UDP and TLS are both supported by the protocol parser, QUIC is not currently supported. The researcher suspects the information obtained from our packet captures will be limited. Suricata's latest stable version is 5.0.2

### 2.2.2. Snort

Snort is an open-source IPS, IDS framework. The engine can also process packets offline. Suricata does not support decoders for QUIC, but decoders for UDP and TLS do exist.

Snort is the bases of enterprise products like Cisco Firepower. Cisco's latest recommendation is to block QUIC traffic, forcing browsers back to TCP/TLS. (Maynard, 2018).

### 2.2.3. Zeek

Zeek is the open-source network security monitor formerly known as Bro. It is a popular framework for extracting meta-data from packets, providing analysis, and acting on that meta-data. Zeek contains protocol plugins for both UDP and TLS. Third-party plugins are available to provide additional information on the QUIC protocol. The researcher found plugins from both Corelight and Salesforce via Github. The Corelight plugin is two years old and only supports up to version Q043 of QUIC. Due to the various capabilities listed above, the researcher feels it will be the best tool to identify malicious QUIC/GQUIC packets. Zeek's latest version is 3.0.1

When analyzing packet capture files the `-c` flag ignores any checksum errors that may occur, and the `-r` flag is used to read the `.pcap` file.

### 2.2.4. Zeek with Salesforce Plugin

This plugin for Zeek was developed in 2019 to provide additional visibility into GQUIC packets. Using BinPAC, the plugin focuses on the non-encrypted packets of GQUIC – the client *hello* and server rejection packets. The plugin allows the gathering of certificates, user-agent strings, and other valuable data used for fingerprinting “good” versus “bad” traffic (Yu, 2019). The researcher expects this tool to be the most useful for dealing with QUIC packets currently.

The plugin is first downloaded from Github using the command `git clone https://github.com/salesforce/GQUIC\_Protocol\_Analyzer`. It can then be configured and installed into Bro using `sudo` and the following commands - `./configure`, `make`, `make install`. The plugin is installed in the `/opt/bro/lib/bro/plugins` directory. Bro `-N` verifies a successful installation. The output should look like the following.

```

Bro::SSH - Secure Shell analyzer (built-in)
Bro::SSL - SSL/TLS and DTLs analyzers (built-in)
Bro::SteppingStone - Stepping stone analyzer (built-in)
Bro::Syslog - Syslog analyzer UDP-only (built-in)
Bro::TCP - TCP analyzer (built-in)
Bro::Teredo - Teredo analyzer (built-in)
Bro::UDP - UDP Analyzer (built-in)
Bro::Unified2 - Analyze Unified2 alert files. (built-in)
Bro::X509 - X509 and OCSP analyzer (built-in)
Bro::XMPP - XMPP analyzer (StartTLS only) (built-in)
Bro::ZIP - Generic ZIP support analyzer (built-in)
Bro::AF_Packet - Packet acquisition via AF_Packet (dynamic, version 1.3)
Salesforce::GQUIC - Google QUIC (GQUIC) protocol analyzer for Q039-Q046 (dynamic, version 1.0)

```

**Figure 4 - Validating Bro Plugin**

### 2.2.5. Merlin C2 Framework

Merlin is a command and control framework written in the Go programming language by Russel Van Tuyl to aid in red team exercises. It was designed from the start to use HTTP/2 for communications and then updated to allow the use of the GQUIC protocol. This use of encryption creates challenges for IPS/IDS solutions, and the inclusion of GQUIC made it the perfect candidate for the researcher to generate “bad packets” for testing (Villarreal, 2019).

The Merlin framework consists of an agent and a server. The server and agent both must use the command-line switch **-proto hq** to use GQUIC as the communication protocol. Merlin uses the GOQUIC library, which currently supports version Q044 of the protocol.

The latest version of Merlin C2, v0.8.0 beta, contains a known bug, in which the server will die if told to use the GQUIC protocol and the built-in certificate. After a discussion with the author, the researcher learned that if you create a self-signed certificate, this problem is corrected. The following commands generate this certificate.

```
openssl genrsa -out privatekey.pem 1024
```

```
openssl req -new -x509 -key privatekey.pem -out publickey.cer -days 1825
```



### 3. Findings and Analysis

Each tool processes the packet captures. The resulting output or data extracted provides information and insight for the researcher to help differentiate legitimate traffic from malicious traffic. It also further illustrates the differences between GQUIC and QUIC and highlights the strengths and weaknesses of each tool.

