

## IPv6 Security Architecture

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Internet community is making a transition from version 4 of the Internet Protocol (IPv4) to version 6 of the Internet Protocol (IPv6). [Hi94] This memo describes the security mechanisms integrated into version 6 of the Internet Protocol (IPv6) and the services that they provide. Each security mechanism is specified in a separate document. It also describes key management for the IPv6 security mechanisms.

#### 1.1 Definitions

This section provides a few basic definitions that are applicable to this document. Other documents provide more definitions and background information. [[VK83](#), [HA94](#)]

Authentication

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The property of knowing that the data received is the same as the data that was sent and that the claimed sender is in fact the actual sender.

#### Integrity

The property of ensuring that data is transmitted from source to destination without undetected alteration.

#### Confidentiality

The property of keeping communications confidential so that intended participants can know what is being sent but unintended parties are unable to determine what is being sent.

#### Encryption

A mechanism commonly used to provide confidentiality.

#### Non-repudiation

The property of a receiver being able to prove that the sender of some data did in fact send the data even though the sender might later desire to deny ever having sent that data.

#### SAID

Acronym for "Security Association Identifier"

#### Security Association

The set of security information relating to a given network connection or set of connections. This usually includes the cryptographic key, key lifetime, algorithm, algorithm mode, sensitivity level (e.g. Unclassified, Secret, Proprietary), what kind of security service is provided (authentication-only, Transport-Mode Encryption, IP-Mode Encryption, or some combination), and possibly other data.

#### Traffic Analysis

A kind of network attack where the adversary is able to make deductions about oneself just by analysing the network traffic patterns (such as frequency of transmission, who is talking with whom, size of packets, Flow Identifier used, etc).

## [2. DESIGN OBJECTIVES](#)

This section describes some of the design objectives of this security architecture and its component mechanisms. The primary

objective of this work is to ensure that IPv6 will have solid security mechanisms available to users who desire security. These mechanisms are designed such that Internet users who do not employ these mechanisms will not be adversely affected. These mechanisms are intended to be algorithm-independent so that the cryptographic

algorithms can be altered without affecting the other parts of the implementation. Standard default algorithms (i.e. keyed MD5, DES CBC) are specified to ensure interoperability in the global Internet. The selected algorithms are the same as the standard default algorithms used in SNMPv2. The IPv6 Security mechanisms should be useful in enforcing a variety of security policies.

### [3.](#) IPv6 SECURITY MECHANISMS

There are two security mechanisms in IPv6. The first is the Authentication Header which provides integrity and authentication without confidentiality. [Atk95a] The second is the Encapsulating Security Payload which, depending on algorithm and mode, might provide integrity, authentication, and always provides confidentiality. [Atk95b] The IPv6 mechanisms do not provide security against a number of traffic analysis attacks. However, there are several techniques outside the scope of this specification (e.g. bulk link encryption) that might be used to provide protection against traffic analysis. [VK83] The two IPv6 security mechanisms may be combined.

#### [3.1](#) AUTHENTICATION HEADER

The IPv6 Authentication Header seeks to provide integrity and authentication for IPv6 datagrams. It does this by computing a cryptographic authentication function over the IPv6 datagram and using a secret authentication key in the computation. [Atk95a] The sender computes the authentication data just prior to sending the authenticated IPv6 packet and the receiver verifies the correctness of the authentication data upon reception. Certain fields which must change in transit, such as the Hop Limit field decremented on each hop, are omitted from the authentication calculation. However the omission of the Hop Limit field does not adversely impact the security provided. Non-repudiation might be provided by some authentication algorithms (e.g. asymmetric algorithms when both sender and receiver keys are used in the authentication calculation) used with the Authentication Header, but it is not necessarily provided by all

authentication algorithms that might be used with the Authentication Header. The default authentication algorithm is keyed MD5, which like all symmetric algorithms cannot provide non-repudiation. Confidentiality and traffic analysis protection are not provided by the Authentication Header.

The IPv6 Authentication Header holds authentication information for its IPv6 datagram. This authentication information is calculated using all of the fields in the IPv6 datagram which do not change during transit from the originator to the recipient. All IPv6 headers, payloads, and the user data are included in this calculation. The only exception is that fields which need to change in transit (e.g.

IPv6 Header's "Hop Count" or the IPv6 Routing Header's "Next Address") are omitted when the authentication data is calculated.

Use of the Authentication Header will increase the IPv6 protocol processing costs in participating systems and will also increase the communications latency. The increased latency is primarily due to the calculation of the authentication data by the sender and the calculation and comparison of the authentication data by each receiver for each IPv6 datagram containing an Authentication Header (AH).

The Authentication Header provides much stronger security than exists in most of the current Internet and should not affect exportability or significantly increase implementation cost. While the Authentication Header might be implemented by a security gateway on behalf of hosts on a trusted network behind that security gateway, this mode of operation is not encouraged. Instead, the Authentication Header should be used from origin to final destination.

All IPv6-capable hosts MUST implement the IPv6 Authentication Header with at least the MD5 algorithm using a 128-bit key. Other authentication algorithms MAY be implemented in addition to keyed MD5.

### [3.2](#) ENCAPSULATING SECURITY PAYLOAD

The IPv6 Encapsulating Security Payload (ESP) seeks to provide integrity, authentication, and confidentiality to IPv6 datagrams. [\[Atk95b\]](#) It does this by encapsulating either an entire IPv6 datagram or only the upper-layer protocol data inside the ESP, encrypting most of the ESP contents, and then appending a new

cleartext IPv6 header to the now encrypted Encapsulating Security Payload. This cleartext IPv6 header is used to carry the protected data through the internetwork. The recipient of the cleartext datagram removes and discards the cleartext IPv6 header and cleartext IPv6 options, decrypts the ESP, processes and then removes the ESP headers, and then processes the (now decrypted) original IPv6 datagram or upper-layer protocol data as per the normal IPv6 protocol specification.

### [3.2.1](#) Description of the ESP Modes

There are two modes within ESP. The first mode, which is known as IP-mode, encapsulates an entire IP datagram within the ESP header. The second mode, which is known as Transport-mode, usually encapsulates a UDP or TCP frame inside IP.

### [3.2.2](#) Usage of ESP

ESP works between hosts, between a host and a security gateway, or between security gateways. This support for security gateways permits trustworthy networks behind a security gateway to omit encryption and thereby avoid the performance and monetary costs of encryption, while still providing confidentiality for traffic transiting untrustworthy network segments. When both hosts directly implement ESP and there is no intervening security gateway, then they may use the Transport-mode (where only the upper layer protocol data (e.g. TCP or UDP) is encrypted and there is no encrypted IPv6 header). This mode reduces both the bandwidth consumed and the protocol processing costs for users that don't need to keep the entire IPv6 datagram confidential. ESP works with both unicast and multicast traffic.

### [3.2.3](#) Performance Impacts of ESP

The encapsulating security approach used by ESP can noticeably impact network performance in participating systems, but should not adversely impact routers or other intermediate systems that are not participating in the particular ESP association. Protocol processing in participating systems will be more complex when encapsulating

security is used, requiring both more time and more processing power. Use of encryption will also increase the communications latency. The increased latency is primarily due to the encryption and decryption required for each IPv6 datagram containing an Encapsulating Security Payload. The precise cost of ESP will vary with the specifics of the implementation, including the encryption algorithm, key size, and other factors. Hardware implementations of the encryption algorithm are recommended when high throughput is desired. Because of the performance impact, users not requiring confidentiality will probably prefer to use the IPv6 Authentication Header instead of ESP. For interoperability throughout the worldwide Internet, all conforming implementations of IPv6 Encapsulating Security Payload MUST support the use of the Data Encryption Standard (DES) in Cipher-Block Chaining (CBC) Mode. Other confidentiality algorithms and modes may also be implemented in addition to this mandatory algorithm and mode. Export of encryption and use of encryption are regulated in some countries. [OTA94]

### 3.3 COMBINING SECURITY MECHANISMS

In some cases the IPv6 Authentication Header might be combined with the IPv6 Encapsulating Security Protocol to obtain the desired security properties. The Authentication Header always provides integrity and authentication and can provide non-repudiation if used with certain authentication algorithms (e.g. RSA) . The Encapsulating Security Payload always provides integrity and confidentiality and can

also provide authentication if used with certain authenticating encryption algorithms. Adding the Authentication Header to a IPv6 datagram prior to encapsulating that datagram using the Encapsulating Security Protocol might be desirable for users wishing to have strong integrity, authentication, confidentiality, and perhaps also non-repudiation. When the two mechanisms are combined, the placement of the IPv6 Authentication Header makes clear which part of the data is being authenticated. Details on combining the two mechanisms are provided in the IPv6 Encapsulating Security Payload specification. [At94b]

### 3.4 OTHER SECURITY MECHANISMS

Protection from traffic analysis is not provided by any of the security mechanisms described above. It is unclear whether meaningful protection from traffic analysis can be provided economically at the

Internet Layer and it appears that few Internet users are concerned about traffic analysis. One traditional method for protection against traffic analysis is the use of bulk link encryption. Another technique is to send false traffic in order to increase the noise in the data provided by traffic analysis. Reference [\[VK83\]](#) discusses traffic analysis issues in more detail.