#### 3.1. Suricata

Suricata is capable of reading .pcap files offline using the -r switch. The researcher updated the installed Suricata rules (**sudo suricata-update**) and downloaded the emerging threats rule set.

Suricata found no concerns in the “good” .pcap files containing chrome traffic.

```

root@kali:~# suricata -r chrome_newtest1.pcap
30/3/2020 -- 20:35:47 - <Notice> - This is Suricata version 4.1.5 RELEASE
30/3/2020 -- 20:35:51 - <Warning> - [ERRCODE: SC_WARN_FLOWBIT(306)] - flowbit 'is proto irc' is checked but not set. Checked in 20
30/3/2020 -- 20:35:51 - <Warning> - [ERRCODE: SC_WARN_FLOWBIT(306)] - flowbit 'et.MCOFF' is checked but not set. Checked in 20
30/3/2020 -- 20:35:51 - <Warning> - [ERRCODE: SC_WARN_FLOWBIT(306)] - flowbit 'et.IE7.NoRef.NoCookie' is checked but not set. Checked in 20
30/3/2020 -- 20:35:51 - <Warning> - [ERRCODE: SC_WARN_FLOWBIT(306)] - flowbit 'min.gethttp' is checked but not set. Checked in 20
30/3/2020 -- 20:35:51 - <Warning> - [ERRCODE: SC_WARN_FLOWBIT(306)] - flowbit 'ET.armwget' is checked but not set. Checked in 20
30/3/2020 -- 20:35:51 - <Warning> - [ERRCODE: SC_WARN_FLOWBIT(306)] - flowbit 'HTTP,UncompressedFlash' is checked but not set. Checked in 20
30/3/2020 -- 20:35:51 - <Warning> - [ERRCODE: SC_WARN_FLOWBIT(306)] - flowbit 'ET.JS.Obfus.Func' is checked but not set. Checked in 20
30/3/2020 -- 20:35:51 - <Warning> - [ERRCODE: SC_WARN_FLOWBIT(306)] - flowbit 'et.JavaArchiveOrClass' is checked but not set. Checked in 20
30/3/2020 -- 20:35:51 - <Warning> - [ERRCODE: SC_WARN_FLOWBIT(306)] - flowbit 'ET.pdf.in.http' is checked but not set. Checked in 20
30/3/2020 -- 20:35:51 - <Warning> - [ERRCODE: SC_WARN_FLOWBIT(306)] - flowbit 'et.http.PK' is checked but not set. Checked in 20
30/3/2020 -- 20:35:55 - <Notice> - all 5 packet processing threads, 4 management threads initialized, engine started.
30/3/2020 -- 20:35:55 - <Notice> - Signal Received. Stopping engine.
30/3/2020 -- 20:35:55 - <Notice> - Pcap-file module read 1 files, 11483 packets, 13349342 bytes
root@kali:~#

```

Figure 6 - Suricata - Chrome Packets

Suricata runs against the packet capture contain the Merlin C2 traffic, and no rules were triggered.

```

root@kali:~# suricata -r merlin_bad.pcap
30/3/2020 -- 20:39:55 - <Notice> - This is Suricata version 4.1.5 RELEASE
30/3/2020 -- 20:39:58 - <Warning> - [ERRCODE: SC_WARN_FLOWBIT(306)] - flowbit 'is_proto_irc' is checked but not set
30/3/2020 -- 20:39:58 - <Warning> - [ERRCODE: SC_WARN_FLOWBIT(306)] - flowbit 'et.MCOFF' is checked but not set.
30/3/2020 -- 20:39:58 - <Warning> - [ERRCODE: SC_WARN_FLOWBIT(306)] - flowbit 'et.IE7.NoRef.NoCookie' is checked
30/3/2020 -- 20:39:58 - <Warning> - [ERRCODE: SC_WARN_FLOWBIT(306)] - flowbit 'min.gethttp' is checked but not set
30/3/2020 -- 20:39:58 - <Warning> - [ERRCODE: SC_WARN_FLOWBIT(306)] - flowbit 'ET.armwget' is checked but not set
30/3/2020 -- 20:39:58 - <Warning> - [ERRCODE: SC_WARN_FLOWBIT(306)] - flowbit 'HTTP.UncompressedFlash' is checked
30/3/2020 -- 20:39:58 - <Warning> - [ERRCODE: SC_WARN_FLOWBIT(306)] - flowbit 'ET.JS.Ofus.Func' is checked but not set
30/3/2020 -- 20:39:58 - <Warning> - [ERRCODE: SC_WARN_FLOWBIT(306)] - flowbit 'et.JavaArchiveOrClass' is checked
30/3/2020 -- 20:39:58 - <Warning> - [ERRCODE: SC_WARN_FLOWBIT(306)] - flowbit 'ET.pdf.in.http' is checked but not set
30/3/2020 -- 20:39:58 - <Warning> - [ERRCODE: SC_WARN_FLOWBIT(306)] - flowbit 'et.http.PK' is checked but not set
30/3/2020 -- 20:40:02 - <Notice> - all 5 packet processing threads, 4 management threads initialized, engine started
30/3/2020 -- 20:40:02 - <Notice> - Signal Received. Stopping engine.
30/3/2020 -- 20:40:02 - <Notice> - Pcap-file module read 1 files, 247 packets, 123541 bytes
root@kali:~#