#### [4.](#) KEY MANAGEMENT

The Key Management protocol that will be used with IPv6 is not specified in this document. However, because the key management protocol is coupled to the other security mechanisms only via the Security Association Identifier (SAID), those other security mechanisms have been defined in two companion documents. IPv6 is not intended to support so-called "in-band" key management, where the key management data is carried in a distinct IPv6 header. Instead it will primarily use so-called "out-of-band" key management, where the key management data will be carried by an upper layer protocol such as UDP or TCP on some specific port number. This permits clear decoupling of the key management mechanism from the other security mechanisms, and thereby permits one to substitute new and improved key management methods without having to modify the implementations of the other security mechanisms. This is clearly wise given the long history of subtle flaws in published key management protocols. [\[NS78, NS81\]](#) What follows in this section is a brief discussion of a few alternative approaches to key management.

##### [4.1](#) Manual Key Distribution

The simplest form of key management is manual key management, where a person manually configures each system with its own key and also with the keys of other communicating systems. This is quite practical in small, static environments but does not scale. It is not a viable

medium-term or long-term approach, but might be appropriate and useful in many environments in the near-term. For example, within a small LAN it is entirely practical to manually configure keys for each system. Within a single administrative domain it is practical to configure keys for each router so that the routing data can be protected and to reduce the risk of an intruder breaking into a router. Another case is where an organisation has an encrypting firewall between the internal network and the Internet at each of its

sites and it connects two or more sites via the Internet. In this case, the encrypting firewall might selectively encrypt traffic for other sites within the organisation using a manually configured key, while not encrypting traffic with other destinations. It also might be appropriate when only selected communications need to be secured.

#### [4.2](#) Some Existing Key Management Techniques

There are a number of key management algorithms that have been described in the public literature. Needham & Schroeder have proposed a key management algorithm which relies on a centralised key distribution system. [[NS78](#), [NS81](#)] This algorithm is used in the Kerberos Authentication System developed at MIT under Project Athena. [[KB93](#)] More recently, Diffie & Hellman have devised an algorithm which does not require a centralised key distribution system. [[DH76](#)] Unfortunately, the original Diffie-Hellman technique is vulnerable to an active "man in the middle" attack. However, this vulnerability can be mitigated by using signed keys to authentically bootstrap into the Diffie-Hellman exchange.

#### [4.3](#) Automated Key Distribution

Widespread deployment and use of IPv6 security will require an Internet-standard scalable key management protocol. Ideally such a protocol would support a number of protocols in the Internet protocol suite, not just IPv6 security. There is work underway within the IETF to add signed host keys to the Domain Name System [[EK94](#)] The DNS keys enable the originating party would to authenticate key management messages with the other key management party using an asymmetric algorithm. The two parties would then have an authenticatable communications channel that could be used to create a shared session key using Diffie-Hellman or other means. [[DH76](#)]

There are two keying approaches for IPv6. The first approach, called host-to-host keying, has all users on host 1 share the same key for use on traffic destined for all users on host 2. The second approach, called user-to-user keying, lets user A on host 1 have a unique session key with user B on host 2 that is not shared with other users on host1. In many cases, a single computer system will have at least two mutually suspicious users A and B that do not trust each

other. When host-to-host keying is used and mutually suspicious users



exist, it is possible for user A to determine the host-to-host key via well known methods, such as a Chosen Plaintext attack. Once user A has improperly obtained the key in use, user A can then either read user B's encrypted traffic or forge traffic from user B. When user-to-user keying is used, this kind of attack from one user onto another user's traffic is not possible. Hence, support for user-to-user keying must be present in all IPv6 implementations, as is described in the "IPv6 Key Management Requirements" section below.

#### [4.4](#) Multicast Key Distribution

Multicast key distribution is an active research area in the published literature as of this writing. For multicast groups having relatively few members, manual key distribution or multiple use of existing unicast key distribution algorithms such as modified Diffie-Hellman appears feasible. For very large groups, new scalable techniques will be needed. The use of Core-Based Trees (CBT) to provide session key management as well as multicast routing might be an approach used in the future. [[BFC93](#)]

#### [4.5](#) IPv6 Key Management Requirements

This section defines key management requirements for all IPv6 implementations. It applies equally to the IPv6 Authentication Header and the IPv6 Encapsulating Security Payload.

All IPv6 implementations **MUST** support manual key management. All IPv6 implementations **SHOULD** support an Internet standard key management protocol once the latter is defined. All IPv6 implementations **MUST** permit the configuration and use of user-to-user keying for traffic originating at that system and **MAY** additionally permit the configuration of host-to-host keying for traffic originating at that system as an added feature to make manual key distribution easier and give the system administrator more flexibility.

A device that encrypts or authenticates IPv6 packets originated on other systems, for example a dedicated IP encryptor or an encrypting gateway, cannot generally provide user-to-user keying for traffic originating on other systems. Hence, such systems **MUST** implement support for host-to-host keying for traffic originating on other systems and **MAY** implement support for user-to-user keying for traffic originating on other systems.

The method by which keys are configured on a particular system is implementation-defined. A flat file containing security association identifiers and the security parameters, including the key(s), is an example of one possible method for manual key distribution. An IPv6

system MUST take reasonable steps to protect the keys and other security association information from unauthorised examination or modification because all of the security lies in the keys.

## 5. USAGE

This section describes the possible use of the security mechanisms provided by IPv6 in several different environments and applications in order to give the implementer and user a better idea of how these mechanisms can be used to reduce security risks.

### 5.1 USE WITH FIREWALLS

Firewalls are not uncommon in the current Internet. [CB94] While many dislike their presence because they restrict connectivity, they are unlikely to disappear in the near future. Both of the IPv6 mechanisms can be used to increase the security provided by firewalls.

Firewalls used with IPv6 will need to be able to parse the header daisy-chain to determine the transport protocol (e.g. UDP or TCP) in use and the port number for that protocol. Firewall performance should not be significantly affected by use of IPv6 because the header format rules in IPv6 make parsing easy and fast.

Firewalls can use the Authentication Header to gain assurance that the data (e.g. source, destination, transport protocol, port number) being used for access control decisions is correct and authentic. IPv4 firewalls are unable to authenticate the data being used for access control decisions and necessarily trust data that is not trustworthy. Authentication might be performed not only within an organisation or campus but also end to end with remote systems across the Internet. This use of the Authentication Header with IPv6 provides much more assurance of security than IPv4 provides.

Organisations with two or more sites that are interconnected using commercial IP service might wish to use a selectively encrypting firewall. If an encrypting firewall were placed between each site of the Foo Company and the commercial IP service provider, the firewall could provide an encrypted IP tunnel among all of the Foo Company's sites. It could also encrypt traffic between the Foo Company and its suppliers, customers, and other affiliates. Traffic with the NIC, with public Internet archive, or some other organisations might not be encrypted because of the unavailability of a standard key management protocol or as a deliberate choice to facilitate better communications, improved network performance, and increased connectivity. Such a practice could easily protect the organisation's sensitive traffic from eavesdropping and modification.

Some organisations (e.g. governments) might wish to use a fully encrypting firewall to provide a protected virtual network over

commercial IP service. The difference between that and a bulk IPv6 encryption device is that a fully encrypting firewall would provide filtering of the decrypted traffic as well as providing encryption of IP packets.

### [5.3](#) USE WITH IPv6 MULTICAST

In the past several years, the Multicast Backbone (MBONE) has grown rapidly. IETF meetings and other conferences are now regularly multicast with real-time audio, video, and whiteboards. Many people are now using teleconferencing applications based on IP Multicast in the Internet or in private internal networks. Hence it is important that the security mechanisms in IPv6 be suitable for use in an environment where multicast is the general case.

The Security Association Identifiers (SAIDs) used in the IPv6 security mechanisms are receiver-oriented, making them well suited for use in IP multicast. [Atk95a, Atk95b] Unfortunately, most currently published multicast key distribution protocols do not scale well. However, there is active research in this area. As an interim step, a multicast group could repeatedly use a secure unicast key distribution protocol to distribute the key to all members or the group could pre-arrange keys using manual key distribution.

### [5.4](#) USE TO PROVIDE QOS PROTECTION

The recent IAB Security Workshop identified Quality of Service protection as an area of significant interest. [BCCH] The two IPv6 security mechanisms are intended to provide good support for real-time services as well as multicasting. This section describes one possible approach to providing such protection.