```

Figure 7 - Suricata Merlin C2 Packets

Suricata was unable to provide any additional information concerning GQUIC/QUIC traffic since neither the legitimate nor the malicious traffic triggered any of the signatures or rules.

The remaining Google Chrome, Firefox, and Merlin C2 packets showed similar findings when processed with Suricata.

### 3.2. Snort

Snort is capable of reading .pcap files offline using the -r switch.

Snort processed eleven thousand four hundred eighty-three packets processed from the chrome\_newtest1.pcap. No signatures or rules matched, and the GQUIC traffic appears as UDP packets mixed in with TCP packets of regular traffic. Nine additional Chrome packet captures processed with similar results. The ten Firefox packet captures yielded comparable results.

Filtered:	0 ( 0.000%)
Outstanding:	0 ( 0.000%)
Injected:	0
=====	
Breakdown by protocol (includes rebuilt packets):	
Eth:	11483 (100.000%)
VLAN:	0 ( 0.000%)
IP4:	11451 ( 99.721%)
Frag:	0 ( 0.000%)
ICMP:	0 ( 0.000%)
UDP:	10167 ( 88.540%)
TCP:	1280 ( 11.147%)
IP6:	14 ( 0.122%)
IP6 Ext:	14 ( 0.122%)
IP6 Opts:	0 ( 0.000%)
Frag6:	0 ( 0.000%)
ICMP6:	2 ( 0.017%)
UDP6:	12 ( 0.105%)
TCP6:	0 ( 0.000%)
Teredo:	0 ( 0.000%)

**Figure 8 - Snort Chrome Packet**

Snort processed the Merlin C2 capture containing 247 packets. No rules were triggered, and all the traffic seen is UDP. An additional nine packet captures from Merlin C2 were processed with similar results.

Total free space (fordblks):	108496
Topmost releasable block (keepcost):	102368
=====	
Packet I/O Totals:	
Received:	247
Analyzed:	247 (100.000%)
Dropped:	0 ( 0.000%)
Filtered:	0 ( 0.000%)
Outstanding:	0 ( 0.000%)
Injected:	0
=====	
Breakdown by protocol (includes rebuilt packets):	
Eth:	247 (100.000%)
VLAN:	0 ( 0.000%)
IP4:	220 ( 89.069%)
Frag:	0 ( 0.000%)
ICMP:	0 ( 0.000%)
UDP:	220 ( 89.069%)
TCP:	0 ( 0.000%)
IP6:	2 ( 0.810%)
TCP Eth:	0 ( 0.000%)

**Figure 9 - Snort Merlin C2 Packet**

Snort was unable to provide additional meaningful information from either packet capture for similar reasons as Suricata. Neither legitimate nor malicious traffic triggered any rules or signatures.

### 3.3. Zeek

Zeek, by default, generates the standard set of log files. These log files show the UDP traffic on 443 but can't identify it as GQUIC/QUIC. The IP source and destination information may help map known malicious IP addresses that the traffic is going to. The remaining nine Google Chrome packet captures yielded similar results as did the Firefox traffic.

```

deckerl@deckerl-seconion:~/test1$ cat conn.log | bro-cut | grep udp | grep 443
1581659755.152907 C00qqwsPY05AiJHL 192.168.189.130 37241 216.58.199.109 443 udp -
0 Dd 7 3369 6 5126 -
1581659755.940853 C879wv2Hp70qT4v4Y1 192.168.189.130 55407 172.217.24.195 443 udp -
0 Dd 5 4254 3 4134 -
1581659757.689428 CV05Vd4p9kVIjHBUK7 192.168.189.130 34217 216.58.220.196 443 udp -
0 Dd 35 7474 36 11542 -
1581659761.734125 C5jhF323fv2Wk5VKzb 192.168.189.130 52550 216.58.220.195 443 udp -
0 Dd 34 5007 56 75743 -
1581659765.134226 CoTd6gXoYkqymhBA2 192.168.189.130 37515 172.217.163.227 443 udp -
0 Dd 9 5926 7 5621 -
1581659770.489050 CPnVvh2xIUomQ4cLKa 192.168.189.130 54020 172.217.161.163 443 udp -
0 Dd 11 6585 11 9874 -
1581659771.723965 CSi01NDjvQAqk6pE7 192.168.189.130 56972 216.58.200.78 443 udp -
0 Dd 6 3004 7 9646 -
1581659785.488005 CDYfje1TFL3GLzzSjb 192.168.189.130 42580 216.58.199.109 443 udp -
0 Dd 29 7875 46 57958 -

```

Figure 10 - Zeek - Good Packets - Conn Log

Zeek is unable to provide much information from the Merlin C2 packet. No certificate information is processed, and only standard connection information supplied. Merlin traffic has far fewer packets compared to legitimate QUIC web traffic, and there is none of the associated HTTP/HTTPS traffic surrounding it as part of the transaction. The malicious C2 traffic did not generate `ssl.log`'s or `x509.log`'s usually seen with standard TCP encrypted traffic.

```

deckerl@deckerl-seconion:~/merlin_bad_zeek$ cat conn.log | bro-cut | grep udp | grep 443
1582134598.911759 CfZU1G33Td6peY18a4 192.168.189.131 32856 192.168.189.132 443 udp -
0 Dd 108 63078 107 54927 -
deckerl@deckerl-seconion:~/merlin_bad_zeek$

```

Figure 11 - Zeek - Merlin C2 Packet

### 3.4. Zeek with Salesforce module

Zeek, with the Salesforce plugin installed, identifies the GQUIC packets and creates an additional log file. This log file includes GQUIC version information, browser head information, as well as an MD5 fingerprint based on the version and tags in the client *hello* packets. This fingerprint can help identify “good” versus known “bad” packets.

Zeek produced similar results for the remaining Google Chrome packet captures but was unable to process the data from the Firefox packets using the newer QUIC format.