The Authentication Header can be used, with appropriate key management, to provide authentication of packets. This authentication is potentially important in packet classification within routers. The IPv6 Flow Identifier can act as a Low-Level Identifier (LLID). Used together, packet classification within routers becomes straightforward if the router is provided with the appropriate key material. For performance reasons the routers might authenticate only every Nth packet rather than every packet, but this is still a significant improvement over capabilities in the current Internet.

Quality of service provisioning is likely to also use the Flow ID in conjunction with a resource reservation protocol, such as RSVP. Thus, the authenticated packet classification can be used to help ensure that each packet receives appropriate handling inside routers.

#### [5.5](#) USE IN COMPARTMENTED OR MULTI-LEVEL NETWORKS

A multi-level secure (MLS) network is one where a single network is used to communicate data at different sensitivity levels (e.g. Unclassified and Secret). Many governments have significant interest

in MLS networking. [\[DIA\]](#) The IPv6 security mechanisms have been designed to support MLS networking. MLS networking requires the use of strong Mandatory Access Controls (MAC) which ordinary users are incapable of controlling or violating. Mandatory Access Controls differ from Discretionary Access Controls in this respect.

The Authentication Header can be used to provide strong authentication among hosts in a single-level network. The Authentication Header can also be used to provide strong assurance for both mandatory access control decisions in multi-level networks and discretionary access control decisions in all kinds of networks. If IP sensitivity labels are used and confidentiality is not considered necessary within the particular operational environment, the Authentication Header is used to provide authentication for the entire packet, including cryptographic binding of the sensitivity level to the IPv6 header and user data. This is a significant improvement over labelled IPv4 networks where the label is trusted even though it is not trustworthy because there is no authentication or cryptographic binding of the label to the IP header and user data.

The Encapsulating Security Payload can be combined with appropriate key policies to provide full multi-level secure networking. In this case each key must be used only at a single sensitivity level and compartment. For example, Key "A" might be used only for sensitive Unclassified packets, while Key "B" is used only for Secret/No-compartments traffic, and Key "C" is used only for Secret/No-Foreign traffic.

In sensitive environments, appropriate organisational policies will dictate the actual key management policy and also the set of algorithms that are appropriate for use. In such environments, the ability to communicate between the Internet and the hosts handling

sensitive data is probably undesirable. Hence, systems only handling sensitive information might not implement the Internet standard algorithms and instead only have algorithms approved by appropriate policies for such use. Such systems would not be fully conforming to the IPv6 Encapsulating Security Payload specification with regard to implementation of the mandatory Internet algorithm, but those users might not care or might consider that to be desirable.

Encryption is very useful and desirable even when all of the hosts are within a protected environment. The Internet-standard encryption algorithm could be used, in conjunction with appropriate key management, to provide strong Discretionary Access Controls (DAC) in conjunction with either implicit or explicit sensitivity labels. [[Ken91](#)] Some environments might consider the Internet-standard encryption algorithm sufficiently strong to provide Mandatory Access Controls (MAC). Full encryption SHOULD be used for all communications

between multi-level computers or compartmented mode workstations even when the computing environment is considered to be protected.

## 6. SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS

This entire draft discusses the IPv6 Security Architecture.

Users need to understand that the quality of the security provided by the mechanisms provided by IPv6 depends completely on the strength of the implemented cryptographic algorithms, the strength of the key being used, the correct implementation of the cryptographic algorithms, the security of the key management protocol, and the correct implementation of IPv6 and the several security mechanisms in all of the participating systems. The security of the implementation is in part related to the security of the operating system which embodies the security implementations. For example, if the operating system does not keep the private cryptologic keys confidential, then traffic using those keys will not be secure. If any of these is incorrect or insufficiently secure, little or no real security will be provided to the user. Because different users on the same system might not trust each other, each user or each session should usually be keyed separately. This will also tend to increase the work required to cryptanalyse the traffic since not all traffic will use the same key.

Certain security properties (e.g. traffic analysis protection) are

not provided by any of these mechanisms. One possible approach to traffic analysis protection is appropriate use of link encryption. [VK83] Users must carefully consider which security properties they require and take active steps to ensure that their needs are met by these or other mechanisms.

Certain applications (e.g. electronic mail) probably need to have application-specific security mechanisms. Application-specific security mechanisms are out of the scope of the IPv6 Security Architecture. Users interested in electronic mail security should consult the RFCs describing the Internet's Privacy-Enhanced Mail system. Users concerned about other application-specific mechanisms should consult the online RFCs to see if suitable Internet Standard mechanisms exist.

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Hale, George Kamis, Phil Karn, Frank Kastenholz, and Dave Mihelcic provided critiques of early versions of this draft.

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