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```
#fields ts      uid      id.orig_h      id.orig_p      id.resp_h      id.resp_p      version server_name      user_agent      tag_count
s
#types time      string addr      port      addr      port      count      string      string      count      string      string
1581659755.152907      CIkmEf4bdrY1YjuFyh      192.168.189.130      37241      216.58.199.109      443      46      accounts.google.com      Chrome/79.0.3
64      17      910a5e3a4d51593bd59a44611544f209      46,PAD-SNI-VER-CCS-UAID-TCID-PDMD-SMHL-ICSL-NONP-MIDS-SCLS-CSCT-COPT-IRTT-CFCW-SFCW
1581659755.187029      CuzcJ42lNrFlrSfIRd      192.168.189.130      42531      216.58.220.196      443      46      www.google.com      Chrome/79.0.3945.130
7      910a5e3a4d51593bd59a44611544f209      46,PAD-SNI-VER-CCS-UAID-TCID-PDMD-SMHL-ICSL-NONP-MIDS-SCLS-CSCT-COPT-IRTT-CFCW-SFCW
1581659755.789413      ClMStb4fhCDJdLcgc2      192.168.189.130      58483      216.58.220.202      443      46      fonts.googleapis.com      Chrome/79.0.3
64      17      910a5e3a4d51593bd59a44611544f209      46,PAD-SNI-VER-CCS-UAID-TCID-PDMD-SMHL-ICSL-NONP-MIDS-SCLS-CSCT-COPT-IRTT-CFCW-SFCW
1581659755.940853      COtUTl1uKCG6J5UAXb      192.168.189.130      55407      172.217.24.195      443      46      fonts.gstatic.com      Chrome/79.0.3
64      17      910a5e3a4d51593bd59a44611544f209      46,PAD-SNI-VER-CCS-UAID-TCID-PDMD-SMHL-ICSL-NONP-MIDS-SCLS-CSCT-COPT-IRTT-CFCW-SFCW
1581659757.689428      CU37LI2K0nJyjrvcI      192.168.189.130      34217      216.58.220.196      443      46      www.google.com      Chrome/79.0.3945.130
7      910a5e3a4d51593bd59a44611544f209      46,PAD-SNI-VER-CCS-UAID-TCID-PDMD-SMHL-ICSL-NONP-MIDS-SCLS-CSCT-COPT-IRTT-CFCW-SFCW
1581659757.837817      CU37LI2K0nJyjrvcI      192.168.189.130      34217      216.58.220.196      443      46      www.google.com      Chrome/79.0.3945.130
```

Figure 12 - Zeek - Salesforce Plugin - Good Packets - Gquic Log

The Salesforce plugin extracts the same data from the Merlin C2 packet capture, but there is minimal information to differentiate the regular browsing traffic from the bad C2 traffic. Web browsing has a mix of TCP & UDP connections, whereas the C2 framework does not. The CYU tags found here match the ones mentioned by the Salesforce GitHub site as being associated with Merlin C2. The researcher's use of a self-signed certificate did not result in different CYU tags for Merlin C2.

```
#fields ts      uid      id.orig_h      id.orig_p      id.resp_h      id.resp_p      version server_name      user_agent      tag_count
s
#types time      string addr      port      addr      port      count      string      string      count      string      string
1582134598.911759      CnuBau4Z1RoXnRMvA9      192.168.189.131      32856      192.168.189.132      443      44      192.168.189.132      -      9      9
0d1f095f5d      44,PAD-SNI-VER-CCS-PDMD-ICSL-MIDS-CFCW-SFCW
#close 2020-02-18-03-39-01
deckerl@deckerl-seconion:~/merlin_bad$ cat gquic.log | bro-cut cyu cyutags
07fc27484cbf1ec48be2f99d1f095f5d      44,PAD-SNI-VER-CCS-PDMD-ICSL-MIDS-CFCW-SFCW
deckerl@deckerl-seconion:~/merlin_bad$
```

Figure 13 - Zeek - Salesforce Plugin - Merlin C2

### 3.5. Wireshark

Wireshark needs to be a version greater than 3.0.3 to help decode the latest version of QUIC packets. Wireshark 3.05 was installed on Kali to examine the researcher's packet captures. QUIC profiles from Cellstream were tested but did not provide additional information with the researcher's setup.

When examining the known “bad” packets from the Merlin C2 capture, only the initial client hello packets are unencrypted and provide information like what has been extracted by the Zeek Salesforce plugin.

The data field contains multiple tags, including version, encryption algorithm, padding, and many others. These fields help establish how the server and client will handle the traffic stream.

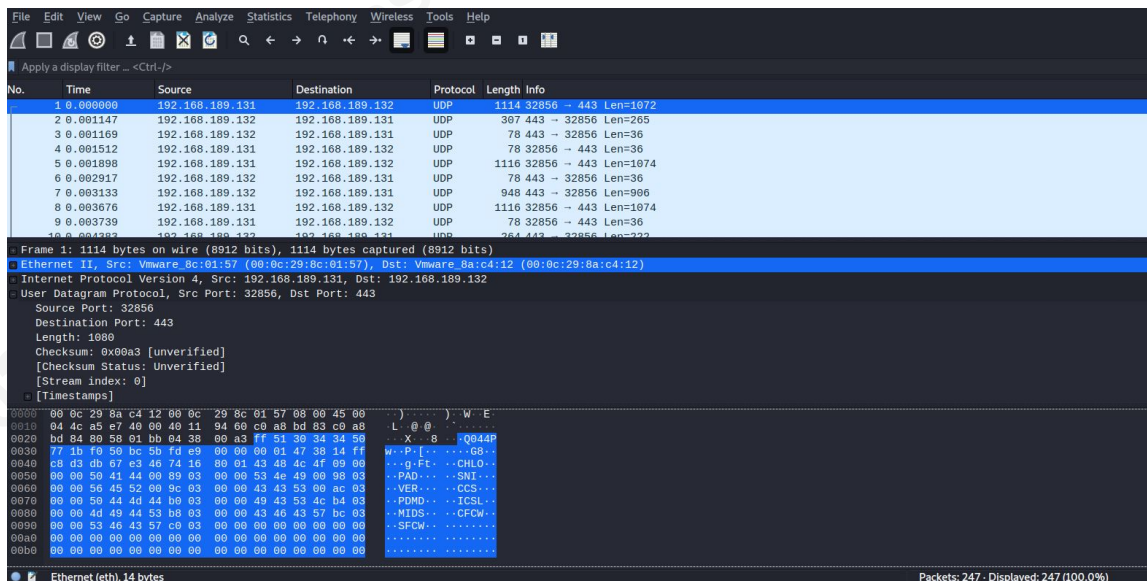


Figure 14 - Wireshark - Merlin C2 packet

Using Wireshark to examine the “good” traffic from Google & YouTube yields DNS traffic, HTTP and HTTPS traffic, and G QUIC traffic. G QUIC appears sporadically as some, but not all Chrome sites use it. The client *hello* packets contain similar information to the “bad” traffic.

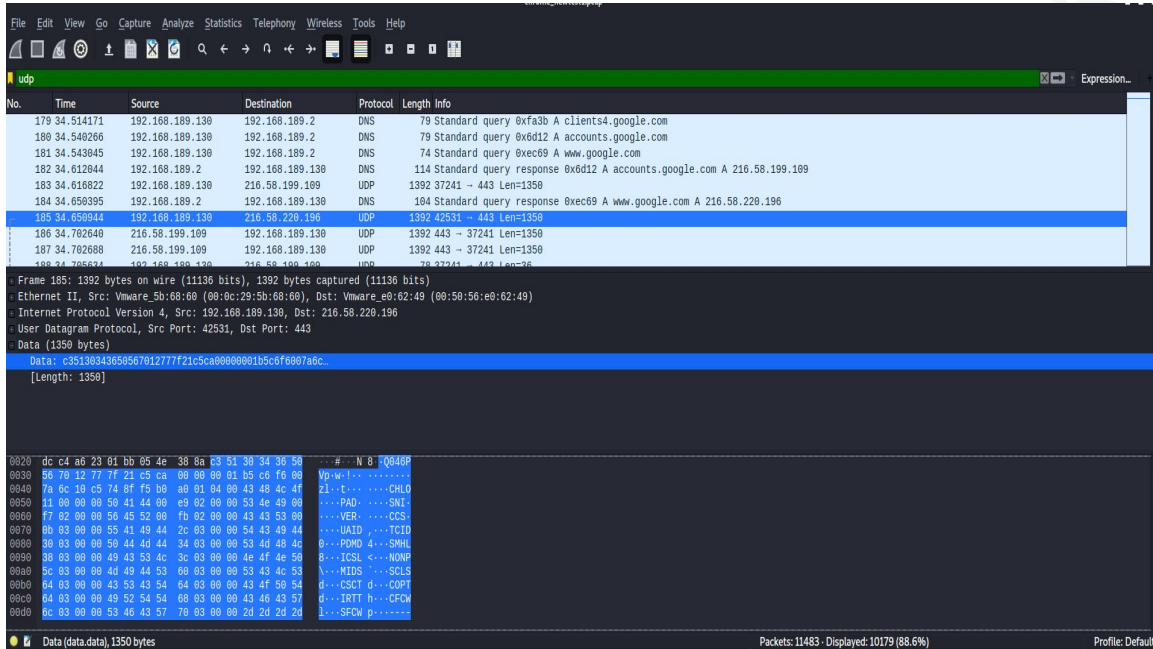


Figure 15 - Wireshark - Chrome packet

## 4. Future Research

While collecting data for this research, challenges arose with the third-party plugins and the latest version of Zeek. The researcher was unable to get either Bro-quick or the GQUIC plugin to work with the current version of Zeek.

GQUIC is an evolving standard, and the Salesforce plugin has supported up to the current version of Q046. Additional work may be needed to update the plugin as well as any related scripts as the protocol continues to evolve.

The Salesforce plugin was unable to process QUIC traffic used by Firefox. Further research is required to adapt the plugin to QUIC, as it is the newer standard seen from non-Google browsers.

As with traditional TCP encrypted traffic, analysis of the connection information, and meta-data is key to finding malicious traffic. Additional research will be needed to adapt reputation, beaconing, and other methods to QUIC/GQUIC traffic analysis.

As Microsoft moves QUIC beyond HTTP traffic, incorporating it into the SMB protocol in future builds of Windows (Pyle, 2020), additional analysis and tools will be needed.

#### 4.1. Developing a proof on concept Zeek script

Zeek is a collection of scripts and can be extended and customized as needed. The Salesforce GQUIC plugin adds four new events. `Gquic_packet`, `gquic_client_version`, `gquic_helo`, and `gquic_rej`. It also adds two new constants: `PublicHeader` and `HelloInfo`.

The researcher will create a script using these elements to more reliably identify Merlin C2 traffic when it is mixed in with legitimate traffic.

After looking at the various data sets gathered, two identifying features of malicious GQUIC traffic, like Merlin C2 are relevant.

- 1) Malicious traffic showed up far less frequently than legitimate traffic.
- 2) Google's GQUIC tags were consistent in the limited sample set.

From this premise, the pseudo-code followed: Building on the Salesforce plugin, when Zeek identifies a new GQUIC packet, it adds the ip address (`id_orig.h`), and tag set (`CYU`) tag to an array and a counter starts. The counter increments the next time the same ip and `CYU` appear. By looking at both variables, we can account for an infected machine that is generating both legitimate and malicious packets.

The researcher can then filter the common Google tags or sort for least seen tags, which could aid an investigator in identifying infected machines.

A sample of the Merlin C2 packet capture was merged with a Google Chrome packet capture using `mergcap`. The script uses this packet capture to count each combination ip address and GQUIC tag.

#### 4.2. Zeek Script Proof of Concept

```
@load base/protocols/conn
@load base/protocols/http
```

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```

## There is likely a far more elegant way to do this

type GQUIC_Hosts:record {
    host_ip: addr;
    gquic_tags: string;
    number_seen: count;
};

global profiles: table[string] of GQUIC_Hosts;
global x = 1;
global start = 1;

event gquic_hello(c:connection,
is_orig:bool,hdr:GQUIC::PublicHeader,hello:GQUIC::HelloInfo)
{
    local packet_match = 0;
    if (start == 1) {
        profiles[c$uid] = [
            $host_ip=c$id$orig_h,
            $gquic_tags = hello$tag_list,
            $number_seen = x
        ];
        start +=1;
    }
    ### Test new packet to increment counter if source and tags match ##
    for (keys in profiles) {
        if (profiles[keys]$host_ip == c$id$orig_h && profiles[keys]$gquic_tags ==
hello$tag_list) {
            local y = 1;
            y = profiles[keys]$number_seen;
            y +=1;
            print "match found";
            print c$uid;
            profiles[keys] = [
                $host_ip = c$id$orig_h,
                $gquic_tags = hello$tag_list,
                $number_seen = y
            ];
            packet_match = 1;
        }
    }
    ## for loop
}

if (packet_match == 0) {

```

```

        print "add new packet";
        print c$uid;
        profiles[c$uid] = [
            $host_ip = c$id$orig_h,
            $gquic_tags = hello$tag_list,
            $number_seen = 1
        ];

    }

# print c$uid;
# print c;
# print x;
# x+=1;

# print start;
# print x;
print profiles[c$uid];
## GQUIC event
}

```

## 5. Conclusion

As hypothesized, most open-source tools tested provided minimal or no information on QUIC/GQUIC packets, and as a result, could not detect malicious versus non-malicious packets. Third-party plugins for Zeek proved to be the most valuable at extracting data from the non-encrypted GQUIC packets. The researcher was able to create an initial proof of concept Zeek script to help identify the malicious packets among the legitimate Google traffic, using the work previously done by Salesforce.

Security professionals will better be able to defend their networks in the future from malicious GQUIC traffic, by understanding the current state of the security tools, where QUIC is going, and how tools like Zeek plugins perform.

However, the recommendation of the researcher would be to block and monitor GQUIC/QUIC traffic from enterprise networks until further tools develop. These

protocols work in the consumer space but create challenges in the enterprise security space.

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